

School...from Page 1A

"We've got seven classrooms throughout the day, if it gets underneath there, and too loud for that period, they

can go to another room in the building that has a planning period."

The school board hired Hussion in May to helm the high school as principal, after former principal John Hill transitioned to the board office as director of human resources and operations for the school system.

Hussion has plenty of experience in high school administration, having served the last four years as assistant principal, and he's excited about his new job.

"We're going to work really hard on communication from our website to social media to parental engagement," said Hussion. "It's going to be a huge focus for us and our students as well, making sure everybody knows what's going on ahead of time. That's been a big key for us."

Elementary School Principal Trish Cook is happy to report that the elementary gym now has functioning air conditioning.

"It's a big hoorah for us," said Cook. "We also have a new science curriculum that we're really excited about. And for all of our schools, a focus is communication, improving our website so parents can easily get information that

they need."

And this year, all schools in the system will have instructional opportunities in the Spanish language, allowing Union County students to really dig in and learn a foreign language from kindergarten through 12th grade.

As a reminder, Cook has asked that all parents update their PowerSchool information for use by the schools in the event of an emergency, and she said that parents can get their Car Rider Tags during Meet Your Teacher night.

Paris...from Page 1A

value of property in Union County has gone up a little more than \$18 million since last year, largely due to new investments in real property in the county.

"We're going to be slightly decreasing property taxes, although we will have an increase in revenue because of new property that's been subdivided and sold," said Paris. "People are buying new property, like Thirteen Hundred, for example."

"They go out there and they buy lots that weren't previously subdivided, and so there's extra tax revenue. That prevents us from having to raise our taxes."

With a 5.786 millage rate, the county anticipates collecting \$7,158,357 in tax revenues this year, to go toward the Fiscal Year 2018 county budget. The FY18 budget will be adopted in December.

Paris has been able to drop the county millage rate four times in the last five years because of steadily improving property values.

"We've managed the county well," said Paris. "Even though we're coming out of the slump, we're not totally out of it, and neither is everybody totally out of it."

"Having come through the really bad economy and not having to raise taxes or do anything more than what we've done, I feel like it is evidence that our employees, our workforce and the community all are working together to maintain our facilities and properties as good as or better than any other rural county in the state of Georgia."

Paris said that employee salaries and benefits make up the biggest part of the county budget each year, and he gives major credit to Union County's workers for allowing the county to maintain a consistently low tax rate.

"We get the job done with fewer employees than most other counties are able to," said Paris.

And if there's room in the budget each year, the commissioner likes to give eligible county employees raises to reward hard work and to stay competitive.

"Now that the job market is so strong and everybody is working that wants to work, we have to keep our pay scale up in order to keep our employees," said Paris.

Added Paris: "We're not out of line with our wages, but we try to keep our employee benefits and salaries up commensurate with surrounding counties."

Union County residents enjoy one of the lowest millage rates in the state of Georgia, as the county consistently finds itself among the lowest two and three counties out of 159.

"My goal always is and always has been to offer the best service and the most facilities for the least amount of cost," said Paris.

Tax collection has been especially strong the last few years, as evidenced by a recent budget amendment from the Union County Commissioner's office.

In late June, Paris called a meeting to amend the 2016 budget as part of the county's annual audit process.

That amendment included some \$200,000 in net tax revenues toward the county's unassigned fund balance, or reserves.

The 2016 budget amendment also included amending revenues by \$730,000 and expenditures by \$530,000, both of which had been underbudgeted prior to amending the figures to actual.

2016 revenues, though underbudgeted, greatly exceeded expectations, and expenditures had been underbudgeted in salaries for employees countywide.

As previously reported, the county also purchased the Merritt property in 2016, utilizing the property for the construction of the North Enotah Drug Court facility, though neither the property purchase nor the facility construction were anticipated when the 2016 budget was drawn up in 2015.

The 2016 audit will be presented in the Thursday, Aug. 17, regular commission meeting at 6 p.m. in the Union County Courthouse.

"And there haven't been any traffic changes that I know of," added Hussion.

The schools held a Welcome Back celebration for teachers and employees in the Fine Arts Center on Monday, July 31, to kick off the week of pre-planning ahead of school starting.

In other school news, Dr. Rayfield announced last week that he had notified the board of education that schools would need to close for the Monday, Aug. 21, total solar eclipse.

BRMEMC...from Page 1A

the BRMEMC board, and Jeff Ledford hopes to unseat Incumbent Chris Logan as one of the Clay County, North Carolina representatives on the BRMEMC board.

Henson was a board member for a short while in 2015. The BRMEMC Board of Directors disqualified him because of a business partnership with then fellow board member Greg Owenby.

Henson had been appointed to replace Union County board member Bob Ensley, because of Ensley's failing health. He made the board aware of his business relationship with Owenby before he was appointed.

"I didn't try to hide anything," Henson said. "I guess the board members thought that everyone had done their due diligence. The ball was dropped somewhere however."

Henson gained enough petition signatures to run for the seat in 2015, but opted not to run at that time. This time, Henson was nominated by the EMC's Nominating Committee to again earn a seat on the Board.

The BRMEMC by-laws prohibit board members from serving if they have a business partnership with another board member.

The board apologized to Henson that his appointment was not vetted out before he was appointed to the board, stating that this was nothing personal, it was just the by-laws."

Henson said he harbored no ill.

"The rules are the rules and I'm not a rule-breaker," he said at the time.

Today, Henson is back, ready to seek another seat on the board.

"I opened my own business, Henson & Associates, Inc., in 1989 and through years of hard work have built it into a successful enterprise," he said. "My business philosophy has always been that you are only as good as your people. Employee morale is a main concern and one that I will focus on at BRMEMC. If

The board office had been weighing making the day a half-day, but after considering traffic concerns and hearing advice from local law enforcement and emergency management, Dr. Rayfield decided it would be best to err on the side of caution and close the schools that day.

Enrollment totals appear to be holding steady, though the schools will have those totals finalized after the first full week back.

ected, I will keep the membership and its wellbeing at heart and strive to advance the goals of BRMEMC and enrich this community through service."

Jenkins rode the wave of petition ballot winners in 2014. He has almost completed his first term as a board member.

Waldroup wasn't the only person seeking to represent Towns County.

Bert Rogers also sought that seat, but, as the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald* newspapers have learned, he was rejected by the BRMEMC board of directors for not being a member in good standing because he had been late on utility payments in the past.

However, there is no such mention of that rule in the by-laws, the newspapers have learned.

In fact, there isn't a true definition of member in good standing.

Meanwhile, Ledford, a life-long resident of Clay County, North Carolina, is currently the Used Car Manager at Ware Chevrolet in Blairsville. He has over 30 years of experience in new and preowned vehicle sales and is skilled in negotiating transactions with customers to close on deals and increase sales. Ledford has proven leadership skills that help team members achieve individual sales, enhance customer service, and drive business goals. He has dedicated his career to delivering high quality service and building relationships with his customers.

Logan, also elected by way of petition ballot in 2014, presently serves as treasurer of the BRMEMC, chairman of the Finance Committee and serves on the North Georgia Network Board of Directors.

Union/Towns County Tea Party Luncheon

Union/Towns County Tea Party has a monthly luncheon the 2nd Tuesday, 11:30 AM at Steve's Steakhouse.

NT(Aug2,21)CJ