

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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TVA Board approves rate increase to pay down debt

By Shawn Jarrard
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As expected, the Tennessee Valley Authority Board of Directors has approved the federal agency's sixth base-rate power increase since 2013.

The increase was part of a \$10.55 billion budget approved by board members in their quarterly meeting in Knoxville, Tennessee, on Aug. 22.

This latest rate increase will go into effect on Oct. 1 and will raise about \$200 million in additional revenues from all over the Valley.

TVA's rationale for implementing this and similar annual increases stems from a 10-year plan to get TVA in better financial shape moving forward.

Alongside new revenues generated by rate increases, the plan has also helped TVA to save money on fuel and cut

operating costs, and now, the TVA Board has signaled that it is ready to start aggressively paying down debt to lower future interest payments.

Pitched as a "1.5 percent effective retail rate increase," the adjustment will actually result in a 2.4-percent increase to TVA's portion of wholesale power costs.

Based on these numbers, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC has estimated the increase will cost its moderate residential power users an additional \$27 a year, or \$2.25 more per month.

Fortunately, the federal agency has been doing more than just raising rates since initiating its long-range financial plan in 2013.

TVA says it has been able to keep its rates relatively flat over the last five years, thanks to a concerted effort to cut fuel costs by moving away from coal and toward nuclear and renewables.

Combining revenues from rate increases with savings in fuel and O&M, along with weather extremes (higher power sales) and greater rainfall (hydroelectric power boost), TVA has realized record profits in recent years, which means it is actually ahead of schedule on its plan.

Cass Larson, TVA's vice president of Pricing and Contracts, told the BRMEMC Board of Directors in their Aug. 14 meeting that TVA will likely only seek one more annual rate increase, in 2019, and forgo the final three that are part of the plan.

Now, TVA is moving into the final stages of its financial plan to lower existing debt from about \$26 billion down to \$21.8 billion by 2023.

TVA Board Members believe that, taken together, the lowering of both fuel costs and overall debt service will allow TVA to keep rates low and



TVA President Bill Johnson

competitive for years to come.

"In FY19, we enter the sixth year of our long-range financial plan that outlined capital investments in assets to diversify and maintain our fleet, fuel cost savings and a reduction in overall debt," said TVA Chief Financial Officer John Thomas. "The plan also

calls for lowering operating and maintenance costs, which have been achieved through the work of our employees.

"The advantage to this approach becomes apparent when looking at our results. Rates today remain among the lowest 25 percent in the U.S., and TVA's wholesale rates are essentially the same as they were in 2013. During that same period, we've been able to reliably generate cleaner energy with lower fuel costs while beginning to reduce our debt."

As previously reported, TVA President and CEO Bill Johnson will be attending the BRMEMC Annual Meeting on Sept. 8 to make prepared remarks.

Unfortunately, Johnson will not be able to answer public comments during the Q&A portion of the meeting, but he has committed to speaking with EMC Board Members about their concerns with TVA's

long-range financial plan.

The EMC board will meet next in the annual meeting, which will see the election of three director candidates and the potential adoption of two bylaw changes.

Up for election this year are three director seats, one each in Union County, Towns County and Fannin County.

The bylaw amendments include setting the definition of "member in good standing" for the purposes of becoming or remaining an EMC director, and whether or not to establish district voting for director candidates.

If approved, the phrase "member in good standing" will be defined as any member who has not lost his or her right to receive electric service from the cooperative.

Concerning district voting, currently, EMC board directors are elected at large.

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Board of Education sets millage, hears all about beginning of year

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The principals and board office staff of Union County Schools spoke at length on the start of the 2018-2019 school year in the Aug. 21 regular meeting of the Union County Board of Education.

A big topic of discussion was the proposed rollback millage rate of 11.74 mills, which will bring in \$14,641,479 in property taxes if all taxes are paid.

Due to an increase in the tax digest, the 2018 rollback rate should bring in \$222,756 more than last year's levy, despite the lower millage rate.

The board voted to accept the rollback rate at a subsequent called meeting on Thursday, Aug. 23.

In other news, back in the Aug. 21 meeting, Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill said that full-time



Union County Board of Education Members Janna Akins and Tony Hunter in their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, Aug. 21. Photo by Mark Smith

enrollment at the schools had already surpassed estimates in the five-year plan established last year running through 2022, with current enrollment at 2,905 students.

Also in the meeting, the board certified the ESPLOST referendum, which voters approved overwhelmingly in

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Tax sale set for September 4th at Union County Courthouse

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Tax Commissioner Lee Knight will hold a tax sale at the Union County Courthouse on Tuesday, Sept. 4, starting at 10 a.m.

"Folks will need to come early and register to bid with a driver's license. We'll need them to pay the amount they bid within about three hours," said Knight.

Knight's primary role as tax commissioner is to bill and collect property taxes, and in order to raise the amount due by those who don't pay their tax bills, he sometimes has to auction off tax delinquent properties to the highest bidder.

These auctions, held in conjunction with the Union County Sheriff's Office, are known as "non-judicial tax sales," and Knight holds one every year or so, the last one

having occurred in February 2017.

Most people pay their property taxes on time, but the few who don't find their properties in a tax sale after being delinquent for an extended period of time.

"I'm not of the nature to pursue people that are six months behind on their property tax," said Knight. "I'm more worried about those that are two or three years behind."

"Basically, I run this like a business. We're making 21 percent in interest and penalties the first 12 months, so that's money that goes to the county to help with their operation."

"And it gives a taxpayer a little time - if he's been out of work - to get his property taxes sooner or later, and it gives him time to get caught up."

The full list of properties that will appear in the tax sale can be found in the legal ads



Union County Tax Commissioner Lee Knight

of this newspaper, and also at UnionGATax.com.

Fortunately, many property owners respond to the various delinquent tax notices issued by Knight's office, so the tax sale list is subject to change up to the minute before

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Authorities say Blairsville woman's murder still under investigation

By Shawn Jarrard
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MURPHY, NC - Tamma Lee, the 57-year-old Blairsville woman involved in an apparent murder-suicide in Murphy on Aug. 13, was shot and killed by her daughter's ex-boyfriend, according to the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office.

Nathan Mashburn, 30, of Fannin County, took Lee's life that Monday evening, after which he entered into a lengthy standoff with authorities, according to the sheriff's office.

Mashburn reportedly shot at police during the standoff and later turned the



Tamma Lee

gun on himself, according to the sheriff's office.

He and Lee's daughter had only been together for a short time, and she ended

their relationship earlier that Monday, according to the sheriff's office.

The Aug. 13 timeline of events and motive for the shooting are still under investigation, but at some point, Mashburn refused to return to Georgia, and he gunned down Lee in the driveway of her daughter's home after she attempted to get him to leave, according to the sheriff's office.

In the chaos that followed, Mashburn allegedly shot at others who had gathered at the scene, including Lee's daughter and some neighbors, all of whom were able to escape unharmed, according to the

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Board of Health holds public hearing to modify county pet ordinance

By Mark Smith
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In February, the state modified its rules and regulations for the prevention and control of rabies to match the National Association of Public Health Veterinarians' Compendium of Animal Rabies and Control.

Those changes are now being made at the local level, and Jonathan Terry with District 2 Environmental Health joined local Environmental Health Manager Mark Jarrett at the Union County Health Department on Aug. 21 to conduct the first public hearing of the newly modified county ordinance.



Jonathan Terry and Mark Jarrett in an Aug. 21 public hearing at the Union County Health Department.

The changes to the quarantine observation periods ordinance have to do with

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Bomb dogs train for Super Bowl LIII in Union, Towns

By Shawn Jarrard
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When Super Bowl LIII comes to Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Feb. 3, 2019, the Georgia Explosive Ordnance Detection Canine Program will be hard at work ensuring that football fans enjoy the game in a safe environment.

The elite K-9 program is headed up by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency-Homeland Security, and dozens of participants traveled to Union and Towns counties the week of Aug. 13 for special training ahead of the big event.

This training included

visits to a number of local facilities that are similar to the types of environments these highly-trained dogs are likely to come into contact with at the stadium.

Meeks Park, the Union County Schools Bus Barn and North Georgia Technical College of Union County, along with the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and Towns County Recreation and Conference Center in Towns County, served as training grounds Aug. 14 through Aug. 16.

"Back in 2008, we took Homeland Security Grant Program money to develop our EOD K-9 response program," said EOD K-9 Program Manager Tod Keys. "We started

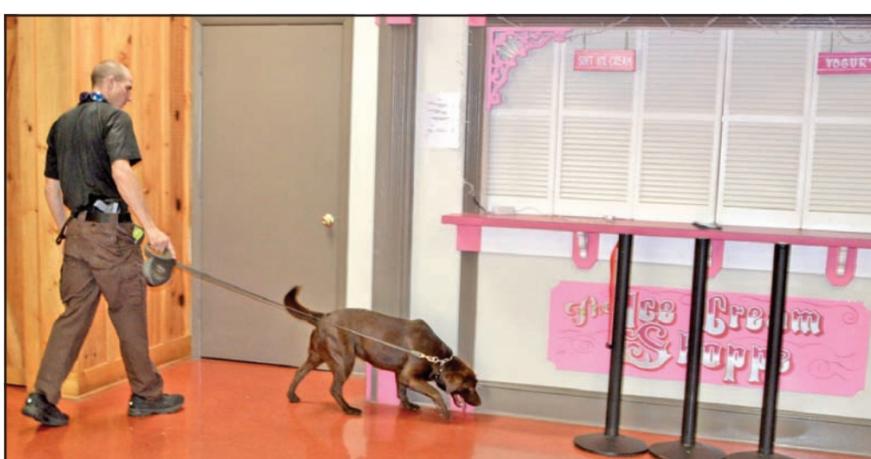
off with 18 teams back in 2008 that were already existing, augmented those teams with equipment to help them better respond statewide, and now, we're up to 55 teams."

Each team consists of a specialized bomb-sniffing dog and their law enforcement handler, and all told, 38 teams participated in the training that took place here in the North Georgia Mountains.

Together, these teams searched for a variety of explosive materials inside buildings and near building exteriors, parking lots, vehicles, packages and more.

And while the training

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A bomb-sniffing dog and his handler inside Anderson Music Hall at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

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