

Seabees...continued from Page 1A

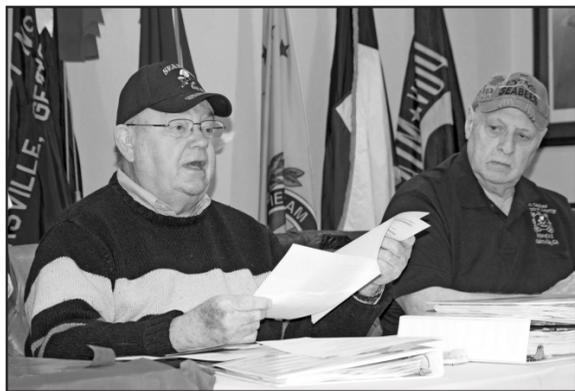
by Amazing Grace Catering, and social hour for the ball will begin at 5:30 p.m., with festivities lasting through the evening.

Each year, a special guest speaker attends the event to talk Seabees past, present and future, and highlight the unique camaraderie of the battalion.

At this time, the keynote speaker for the event has yet to be determined, but Island X-3 members wish to assure all who plan to attend that the oration is going to be a treat indeed.

Tickets for the event will be available to purchase from now until February 28. Active duty and reserve E3-E5 servicemen and women may purchase a ticket for \$30 a piece, while all other tickets are available for \$45 each.

To purchase a ticket, contact Bob Ramay at



Bob Ramay and Richard Peck in the first 2018 meeting of the Navy Seabees Island X-3. Photo/Lily Avery

bobramay@windstream.net, or Ed Crenshaw at cecbret@windstream.net.

Another matter of discussion during the meeting was the organization's donation to North Georgia Technical College last year.

Since the Navy Seabees are known for their construction expertise, Island X-3 decided to donate funds toward the construction department at the college to help students further explore the trade.

"We have given them

\$1,000 for scholarships," said Ramay of Island X-3. "We want the first priority to go to veterans and children and families of veterans. We also want this to go to people out of the five-county area — Union, Towns, Fannin, Clay and Cherokee County in North Carolina."

Now, the group also wishes to support the college's book lending program that will allow students pursuing a degree in the medical field to rent books from the college without being burdened with the cost of purchasing a new textbook, which is oftentimes rather costly.

"There are several young women and men who are enrolled in the nursing program here in Blairsville," said Ramay. "There's a need for course textbooks for those people. It's expensive to purchase college textbooks. There's always a need for healthcare professionals, and if we're going to be helping

people in Blairsville, I think it's a good thing."

All Island X-3 members hope to continue supporting students and veterans through local education opportunities

in the years to come.

Navy Seabees Island X-3 meets on the second Friday of each month at 1 p.m. at the Major Leon Davenport Veterans Center.

Gurtler...continued from Page 1A



Rep. Gurtler with his new interns, L-R: Brian Roberts from the University of North Georgia; Daniel Roper of Young Harris College; and Oshjiah Cancer, also of Young Harris College.

and assigned to committees in 2017: the \$5 Hotel/Motel Tax Repeal, and his Georgia Constitutional Carry Act.

"The state hotel-motel fee is a \$5 per night fee on each calendar night a hotel room is rented until the rental becomes an 'extended stay rental,'" per the Georgia Department of Revenue. "An 'extended stay rental' is the rental of a hotel room for 31 or more consecutive days to the same customer."

Rep. Gurtler believes the hotel-motel fee to be unfair and especially bad for smaller businesses, and he said he looks forward to working with colleagues from both sides of the political aisle to see the repeal become a reality.

The Georgia Constitutional Carry Act would

make the Georgia Weapons License optional, "meaning anyone who is legally eligible to possess a firearm is legally able to carry it, open or concealed," according to MattGurtler.com

"I did get a hearing last year for Constitutional Carry, I did not get a vote, though, in subcommittee," said Rep. Gurtler. "I heard that I might be getting a vote in subcommittee this year, and so it would go to full committee ... Some good stuff's going on with the bills, and I'm really happy about that."

Gurtler raised a few eyebrows last year when he voted no to a number of legislative items that otherwise received full support from his colleagues, like the state budget.

"The budget's always

a big hot topic for us, every single year," said Gurtler. "That's the only thing we're constitutionally obligated to do, is to pass a budget, and Georgia is a balanced budget state. That's going to be a big deal."

Continued Gurtler: "I had another freshman come to me on Monday (Jan. 8) and say that they really were thinking about the budget and the budget votes, and there might be some more opposition this year against the budget."

By voting no to the budget during the 2017 session, Gurtler said he was simply doing what he was elected to do — sticking to his principles and voting his conscience by saying no to what he felt were hundreds of millions of dollars in wasteful subsidies

and government overreach into the free market.

And while his unpopular dissent certainly rankled the leadership in 2017, Gurtler said he has continued to build relationships with fellow lawmakers.

"It's amazing to see that, just by my lone dissent, and by leading by example, that others are starting to follow suit to say that we can do a better budget than this," said Gurtler. "So, I think we'll see a little more opposition this year to the budget, which is exciting."

"The more opposition it gets, the better we can be as legislators, and we can have a better budget for the state of Georgia and for all Georgians, really. So, that's exciting. There's a lot of things happening."

Of course, 2018 is a massive election year in Georgia, with seats open at the highest levels of state government.

"I predict a lot of political rhetoric is going to be happening, a lot more so because it's an election year, and maybe a lot of grandstanding," said Gurtler. "That's going to be interesting. Being my freshman year, I get to see this, so that's kind of unique."

Be sure to check out Rep. Gurtler's regular column in the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald* newspapers.

Space Heaters - A Necessary Evil in our Homes

While only 32 percent of home heating fires involve space heaters, they are involved in 79 percent of home heating fire deaths, according to a report released by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Heating equipment continues to be the second leading cause of home fires behind cooking and the second leading cause of home fire deaths behind smoking. NFPA is urging caution and asking the public to practice safe heating behaviors as the peak time for home heating fires continues, and half of all home heating fires usually happen in December, January, and February.

Half of fatal home space heater fires started because something was too close to the heater and ignited. The leading factor contributing to space heater fires in general was heating equipment too close to things that can burn, such as upholstered furniture, clothing, mattress, or bedding.

Other leading factors contributing to home heater fires were failure to clean, which is principally related to creosote build-up in chimneys, and leaving an operating space heater unattended. Whether your chimney supports a wood or coal stove or just a fireplace, be sure to have it cleaned and inspected at least once a year to reduce your risk of having a fire. Always turn off a portable space heater when you go to sleep or leave the room. In 2016, U.S. fire departments responded to 66,400 home structure fires that involved heating equipment. These fires killed 580 people, injured another 1,850, and were responsible for \$608 million in direct property damage.

NFPA offers the following safety tips. * Have a three-foot "kid-free zone" around open fires and space heaters. * Use a sturdy, metal screen to prevent contact burns, which are even more common than flame burns. * Keep things that can burn, such as paper, bed-

ding, or furniture, at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.

* Use heating equipment that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory. * Never use your oven for heating. * Install stationary space heating equipment, water heaters or central heating equipment, according to the local codes and manufacturer's instructions. * Have a qualified professional install the equipment. * Make sure all fuel-burning vented equipment is vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. * Make sure the venting for exhaust is kept clear and unobstructed. This includes removal of snow and ice around the outlet to the outside. * Install and maintain carbon monoxide alarms to avoid risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. * Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified professional. * Turn portable electric heaters off when you go to bed or leave the room. * Use portable space heaters with an automatic shut off so if they're tipped over they will shut off. * Plug power cords directly into outlets and never into an extension cord. * Inspect for cracked or damaged, broken plugs or loose connections. * Always use the proper fuel in a fuel burning heater as specified by the manufacturer. * When refueling, allow the appliance to cool and refuel outside or in a well-ventilated area. * When using the heater, open a window to ensure proper ventilation. * In portable kerosene or other liquid-fueled space heaters, always use the proper grade of the proper fuel. * All new unvented gas-fired space heaters have an oxygen depletion sensor that detects a reduced level of oxygen in the area where the heater is operating and shuts off the heater before a hazardous level of carbon monoxide accumulates. If you have an older heater without this feature, replace it. * If the pilot light of your gas heater goes out, allow 5 minutes



Frank Riley
Executive Director of RC&D

or more for the gas to go away before trying again, do not allow gas to accumulate, and light the match before you turn on the gas to the pilot to avoid risk of flashback. If you smell gas in your gas heater, do not attempt to light the appliance. Turn off all the controls and open doors and windows. Call a gas service person. * Install a wood burning stove, chimney connectors and chimneys following manufacturer's instructions or have a professional do the installation. * Wood stoves should bear the label of a recognized testing laboratory. * In wood stoves, burn only dry, seasoned wood. In pellet stoves, burn only dry, seasoned wood pellets. * Start the fire with newspaper or kindling, never with a flammable liquid, such as lighter fluid, kerosene, or gasoline. * Keep the doors of your wood stove closed unless loading or stoking the live fire. * Allow ashes to cool before disposing. Dispose of ashes in a tightly covered metal (Never Plastic!) container and keep the ash container at least 10 feet away from the home and any other nearby buildings. Douse and saturate with water. * Chimneys and vents need to be cleaned and inspected at least once a year by a professional. Heaters are just "Contained Fire" trying to get out into our flammable things, and it only takes one mistake to let the fire escape into our homes and we don't get a "Do over". Always think heater safety.

For more information on heater safety, contact your local Fire Department or Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council at: info.ccred@gmail.com.