

Arbor Day...from Page 1A



Photo by Lily Avery

Justin Davenport and Roy Fortenberry of the Georgia Forestry Commission.



Military Ball

The local Island of the Navy Seabee Veterans of America is sponsoring a "Military Ball" on Saturday, March 3rd in Blairsville. All Military Branches and Civilians are invited and encouraged to attend this gala event.

Please contact Bob Ramay at 706-781-2536 or bo-ramay@windstream.net for tickets and information. Get your tickets ASAP and don't miss an evening of fun, dinner and dancing. NT(Feb21,23)CA

established in 1872 in Nebraska City, Nebraska, and was brought about by J. Sterling Morton as he stood before the State Board of Agriculture requesting such legislation be proclaimed in the state of Nebraska.

By the 1920s, more than 45 states had joined Nebraska in the celebration of native trees and all the bounty that plants offer to mankind.

Today, all 50 states participate in Arbor Day

festivities, as well as many countries and cities around the world.

This year, a crape myrtle tree was planted at the Old Blairsville Cemetery, a site that the county, city and the Sons of Confederate Veterans have been working tirelessly to restore and revitalize over the last two years.

There are more than 100 graves in the cemetery, many dating back all the way to the early 1800s, making it one of

the oldest cemeteries in the county.

The Blairsville Garden Club hopes to continue planting a tree at this historic site for Arbor Day in the years to come, to further the beautification of those sacred grounds.

National Arbor Day is observed on the last Friday in April, and each state observes the holiday on a date that is reflective of planting season in each region.

BRMEMC Board votes to limit director pay

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

YOUNG HARRIS – Members of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors voted unanimously to cap their own pay in the Feb. 13 regular board meeting.

Director Danny Henson spearheaded the initiative in the midst of growing board costs to save members money.

"In 2016, our board cost went up \$15,000, and in 2015, it went up \$9,000," said Director Henson following the meeting. "No one on the board is abusing this privilege, we're just trying to set a precedent for years to come."

Under the old director compensation policy, board members received \$300 per meeting attended, including special meetings of the board or any of its committees.

And while that policy had a \$450 per day maximum built in for directors attending more than one meeting in a day, costs could start to add up for directors who, for example, conducted multi-day business within their committees.

Under the updated policy, board pay is capped at \$450 for attendance at all regular meetings – there are 12 regular meetings in a year – and directors no longer get paid for attending other meetings.

The one exception to the \$450 per month cap is if the directors decide as a board to allow special per diem compensation for required attendance at multi-day meetings that occur for emergency or unusual reasons.

As such, the updated



BRMEMC Director
Danny Henson

compensation policy effectively caps director pay at \$5,400 per year for meeting attendance.

The policy also addresses pay for director attendance at workshops and training programs, resulting in pay of \$200 per day, but only when attendance at those workshops or training programs is required.

New directors are given two years to complete five required training classes, and no additional classes are covered by the EMC, excepting extra training for directors who assume special roles on the board, i.e. secretary or treasurer.

Costs associated with director travel for required training and meeting attendance are also paid by the EMC.

"About the most a board member can make now would be somewhere around \$6,400 or \$6,500 a year," said Henson, taking into account training and meeting attendance. "If we can stay below \$6,600 per

director a year on average of the nine (directors), we will be below the '09 cost to run the board."

Added Henson: "It'll save us somewhere around \$40,000 a year, and that is a lot of money. We're trying our best to cut expenses up there, and this just shows you we're not afraid to cut our own."

State law mandates that EMC directors be compensated for their time.

Also in the board meeting, retired educator and local resident Dr. Jounida Bradley asked the board to do something about high electricity bills, which tend to spike for full-time residents in the winter time.

BRMEMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms touched on some key figures in the meeting concerning the EMC's broadband services, highlighting the fact that the broadband take rate increased nearly 5 percent between 2016 and 2017.

In the past, Nelms has stated that it was his goal to increase market saturation of current EMC infrastructure before spending money on newer infrastructure.

The EMC is striving to meet and subsequently maintain a 50 percent take rate for its broadband services, and right now, the broadband take rate is sitting at around 33 percent.

Board members welcomed high school seniors Chase Williams of Towns County and Jacquelyn Stewart of Clay County, North Carolina, in the Feb. 13 meeting, and they spoke on their time as delegates in the EMC's annual Washington Youth Tour.

Johnson...from Page 1A



Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Friends Steven Aft and Michael Borkman in the Mountain Movers and Shakers meeting on Friday, Feb. 16.

this mountain region up here that we live in."

Johnson was the honored guest of the Mountain Movers and Shakers that Friday, Feb. 16, and he joined them to speak about the Iwo Jima remembrance event that occurred on Monday, Feb. 19, after press time.

The event at Foster Park commemorated the 73rd anniversary of the first landing in the Battle of Iwo Jima, and Johnson was accompanied by five other Iwo Jima survivors for the remembrance.

"We saved 24,000 lives just by taking that island," said Johnson on Friday. "It's hard to believe when you look at history and say, I thank God I was part of that. I thank you for being Americans and supporting our military."

Added Johnson: "Being in the military has many opportunities, and if you all have grandchildren who are interested, the opportunity is there for them."

Former Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall commissioned the one-of-a-kind Iwo Jima flag-raising memorial, which was dedicated on Veterans Day 2015 at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park.

Kendall announced the statue in October 2015, during a county meeting attended by artist Al Garnto and Iwo

Jima vets Bud Johnson and

Todd Kimsey, both retired U.S. Navy.

"This is what freedom is about," said Johnson then. "It's not so much about us who are survivors, but those who didn't make it back."

Michael Borkman emceed last week's meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers, and he embraced the group's regional mission by inviting his friend, Steven Aft of Murphy, North Carolina, to address those gathered.

Aft spoke on the defining qualities of community service, and the importance of community outreach, youth development, and maintaining a focus on leadership in these mountain communities.

To contact Aft and learn how to get involved in the many community service initiatives he's got his hands in, visit www.StevenAft.com.