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a serious task. They must have served their community well and represented what a veteran should be. This year, the Commanders Award is awarded to Mike Ruback.”

While Ruback was unable to attend due to health reasons related to exposure to

Agent Orange, the comradery, respect and love for Ruback filled the room as Vietnam Veterans of America Post #1101 President Ray Tiburski accepted the award on his behalf.

“I know Mike would like to be here today,” said Tiburski.



Linda Gorman is the original Quilts of Valor liaison for the Misty Mountain Quilters’ Guild, and she was the guest speaker at the Nov. 10 luncheon. Photo/Lily Avery

“Mike was instrumental in helping to start the Navy Seabees veterans group. He was commander of the DAV and commander of the VFW at the same time. He well deserves this award.”

After a scrumptious lunch and plenty of fellowship among fellow veterans and friends, guest speaker and the first Quilts of Valor liaison for the area, Linda

Gorman, shared the power and importance of QOV and how these beautifully handmade quilts impact veterans lives on a daily basis.

QOV Foundation was founded in 2003 by one woman’s dream, Catherine Roberts, to give back to those who have given so much to this country and her citizens. The first QOV was presented in November of 2003 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and from there the foundation took off. Now, over 170,000 quilts have been presented to active duty and retired veterans across the country, and around the world.

In 2012, Gorman helped to bring QOV to Union County and the surrounding areas and since, the group of more than a dozen quilters has presented more than 400 quilts to area veterans. And on Friday, three more were added to the list.

“We are very humbled, always, to stand before you



VVA Blairsville Chapter 1101 President Ray Tiburski delivering comments about 2017 Commanders Award recipient Mike Ruback. Photo/Lily Avery



Army Veteran Chuck Honaker emceed the annual Veterans Day Luncheon. Photo/Lily Avery

men and women that served the country, performed the duty and fought for the freedoms we enjoy today,” said Gorman. “We are eternally grateful to each of you and thank you for your services and your sacrifices.”

Retired U.S. Army Vietnam Veteran Stephen

(Doug) Gooch, Retired U.S. Army Vietnam Veteran Raymond Parson and Retired U.S. Army Vietnam Veteran Charles Turner were all three awarded Quilts of Valor.

“We thank you for your service and for the service of those who support you,” said Gorman.

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those who wish to attend the board’s opening meetings must give at least two days’ notice as to whether they will be attending so the EMC can plan accordingly.

“I’m glad that we passed this,” Perren said. “I’m glad that it’s coming. We have nothing to hide. I don’t have anything to hide. I’m not going to say anything in that meeting that I wouldn’t say to you here.”

Open meetings were a platform that some, who are now directors, had promised as they petitioned to become candidates and solicited votes.

Larry Williams, Fannin County’s sole representative on the board, told fellow board members last month that he ran on a platform for open meetings and transparency. He added that he was prepared to make a motion during the business portion of the meeting to vote on open meetings.

He did just that, including in his motion that the next meeting in November be open to the public.

Roy Perren, the board’s secretary, was asked if he got Williams’ request.

“I did, and I second that motion,” Perren said. “I too ran on a platform of open

meetings.”

In September, at the Annual Meeting held in Blairsville, an amendment to the bylaws was proposed by former Towns County Republican Party Chair Chuck Luca to require the board to conduct business in open meetings. Likewise, it was given the seal of approval by the membership to place on the 2018 election ballot.

Williams argued at the Oct. 10 meeting that the board wasn’t required to put that as an amendment, rather, they could put it to a vote on Oct. 10. And they did just that.

With a motion from Williams and a second by Perren, President Cummings asked for discussion. Ray Cook, who represents Cherokee County, North Carolina, said as chairman of the policy committee, he had asked the board for a straw vote on the matter during the summer. The board voted no in the straw poll to hold open meetings.

“I’m not saying that the folks in Cherokee County, North Carolina, don’t want open meetings, I’m just saying that no one has ever asked me to ask the board to do that,” Cook said. “I don’t think anyone in Clay County, North Carolina, has asked for open meetings.”

Board member Gene Mason said that the board had met with three separate attorneys, lawyers that have represented EMCs, and those lawyers each told the board that they would not recommend opening the meetings to the public.

Board member Cory Payne told the board that he voted against open meetings in the straw poll.

“It’s not an issue that came up in Clay County,” he said. “In the last few weeks I’ve talked with several members of the board. I would welcome open meetings.”

President Cummings called for a vote. Danny Henson, Mason, Jeff Ledford and Bert Rogers voted to not open meetings to the public.

Williams, Cook, Payne and Perren voted to open the meetings to the public. Cummings, as president, voted to break the tie and allow for open meetings beginning in November.

Open meetings will require the board to follow the state Sunshine Laws regarding executive sessions.

Following state law would allow the board to go into executive session for only three reasons – personnel, real estate decisions and matters of litigation.

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community members to represent them, and to carry on the memory of her sister.

“I want to do what’s best for our community,” said Cook. “I want to get in there and represent the people as well as I can.”

Cook will be sworn in during next month’s regular city council meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 5. She will be serving the remaining two years of Cone’s term on the council and will be up for re-election in 2019.

And while Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley is excited to have a full council to work with, voter turnout was at an unexpected low for this election, something Mayor Conley wished to address.

Out of the possible 217 registered voters eligible to vote within the city limits, only 30 voted, 15 of which were absentee ballots. According to Mayor Conley, this is one of the lowest voter turnouts he has seen in quite some time.

Although the number of voters who came to the polls for the special election is disheartening, what is most important to the mayor, as well as the city council and all those in public office, is to make sure that the views of the public are heard and accounted for. And that can only be accomplished through voting and substantial voter turnout.

For those who wish to vote the next time the city hosts elections, those who are already registered can do so simply by presenting one of the following pieces of identification at the time of voting: a Georgia Driver’s License; a valid U.S. Passport; a valid Georgia Voter ID Card; a valid Government Issued Employee ID Card with photo or a valid U.S. Military ID Card with photo.

And for those who are not registered, visit www.registertovote.sos.ga.gov or visit any state or government office to learn more on how to become a registered Georgia voter in Union County.