

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Member-owned and controlled

In 1938, the Blue Ridge Electric Association was formed to provide affordable and reliable electric service to the sparsely populated areas of extreme Northeast Georgia and Western North Carolina.

The association co-op was member-owned and controlled. Supposedly, it still is today.

I say supposedly because there is little transparency afforded the membership about the recent dilemma involving the former President of the Board of Directors' indebtedness that included a five-digit unpaid electric bill for his commercial operations.

In this edition of the *North Georgia News*, we hope we have shed some light on the situation. The information was a bit shocking and the actions of administrators past and present allowed former President Terry Taylor to amass a debt of more than \$100,000.

In consideration of board members past and present, the information we were able to uncover indicates that the only board member who knew of Taylor's indebtedness was Taylor himself.

However, Taylor's plight was known by Blue Ridge Mountain EMC administration. The current General Manager Matthew Akins was reprimanded by the Board of Directors according to documents obtained by the newspaper.

However, he remains as GM because it was a situation that Akins reportedly inherited when he took the reins of the member-owned utility cooperative, according to documents obtained by the *North Georgia News*.

Taylor owes more than \$100,000 in unpaid utility bills and a loan he received from Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

The Board of Directors accepted Taylor's resignation, or "retirement" on April 17. But no resignation can restore the credibility that was lost prior to Taylor stepping down.

I'm sure I'm like most folks in the five-county area provided services by BRMEMC. I pay my bill on or before the fifth day of each month. We pay our bills because we owe them. BRMEMC has never let us slide on these bills. They can't afford to, they have an operation to keep running.

As co-op members, just when you think the Taylor incident is behind us, the bill keeps coming. The Board of Directors has voted to pay up to \$30,000 to hire an attorney to determine how the debt was allowed to happen in the first place.

As we speak, the meter is running and the debt is more than \$130,000 for a dirty little secret that continues to get under the nails of the membership like tiny thorns from a rose bush.

You'll read about it in your electric bill, there will be opposition for the board members whose terms are almost expired.

The membership is getting tired of reading and hearing about BRMEMC secrets from sources other than the Board of Directors.

I'm just guessing here, but, I believe that the term "member-owned and controlled" becomes a little more important in the weeks ahead.

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



How's Your Driving?

Have you ever noticed the question written on the back of some trucks that asks "How's my driving?" Usually, right under that question is a telephone number you can call to report the driver's driving whether good or bad. I certainly would not want that question on the back of my car.

Over the years I have had people to ask me why I don't have a clergy sign on my car. My answer has always been there are times I would be embarrassed to let folks know I am a preacher. My driving has not been a very good testimony at times. Sometimes we don't walk the talk or demonstrate while driving that we are children of God. My wife tells me that when I get behind the wheel of a car my personality changes. I heard about the lady who was rushing to an appointment. She was driving like Jehu in the book of Kings. The man in front of her was driving the speed limit and she was tailgating him. They came to a traffic light, the light turned to caution and the man stopped. The lady almost hit him and was furious that he didn't speed right on through. She started blowing her horn, beating the steering wheel and cussing a blue streak. All of a sudden she heard a tap on her window and looked around into the face of a policeman. He ordered her to exit the vehicle with hands in the air. He handcuffed her, put her into his police car and carried her to the police station where she was searched, photographed, finger printed and placed in a cell. After a few hours the jailer unlocked her cell and escorted her to the front desk. The arresting officer met her and said, "I apologize for the mistake. When I pulled up behind you, you were shaking your fists, blowing your horn and cussing a blue streak at the man in front of you. I couldn't help but notice all the bumper stickers: "Honk if you love Jesus," "What would Jesus do," "Choose life," "Abortion is murder," and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. I just naturally assumed that you had stolen the car. Again, I am sorry for the mistake." How humiliating for the lady! The moral of this story is that you had better drive as a Christian because folks are reading your driving as well as your bumper stickers.

On the highway of life we don't need to send mixed

See Parris, page 5A

It's On My Mind

Danny Parris



Questions and Answers

These questions are presented by me to give you information on our property tax increase that will be necessary this year.

Q. You mentioned earlier that because of the new courthouse security measures, you would probably have to increase property taxes. Do you know more about that yet?

A. Unfortunately I do have additional information and we will definitely require a property tax increase this year, but not only because of the addition of courthouse security. There are several other increases that have caused an increase to be unavoidable.

Q. How long has it been since the county has raised property taxes?

A. Since 2005. In 2005 the property tax mill rate was 6.65 mills, 2006-5.10 mills, 2007-5.05 mills, 2008-4.95 mills, 2009-4.94 mills, 2010-4.93 mills, 2011-5.419 mills (this was actually a \$77,000 tax decrease, but the mill rate increased to reflect the reduced property values), 2012-5.410 mills, 2013-5.408 mills. For the past five years we have received less revenue each year than the year before, while cost of services have continued to go up and we just cannot continue without an increase.

Q. Do you know how much the property tax increase will be?

A. We will be raising the property taxes about a half mill. Currently our property tax rate is 5.408 mills and this will increase to around 5.9 mills, but we will settle on an exact number next week prior to public hearings on the property tax increase. Even this amount will not be enough to cover all our increases, but we will utilize reserves to help fill in the difference and will continue to look for every way possible to cut costs while at the same time maintaining services and hope for a continued better economy.

Q. Will the public have a chance to come to a public hearing?

A. Yes. State law requires three public hearings be held for a property tax increase. These hearings will be advertised in the *North Georgia News* with the first notice being in the Aug. 13th

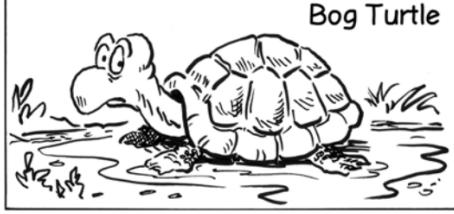
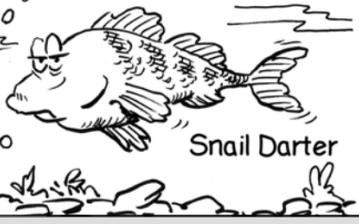
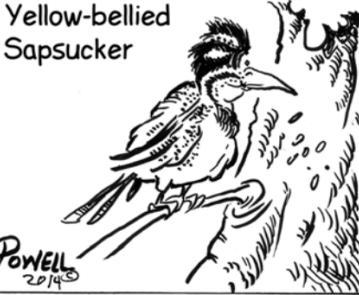
Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



See Paris, page 5A

What is the most endangered species in Georgia?



Letters to the Editor ...

Pay Attention

Dear Editor,

Really, can no one see the stripes at the four way intersection in front of Rite Aid and Bi-Lo that means no one to pull up in that area and try to turn left or go straight across?

If not then maybe they could FEEL, maybe put up some of those Hump and Bump things that WERE once there to begin with. Why were they ever removed?

And maybe a sign of some kind like NO DRIVING IN THIS AREA or something! Geez!

Just like with all of these YIELD signs no one seems to pay attention to any more. Just zoom right on by, right on across, right on truckin' down the road!

It amazes me at how these people got their main drivers license much less learners if they really don't understand what any of this means. Or is this stuff not on the tests any more?

Mrs. D. Barnes

Tell it like it is

Dear Editor

In response to Ruth Elizabeth Ramsey's recent broadside, three points: First, Mickey Cummings and JoAnne Leone are skilled, humorous, interesting, and non-political writers whose talents we are blessed to have in a town the size of Blairsville. Reading their columns is a highlight of my Tuesdays.

Second, the readership does not "pay the bills" for newspapers; advertisers do. In case you haven't noticed, the *North Georgia News* is distributed for a nominal fee to any resident with an orange mailbox. If the advertisers are unhappy with our hometown paper's editorial perspective, they will vote with their dollars.

Third, I believe I could round up a few good-hearted folks who'd chip in to help get you a U-Haul to move to, say, Austin TX or Madisson WI or even New York City. Your general anti-religious views, and your specific anti-Semitic comments, would surely find a happy home with the citizenry in cities such as those.

Best Regards, Roger Beal

Not all about Ruth

Dear Editor,

To reiterate the Editors Note: July 30, 2014 "The *North Georgia News* runs the letters that it receives. The newspaper has never had a shortage of space regarding Letters to the Editor, and certainly has never had a shortage of space when it comes to running the letters of Ruth Elizabeth Ramsey."

I sure wish that last sentence was not true!

Sincerely,

Jean Holsapple

P.S. Many thanks to the Editors Opinions - I may not always agree but feel they are always worth reading. Thanks to Danny Parris, I was never a member of his church but have cut some of his articles and sent to friends. Many thanks to Mickey Cummings, almost every week he affords me laughter and I truly love laughter. An action that apparently Ruth Elizabeth doesn't know much about. Sad!

Thank You

Dear Editor,

Please accept my personal thanks for publishing the Kiwanis Fair/Special Kids reprint of the article originally seen in the Georgia Kiwanian magazine (July 2014). I thought it might have been too long after the actual event to submit it for your consideration, but you published it anyway. Needless to say, the club members are always glad to see their work acknowledged. Every penny we make as a service project in our community goes back to the children in our community; national and international projects are supported through club dues paid by individual members. We are all proud to say we are Kiwanians! Thanks again!

Susan Cartwright Babcock
Blairsville Kiwanis Club

Home of the Brave

Dear Editor,

In 1908, at the age of 15, my Dad arrived at Ellis Island from a tiny, eastern Mediterranean island, having crossed the Mediterranean and the Atlantic (seasick all the way) alone in "Steerage" -- as they then called the fusty belly of that tramp steamer.

He was one of 2 million immigrants who had to pass muster, who had to be declared LEGAL, at Ellis Island that year.

He had \$4 in a goatskin bag tied around his neck.

He spoke but one sentence of English. Standing in line at Ellis Island, he remembered fearing that he'd be sent back.

He took a job washing dishes; was hungry enough to eat the leavings from customers' plates; even years later, never forgot how cold the winter wind was that came howling across Lake Michigan; showed silent, black-and-white films at night in a local theater while he studied his texts; graduated from what they then referred to as the "Gymnasium," gained entry into the University of Louisville Dental College and, in 1924, earned his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree.

He practiced Dentistry for 55 years, sent money back to his relatives; was the president of a Lions Club chapter and a 32nd Degree Mason; matriculated my two sisters and me through college; established a financial, spiritual and personal legacy for the three of us and for our seven children and his nine great-grandchildren.

At home, we spoke his native language but away from home, he insisted that English was to be our first tongue.

He loved this nation with a passion bordering on the religious and often told me that America was God's gift to humanity; that she must be zealously guarded and fiercely defended; that she isn't perfect but that there's never been another like her -- or ever will be again; that without her, the world would be a very different place.

See Mitchell, page 5A

Baseball and An Old Coach

Times were tough in the late 1940s and Papa moved his family to Chicago to find a steadier means of cash flow. My dad and uncle learned to play baseball and basketball at a Catholic School.

Both boys excelled in both sports. As a matter of fact they played on a baseball team that won the Illinois State Championship sometime around 1950.

Roy Reeves had great influence on my father's life. Who knew a game and a baseball coach/ manager could influence a man's life to the extent Roy influenced my father's life.

Dad played summer baseball with a group of boys from Phil Campbell. These boys were managed by Roy Reeves. He set up games with neighboring towns and arranged transportation to the games for the boys. Roy funded the team through his wagers on the games the boys played. Roy owned a little gas station in town where many of his players worked for extra spending money. Most of the boys had no money to buy equipment. So, when a boy needed a new glove, spikes or a bat Roy made sure the boy got what he needed. These purchases were not loans. They were gifts.

After my dad and mother graduated high school they settled down on our family farm. Dad went to work at a textile mill in Hackleburgh, AL. Dad worked and also played summer baseball for the mill. After I was born Dad hoped for advancement at the mill. However, he was told the mill would soon slow down and they were even disbanding the baseball team. Shortly afterward Dad was laid off and he decided to move Chicago to find work. Dad had no money, so, Roy Reeves loaned him \$200 to make the trip and get settled into an apartment.

Papa didn't want Dad to leave home to find work in Chicago. Papa was also a proud man that didn't like to borrow money. After Dad had left on the train Papa found out that he had borrowed money from Roy Reeves. So, Papa went to Phil Campbell to pay off the money his son had borrowed. Papa walked into the service station and asked, "Roy, how much money does my boy owe you?" Roy told Papa, "That's none of your business Mr. Cummings. That loan is between me and Paul and I know he will pay it back." Papa grinned and walked out of the service station. He was still mad at my daddy for leaving. But, he was proud because he knew his son would pay back the money he owed Roy Reeves.

Years later my dad became a minister. He received news that his old friend, Roy, was sick with cancer. So, Dad went to see him. When Dad walked into his house Roy began to cry and said, "Paul, I need to apologize to you and the other boys because I was not a good influence

See Cummings, page 5A

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Blairsville - Union County Chamber

Cindy Williams



Meet Wes Durham, the Voice of the Atlanta Falcons

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce along with our partner Jeff Davis State Farm is thrilled to announce that Wes Durham, the "Voice of the Atlanta Falcons," will be our guest speaker at our upcoming Power Breakfast.

The event will be held on Tuesday, August 19 at 7:45 a.m. at the Union County Community Center. Registration is open, and the public is invited to attend.

Wes Durham has been the radio play-by-play voice of the Atlanta Falcons since 2004, and now enters his second year as one of the football and basketball play-by-play announcers for ACC football and basketball on Fox Sports South and Raycom Sports. This past January, he was selected as the "Georgia Sportscaster of the Year" by the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association. Prior to joining the Atlanta Falcons Radio Network, Mr. Durham spent 18 years broadcasting more than 750 football and basketball games on radio for Georgia Tech, including trips to the Final Four and the Orange Bowl.

Legends of Loyalty will be the topic of this year's event. From the sports world to the business world, loyalty is a key element of success. Mr. Durham will share stories from several of the Atlanta Falcons most popular players. This is sure to be a memorable breakfast experience.

The Chamber would like to express our sincere appreciation to Mr. Durham for his time and expertise.

See Williams, page 5A

The Memories of Preserving

If this week's column was entitled "preserving memories", you would expect that it would be about photography or scrap booking. But it's not. Today I want to share with you the memories that flood me whenever I see a backyard vegetable garden, a bushel of cantaloupe or a Ball Jar. These are the memories of preserving.

Farmers Market Moment

JoAnne Leone



Growing up, our family garden was in New York State, just a stone's throw from the icy waters of Lake Erie. The soil was rich and the summer weather was usually conducive enough to produce very modest yields per plant. I can remember years where the local vineyards and orchards bore so much fruit, the branches and vines couldn't take the weight. With the short growing season and the high yield, I soon recognized that the late evening summer sunsets were designed to keep us all feeling that there were more work hours in the day. It was these warm, balmy summer evenings that we would preserve the fruits of our labor, in order to enjoy them the eight months of winter.

Cantaloupe was always one of my favorite summer fruits. Dad usually only planted 4 or 5 plants of this melon. Everyday, I could ride my bike and put one or two vine ripened spheres in my handlebar basket and head home. Mom would cut them in quarters and serve with a scoop of vanilla ice cream right in the middle of the wedge. Well, that was a special treat. Most often, it was sliced and we'd stick our face in the sweet flesh and just chew.

Then the summer I turned ten years old, something magical happened to our garden. The average yield multiplied by what seemed 100 fold. We would get a half bushel of ripe cantaloupes every other day. Then there were the green beans by the bushel, corn so plentiful, even I was tiring of chewing it off the cob. Peppers and eggplants were more abundant than the minnows in the creek. That's when my parents decided to buy a freezer and a melon ball gadget.

About every evening my little sister and I would take the halves of cantaloupe that my Mom had cut and seeded, and we'd make melon

See Leone, page 5A

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