

Meeting...from Page 1A

Taylor's debt, or that Chris Kelley was demoted for being a whistleblower or that a 74-year-old woman had her power cut off, and had to pay a \$50 reconnection fee.

"I want to tell you, shame on the board for charging that poor woman \$50 to get her power cut back on," Heimanson said.

"Oh, and one more thing, when I asked Mr. Akins why they had to build the headquarters so grand, he commented to me that it was to be in conformity with Brasstown Valley, that tourists who come by and want to see the EMC," she said. "When people go on vacation, I don't think the EMC is their destination."

"I hope today, that we get three new board members," she said.

Heimanson got her wish; there are three new board members, Charles Jenkins, Steven Phillips, and Chris Logan. And her speech drew a rousing round of applause.

Though Heimanson was a tough act to follow, Karen Kelley, wife of former EMC Operations Director Chris Kelley, who was demoted for alerting Board of Directors about the long-term debt of former EMC Board of Directors' President Terry Taylor, had some choice words for the Board.

"The reason you're having all the problems you're having is not because Chris Kelley blew the whistle on a director," Karen Kelley said. "It's because someone who used to sit on that stage wouldn't pay their bill."

Former EMC Director

of Operations Chris Kelley according to the \$30,000 opinion of EMC Attorney Steven Minor first reported the long overdue debt of Taylor and Taylor Construction to board member Greg Owenby.

Chris Kelley's reward was a demotion, a significant pay cut and personnel reprimands that included being cited for insubordination, the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald* have learned.

Chris Kelley resigned his position at BRMEMC in late August.

The membership crowd screamed for Chris Kelley's reinstatement.

Earlier in the meeting, Akins, who knew about Taylor's outstanding debt when he took over as EMC general manager in 2010 and knew about it when the bill was paid off July 2011 and then grew again to more than \$48,000, asked the membership for forgiveness.

"I will work hard to regain the trust of the membership," Akins said. "The Board of Directors has worked hard to get to the bottom of this, and get back on track."

Akins concluded by thanking the membership for supporting the cooperative.

Director Jerry Nichols also apologized on behalf of the board of directors.

"We make mistakes, some were made over the last few years," Nichols said. "It became a problem as soon as we found out about it (April 8, 2014)."

"There's a lot of information out there," he said. "Bad news is what people

look at. We're regretful of how this has played out. We regret that it happened; your cooperative is going to change because of this. Please, have an open mind."

Some members called for term limits, and others urged Akins and the board to resign.

EMC Member Mary Jean Boyette, of Towns County, said some things are unforgivable.

"Matthew Akins knew this was going on when he took over," she said. "He should have the grace to resign. The Board should have the grace to resign."

EMC Member Richard Botting concurred with Boyette's assessment.

"Don't believe that we have fallen off the proverbial turnip truck," Botting told the board. "Matthew Akins' actions are incomprehensible. The Board of Directors should be held equally responsible for incompetency."

The meeting concluded with the election of three new board members: Jenkins, Phillips and Logan. The membership left with a feeling of satisfaction and empowerment.

The other six EMC board members must now wait to see if a circulating petition seeking their recall from the EMC Board of Directors is successful.

Without a doubt, the 75th annual meeting of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was one for the record books, as Jenkins, Phillips and Logan became the first petitioning candidates to successfully gain seats on the board of directors.

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site that very few guys were showing up for funerals."

Blairsville has been an accepting home for the Shermans since they moved here two years ago, and both say it was God who brought them there. The Shermans own and operate SafeGuard Lock & Vault, a locksmith service in Blairsville.

"I've never found a more beautiful spot in the United States, and we're just blessed to be here, we're glad to be here," said Sherman.

America suffered a great tragedy on the day the towers fell, and the heart of the flagpole dedication was in remembrance of the men and women who lost their lives that day, and the country that dealt with the aftermath.

"We picked today because today's a very special day to a lot of us," said Joey Swanson, who is a financial representative with Woodmen. "We all can think back 13 years ago where we were,

and it's heart wrenching what we had to go through."

Plans for a flagpole at the Community Center have been in the works for a couple of years, and the Woodmen stepped up to turn those plans into a reality.

"Joey said, 'Why doesn't Woodmen of the World put you a flagpole up?'" said Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris. "We're honored to have the flag and the flagpole here."

Speaking at the ceremony, Sherman expressed his appreciation for the flag he served for so long as a firefighter, and remembered the day that terrorists thought, mistakenly, that they could take America's freedoms away.

"Firefighters, police officers, search and rescue teams came from everywhere, all over the United States," said Sherman. "And as true Americans, they stood up and did what was necessary that

day and for many days afterward."

Sherman warned of the necessity for America to stay on guard and keep fighting evil.

"We might have been caught before on 9/11, just because we just didn't think somebody would do something like that to us," said Sherman. "But we know it can happen, and we know it can happen again, and we need to stand up and we need to be vigilant."

Veteran Michael Ruback of Blairsville, who served three tours in Vietnam as a Seabee, oversaw the raising of the flag to half-staff, and 11-year-old Woodmen Hailee Turner sang a beautiful rendition of Alan Jackson's "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)."

The Woodmen of the World is a non-profit life insurance and retirement planning organization known for its patriotism and flag presentations.

Open House...from Page 1A

"We served up a lot of hot dogs and hamburgers today," Burnette said. "It's always fun to break bread with the folks in the community."

The firefighters at Station 2 also gave away door prizes donated by businesses in the area, Burnette said.

"We like to thank all the businesses that made the door prizes possible for today's open house," Burnette said.

The Georgia Forestry Commission and U.S. Forest Service also played a huge role at Station 2's Open House.

Chief Ranger Tony Harkins of the Georgia Forestry Commission said GFC plays an important role in North Georgia.

"We cover for the state, Towns, Fannin and Union County," he said. "We work as a coordinator with the fire department and U.S. Forest Service. So, we like the opportunity to come out at the open house to present to the homeowners what we do."

"We have a new program called Firewise. It enables the homeowners to take measures to make their home and the community safer. Not only individual homes, but the whole community. And that partners the Forest Service, the state, the fire department and the county agencies all together working towards that common goal to make it safer for firefighters and landowners. And we welcome the opportunity to come out and just present that to them. It's something new. We've had tremendous success in Towns County, and starting the first of the year we're going to introduce it to Union County, and hope it takes off as well here."

"We've got 10 Firewise communities in Towns County recognized, and we've got about 10 more in the works. We've got one Firewise com-



munity in Union, one in Fannin, another one in Fannin in the works. But we had an 800-acre fire in Towns County a few years ago that got everybody's attention, and we just got the ball rolling while the interest was there."

On the GFC, Harkins said "We provide protection for private lands and state lands."

Jason Demas with the U.S. Forest Service, said the keys to success is entirely about relationships and cooperation, not just at the state and federal level, but the local county level.

"The county is the first responder there, they get there before we do. This gives us a chance to meet our cooperators, and also meet the public that live here in the community, be able to create relationships and friendships with the locals who we're here serving. That's our job, is to serve them."

Harkins said times are hard, resources are scarce.

"So, by everybody cooperating and working together, we're able to provide a better service to the landowners," he said.

Demas - "I cover six counties. I've got Towns, Union, Fannin, Dawson, Lumpkin and Gilmer," Demas

said. "So, without cooperators and relationships, it's very hard for me to be able to be successful, because we have a very limited number and a large vast area, so we rely a whole lot on our local state agencies, Georgia Forestry Commission, and also our local fire department. Like I said, they're always the first ones on the scene, and we're just here to support them."

"We all work together. That's how we're able to be successful," Demas said. "We're public servants - that's what we are. All at the different levels. You've got the county, state and federal - that's all we are is public servants."

Harkins spoke highly of Station 2.

"They've only got just four or five or six paid firefighters in Union County - all these guys out here are volunteers. They're taking their time - they leave their jobs and come to the fire, and we provide training, some equipment and stuff. But we can't do our job without them, and vice versa," Harkins said.

"When the locals come out, it gives them a chance to see the equipment. Not only what their donations buy, but what their tax dollars is buying."