

Review...from Page 1A

membership all but ratified its support for continued transparency within the BRMEMC Board of Directors, as the previous year Chris Logan, Steven Phillips and Charles Jenkins also made it on the ballot by petition for the 2014 annual meeting, and were subsequently voted onto the board.

The membership also voted to impose a three-year term limit on board members moving forward.

"I think people are ready to put the past behind them," said Perren, shortly after learning the results of the election. "I think the membership is ready to move forward. I think the vote today was about transparency, I think it was about opening the meeting process. I support both measures."

In early November, the EMC board penned a letter committing itself to the principles on which the newer board members petitioned and were elected.

"Your Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors is committed to transparency, accountability and responsibility," read the letter, which went on to say that the board would be keeping the public up to date on the goings-on of the board meetings.

Since 2014, the board has passed a conflict of interest policy prohibiting board members from having a profitable business relationship with the EMC, and board members, as well as the board attorney, no longer receive

health benefits through the EMC, according to the letter.

Furthermore, meeting minutes are now made available online once they have been approved.

Also big in 2015 were efforts on behalf of law enforcement in the county, with one example being a record drug bust conducted by the Narcotics Division of the Union County Sheriff's Office.

According to the sheriff's office, a seizure conducted on Oct. 9 netted the biggest pot bust in Union County history, as investigators confiscated an estimated \$790,000 worth of marijuana from an indoor grow on Mull Valley Road.

Highlighting the good work of the sheriff's office at the annual Christmas party, the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution awarded Capt. Chad Deyton of the Sheriff's Narcotics Division with a commendation medal for his work in taking drugs off the streets of Union County.

Capt. Deyton was named Deputy of the Year by Union County Sheriff Mack Mason at that Christmas dinner, and Deputy Shane Burnette also received honors and commendations for his role in single-handedly rescuing two people from a burning home on Thanksgiving Day.

Union County Schools made many headlines in 2015, starting the year off by announcing that it was ranked fifth in the state for CCRPI results, and first in the 13-

county Pioneer RESA for the same results.

Sharing in the accolades was Union County High School, placing 16th in the state for its recent graduation rate. The high school started a new attendance initiative program this school year, which already has seen remarkable support by the students and staff.

Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe announced his retirement in November, fulfilling his desire to retire after having faithfully served the school district for five years.

The Union County Board of Education is currently searching for Steppe's replacement, as Steppe will retire at the end of the 2015-2016 school year.

"It has truly been a blessing to be a part of this school system," said Steppe at the time of his retirement announcement. "I am honored to finish my career in such a wonderful place. I wish nothing but the best for you, the system, and your search for a new superintendent."

Part of Steppe's legacy will be the completion of the SPLOST-funded Union County Schools Fine Arts Center, which opened in September with near-capacity community attendance of close to 1,000 people for a special program put on by the high school band, chorus and theater programs.

Also completed in 2015 was the long awaited Chick-fil-A restaurant, which had been in the works for several years before finally breaking ground this year.

The restaurant held several community-related activities leading up to its grand opening at the end of August, which featured a raising of the flag by the North Georgia Honor Guard, and was preceded by the First 100 contest.

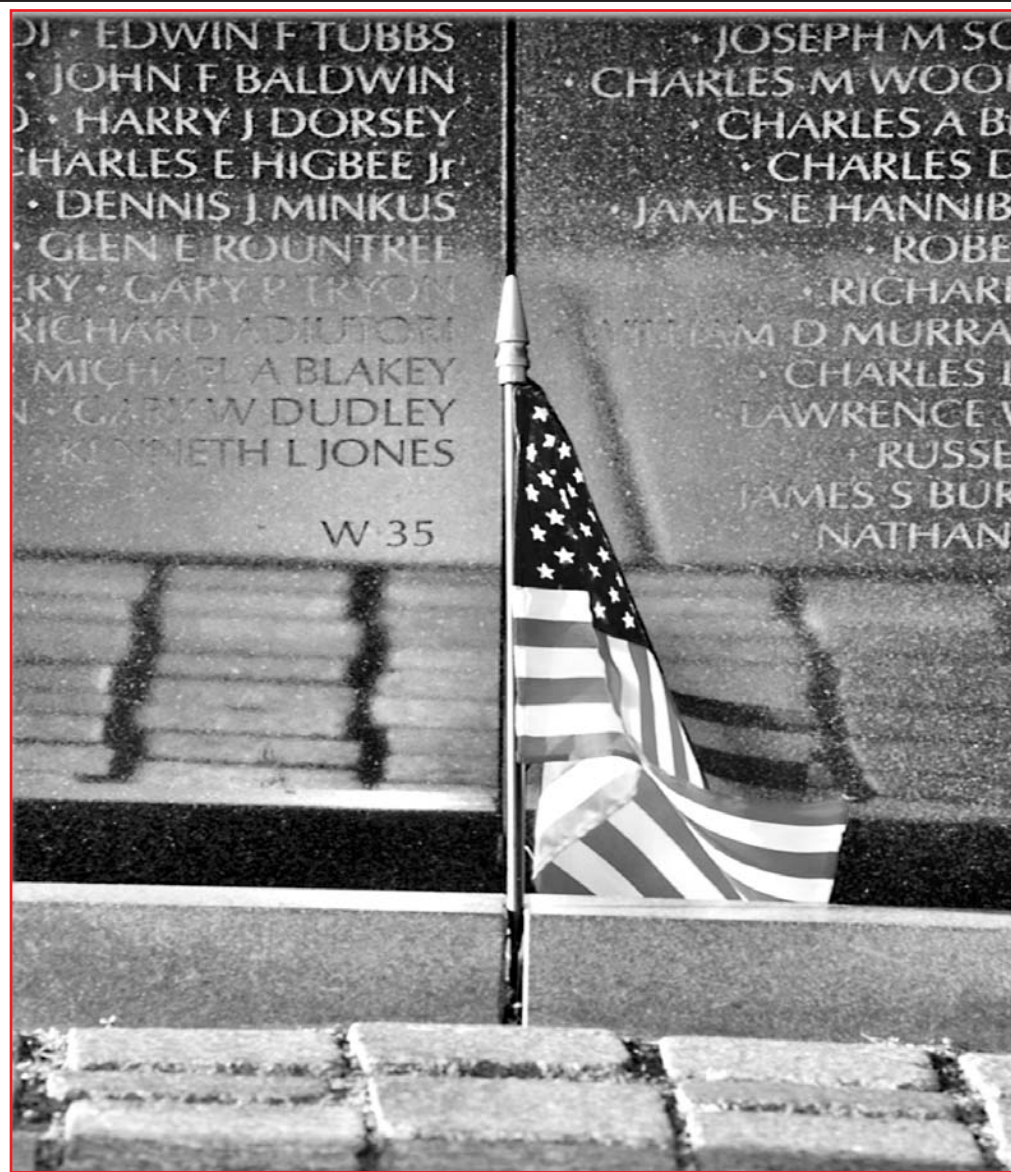
From Oct. 8 until Oct. 12, guarded around the clock, the Vietnam Veterans Moving Wall Memorial stood at attention for the thousands of visitors - including veterans and survivors of veterans - who arrived from all over the Southeast.

The Wall's visit was sponsored by the Blairsville Chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America, and the chapter's president, Mike Priven, was instrumental in securing The Wall, organizing its stay and fundraising for the event.

Many considered the arrival of The Moving Wall to be a once in a lifetime event for Union County, and Vietnam Veterans in particular viewed The Wall's presence as a source of healing and a very welcome "Welcome Home."

On top of being viewable around the clock, several ceremonies took place in front of The Wall, including the presentation of 20 Quilts of Valor to Vietnam Veterans.

The Union County



Union County Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy receives donation



(L-R): Ashleigh Stephens, Judy Baldwin, Janice Cochran, and Cindy Williams

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce along with the Union County Community Center recently presented a check to the Union County Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy to assist with providing free books for children from birth to age five. The money was raised during the Holly Jolly Christmas community event and will provide a year's supply of books for over 20 children.

Events Coordinator Ashleigh Stephens remarked, "We would like to thank the community for coming out to our event and for bidding on the silent auction items which accounted for the largest portion of the money raised." Additionally, Chamber President Cindy Williams commented, "The Ferst Foundation does a phenomenal job in Union County. It is an honor to support their efforts on behalf of Union County children."

Farmers Market kept the North Georgia News busy, with its steady showcase of events through its open season spanning June to the end of October.

From the ever popular Ramp Festival to the Strawberry Jubilee, the Farmers Market brought thousands of visitors in 2015 to support local farmers and producers of handmade goods and wares in Union County.

Millie Arrowood took over the cafe this season, and she made Market Manager Mickey Cummings' favorite biscuits all season long at Millie's Market Cafe.

The Canning Plant stayed busy, too, making some of the finest apple sauce and other canned goods the mountain area has ever tasted.

Blairsville's own Alan Kay made national headlines when he competed in and won a survival competition TV show called *Alone*, produced by the History Channel.

Kay would go on to be the Grand Marshal of the 46th Annual Sorghum Festival Parade.

Also in 2015, the Mountain Regional Library System searched for and found a replacement for longtime MRLS Director Donna Howell, who retired at the end of December 2014 after serving 10 years as director and 15 years before that as assistant director.

Vince Stone took over the top spot as the MRLS director this year, and the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris will be undergoing a \$1 million renovation in 2016 under his guidance.

In the October meeting of Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and the Blairsville City Council, the council passed a policy making way for the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance before every council meeting, as well as for an invocation, neither of which had been done in city council meetings in recent memory.

And in its December meeting, the city council - which saw three incumbents win re-election in this year's municipal elections of

November - honored Bob Head by voting to name the off ramp of the Haralson Development Project after him, calling it Bob Head Street.

The Haralson Development Project took a huge step forward in 2015, after several years of planning. The Downtown Development Authority Board of Directors, with Program Manager Darren Harper, was able to secure mitigation credits, which allowed for construction of the off ramp to begin.

County residents spent a very warm Christmas drenched in rain, as Christmas 2015 brought with it flash floods and record-breaking temperatures in the 70s.

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