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and businesses of fellow Georgians.

BRMEMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms recognized these employees in the November board meeting, and seven of them attended that evening: Phil Chapman, Daniel Nemkovich, David Ellis, Donald Jones, Brad Wilson, Randy Curtis and Josh Payne.

In recognizing these men, Nelms cited the principle of "cooperation among cooperatives," which is one of the seven cooperative principles

adopted by the International Cooperative Alliance.

"The blessing that our guys brought to those folks should not go unnoticed," said Nelms, further noting that the EMC employees were instrumental in reinstating a sense of normalcy after a period of devastation.

Nelms also took time in the meeting to read several thank-you notes he had received from people impacted by the hurricane, people wanting to thank the BRMEMC

employees for their hard work and dedication.

For their part, the men recounted some of the destruction they experienced down in the Bainbridge, Blakely and Faceville areas of Georgia, and how they were part of an effort to replace several thousand poles and clear large swaths of right-of-way.

Also in the meeting, the board approved a loan agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service. This



BRMEMC Directors Jeff Ledford, Ray Cook, Bert Rogers and Cory Payne.

agreement ensures that the EMC has the funds necessary to move forward with its five-year Construction Work Plan.

Ultimately, the agreement guarantees the EMC access to \$30 million in potential long-term loan funds through 2027.

These funds, to be drawn down only as needed, will allow the EMC to pay for infrastructure upgrades in order to accommodate system growth, and the co-op will also be in a better position to react to weather emergencies down the line.

Nelms told the board that not taking the loan package would result in delayed implementation of the Construction Work Plan, and that member fees and power rates would have to be increased to defray some of the costs associated with more expensive short-term credit alternatives.

Over the course of the agreement, the EMC plans to increase its equity position from the current level of 32 percent to right at the industry median of 44 percent.

In his Manager's Report, Nelms discussed the EMC's fiber expansion plan for fiscal year 2019, which features a pilot program for bringing fiber into a number of neighborhoods in the five-county service area.

Unfortunately, the original mailing did not have a tremendous amount of participation, but follow-up phone calls have resulted in more positive results, and good headway is being made with the pilot program.

Nelms also informed the board that the USDA had just issued a press release announcing a partnership between itself and the EMC.

Coinciding with this partnership will be a \$3 million grant to bring "high-speed fiber-optic network to all homes

and businesses located within the Cherokee County, North Carolina, proposed funded service area," according to the USDA.

The project will focus on the Hanging Dog and Grape Creek areas in Cherokee County, which have little to no internet connectivity and/or cellphone service.

"This investment will help construct a high-speed, active Ethernet fiber-optic network, which will enable Blue Ridge (and its affiliates) to offer voice, video and data services to the 865 households and seven businesses within the area," according to the USDA. "The technology will allow for increased opportunities to access economic development, health care, educational and quality of life resources that high-quality communications services can bring to communities.

"A community center will also be established in a local general store where residents can access computer access terminals and Wi-Fi service, free of charge."

Nelms thanked Erik Brinke, the EMC's director of economic development, and Daniel Frizzell, director of engineering, for their efforts toward securing the grant money. These efforts included the completion of a nearly 500 page application and the collection of about 160 letters from residents.

Frizzell said in the Nov. 15 meeting that, even though the USDA had decided to go ahead and announce the funds already, there's still no set timeline on the project, as many important hurdles remain to be overcome, such as environmental and archaeological testing of the land.

In other news, the project to connect fiber to special weather monitoring equipment and the Walasi-Yi Interpretive



Center at Neel's Gap in Union County has experienced a few delays due to permitting issues, according to Nelms.

However, these issues have been resolved, and completion of the installation has been rescheduled for Dec. 13.

Due to the mountainous terrain and difficulty in getting fiber-optic cable through the gap, the project will be undertaken by specialized drone equipment.

When completed, road conditions should be available remotely when bad weather strikes, which will inform emergency services and residents what the roads are like before they head out.

Nelms also shared with the board the final tabulated costs associated with the 2018 annual meeting. The budgeted amount was \$114,100, though the actual cost of the meeting came in under budget at \$99,440.

Ballots and online voting proved to be the biggest expense at \$53,305, followed by labor and overhead at \$12,454, then advertising at \$10,823.

Remaining annual meeting costs included per diem for members of the nominating and elections/credentials committees, door prizes and gifts, entertainment costs, refreshments, etc.

Also in the meeting, Board Members Ray Cook, Cory Payne, Bert Rogers and Jeff Ledford received certificates for having completed various board training classes.

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shopping experience and supports the program with a community grant.

One thing that always touches the hearts of those involved is when volunteers see kids shopping for other members of their families. After all, these big-hearted kids want their mom, dad, brother, sister or grandparent to get something for Christmas, too.

Over the years, Baxter said that he and his fellow officers have seen it all during Shop with a Cop, from kids using Christmas money to buy basic household items, to kids looking for recipe ingredients so grandma can make something special for the family.

"Peach cobbler for us

isn't hard to come by, but for one kid, it was pretty important," said Baxter. "And let's be honest, we've all got toilet paper and paper towels in our house, don't we?"

"But for a kid to come out and want to put that on their Christmas list – what's wrong there? That means you don't have a lot."

Added Baxter, "Not every kid that we take buys that kind of stuff, but those things stick in your mind. You'll never forget those things."

Folks wanting to make a donation to help out local kids for Christmas should visit the Blairsville Police Department, located around back of the City Hall building in Downtown

Blairsville, during business hours.

People looking to refer children for Shop with a Cop can contact Katy Jones with Union County Family Connection at (706) 835-4351.

For more information about Union County Family Connection, visit the website at union.gafcp.org.

"Our Family Connection collaborative brings together partners from various community agencies and organizations in order to help plan strategies to improve the lives of students and families," according to the UC Family Connection website.

Election...from Page 1A

11 pre-assigned Union County voting precincts: Ivy Log, Dooley, Gumlog, Blairsville, Pat Colwell, Trackrock, Coosa, Jones Creek, Owltown, Choestoe and Suches.

"Georgia law requires registered voters to show photo identification in order to vote in person," according to the Secretary of State's office. "When you vote in person, you must show one of the following photo IDs:

"A Georgia driver's license, even if expired; any valid state or federal government issued photo ID, including one issued by the Department of Driver Services or your Voter Registrar; valid U.S. passport; valid employee photo ID from any branch, department, agency, or entity of the U.S. Government, this state, or any county, municipality, board, authority or other entity of this state; valid U.S. military photo ID; valid tribal photo ID."

Robyn Crittenden, former commissioner of the Georgia Department of Human Services, is serving out the

remainder of Kemp's term as Secretary of State.

Appointed by Gov. Nathan Deal on Nov. 8 after

Kemp resigned from his position, Crittenden will be in charge of overseeing the runoff election.