

City council approves \$800,000 grit removal system

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The City of Blairsville has contracted with Engineering Management, Inc. for \$800,000 worth of sewer upgrades, according to a proposal approved in the July 3 regular meeting of the Blairsville City Council.

Grit and other inorganic matter "that are not removed from the wastewater entering the plant by the mechanical screen is causing extraordinary wear and tear to pumps, valves and other equipment throughout" the wastewater treatment facility, according to the proposal.

"The project will consist of additions to the existing headworks structure to accommodate the grit removal equipment, as well as associated electrical, piping and other modifications." Prior to the council vote approving the proposal, Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley said that the project was estimated to cost \$800,000.

However, the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority, which is financing the project, is giving the city a \$200,000 loan forgiveness grant, said the mayor.

"\$600,000 is what the note will be for," said Mayor Conley. "We'll probably take it out on a 10-year loan."

Implementing the grit removal system will allow the city to forgo costly and mounting repairs due to grit in the future, according to city hall.

In other news, the council approved the hiring of three part-time Blairsville Police Officers at an hourly rate of \$15 each to replace a part-time officer the Blairsville Police Department is losing.

"We implement the use of part-time help for budget purposes," said Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Michael Baxter. He said his department tries to share hires with the Union County Sheriff's Office whenever it can because it eliminates the need

for training.

The reason BPD is hiring three part-time officers at one time has to do with scheduling between BPD and UCSO. It's a balancing act between the day and night shifts, said Baxter, adding that having the city covered at all times is paramount.

The new part-time BPD officers are all full-time UCSO deputies, and they are Perry Groves, Christopher Jackson and Russell Long.

Uniti, the company that actually owns the physical infrastructure that Windstream utilizes, has asked the city for a Grant of Right-of-Way Occupancy. Blairsville City Attorney David Barrett advised the city not to approve the contract.

Barrett said the contract that Uniti sent in for signature is grossly incomplete and could potentially leave the city in a precarious position. The council voted to return the contract to Uniti unsigned with a request for clarification and additional



L-R: Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, City Clerk Kaye McCann and City Councilwoman Ruth Cook. Photo by Mark Smith

documentation. Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Program Manager Darren Harper reported that the next DDA Board Meeting will be on Tuesday, July 10.

Harper also reported that he had secured light pole banners for the downtown area of Blairsville at a significantly reduced price. The banners will advertise surrounding features of Blairsville.

There have been no changes with the Haralson Property Development since the last city council meeting, said Harper, other than earnest money had been received from two of the three buyers.

The "A Taste of the Mountains in Blairsville" event will be held on Saturday, Aug. 25, at the Grapelle Butt Mock House, courtesy of the Union County Historical Society, said Harper.

Linda Lawrence, a member of the nonprofit A Taste of the Mountains in Blairsville, Inc., asked the council if the organization could possibly get a reduction in the city licensing fee for the upcoming event because the state licensing fees are so high.

All funds raised by the "A Taste of the Mountains in Blairsville" event will go toward student scholarships.

The council voted unani-

mously to waive the \$100 fee if the state will allow them to do so. Approval from the state is necessary because alcohol will be served at the event.

Assistant Airport Manager Aaron Mannheim reported that people from airplanes that have been forced to land at the Blairsville Municipal Airport in recent weeks due to inclement weather have found Blairsville to be to their liking.

One person even bought a house in Union County, sight-unseen, said Mannheim.

The council also held a first reading of City Ordinance 2018-04, which clarifies the rate schedule for metered and unmetered fire lines.

Suches Fireworks...from Page 1A

run to the Volunteer State for pyrotechnics.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Over the years, the gathering behind Woody Gap School has seen its fair share of improvements to keep people entertained as they wait on the sun to set behind Little Cedar Mountain.

And this year was no different, as Zion Baptist Church provided a "bouncy house" for the kids and plenty to eat and drink with a concessions tent.

Tricia Sheffield, wife of Zion's new pastor Jim Sheffield, was impressed by her first Suches July Fourth experience.

"This is a really nice, family-oriented event," she said. "I like how it provides something you can bring your entire family to and spend time together. It's more than just a firework show, and I really like that. We've definitely enjoyed our first July Fourth here in the community."

Around 9 p.m., local singing sensation Nealy Webster, who is the granddaughter of event emcee Larry Wood, performed the national anthem as anticipation began to build among the hundreds in attendance.

Folks gathered on the athletic field, around the school, in the parking lot, at the community center, the fire department, just wherever they could plant a chair or blanket, or upon whatever surface they could find that provided a good view of the show.

On the field, children from ages toddlers to teens passed the time in an assortment of ways, but the most popular pastimes that evening included the lighting of sparklers, the tossing of footballs and frisbees, and visiting the bouncy house.

Shortly after sunset, the moment everyone had been waiting for finally arrived, as the night sky began to burst with multi-colored explosions that continued nonstop until

well after 10 p.m.

At the conclusion, everyone went home happy, with spectators not only impressed by the quality of the show but the length of the fireworks display, which lasted 30-plus minutes.

"This and the Indian Summer Festival are two of our biggest events of the year," Wood said. "We're happy to have Zion Church here today selling concessions and setting up the bouncy house for the kids. We're thankful for everyone that came out and joined us today, and for everyone that helped put this on."

Will the Suches community be able to outdo itself in 2019? It certainly won't be easy. But if history has taught us anything, it's that the people of Suches won't settle for just another run of the mill fireworks display.

If that were the case, they'd still be lighting bottle rockets at the General Store.

Those who have never celebrated America's birthday in Suches, add it to your bucket list and be sure to arrive early.



The Suches Community comes together every year for the Annual Fourth of July Fireworks Celebration behind Woody Gap School. Photo by Todd Forrest

Station 3...from Page 1A

main station - we have a fire engine, a wildland truck, and we have a utility vehicle, which is used for issues with hikers on the trail. The engine is used for fighting structure fires, and the wildland is mainly used for brushfires."

Schroeder believes volunteers are essential when it comes to fighting fires, rescuing people and saving folks when they are in any type of accident.

"We have a group of volunteers, and we range anywhere from people who have experience at a city fire station ... (to) people like myself who started with no fire experience prior to coming here," said Schroeder. "I started here when I decided to become a volunteer."

"I started medical training, became a first responder, and now I'm an emergency medical technician, or EMT."

According to Schroeder, Stations 3 and 12 respond to numerous types of situations on a day-to-day basis.

"The majority of our calls in this precinct are EMT med-type calls, where we assist the ambulance service," said Schroeder. "We also assist when it's a fire-rescue related ambulance service call and first responder calls."

"That could be for medical situations, it can be for car accidents where people are injured, motorcycle accidents, in which we get several of those



An interior view of Union County Fire Station No. 3 off Gainesville Highway during the June 30 Open House. Photo by Mark Novak

a year. We also get large 18-wheeler truck accidents coming down the mountain.

"Sometimes a driver may take a curve a little to tight, lose the trailer or their brakes, and go off the highway."

During the open house that Saturday, Schroeder was summoned to an emergency call where a bicyclist had difficulty breathing after a bicycle crash.

Union County Fire Chief David Dyer was happy to see area residents at the open house, and he made it a point to shake hands and visit with the locals who came out to view the equipment and share

a hamburger cooked by the firefighters.

Dyer was excited that many people seemed to be showing a real interest in the fire department during the open house, as he believes community plays a crucial role in running a successful volunteer fire station.

"We had a least two folks that are interested in becoming volunteers at this station," said Dyer. "They came out today and picked up an application, talked to some of the firefighters, and they are really interested in becoming volunteers."

Boat Parade...from Page 1A

prices went up, they decided to pare it back to just the waters in front of the marina.

"Grandma's just always done it on her own, free of charge for everybody," said Doucette. This year, however, when E-Demand, Inc. and Advanced Digital Cable, Inc. approached them about being sponsors, they accepted.

Carleen, who moved to Blairsville from San Diego, California, has been the owner and operator of Nottely Marina for 26 years, said Doucette.

This year's winner for best boat theme was the Minion Boat owned by Brian and Stephanie Preston.

"Well, we've had a great time," said Brian. "We love coming up here every weekend. This is a great marina. This is our third time (in the boat parade)." Crewing with the Prestons were their friends Ally, Carla and Bill.

"After we finished the parade last year, we started thinking through what we were going to do, and we've had a year thinking this whole costume up," said Carla. "We got Second Place last year. We were the Grinch."

The Trolls Boat, owned by the Smith Family, took Second Place this year. The Star Wars Boat, owned by the Hintze Family, placed third.

Runners-up were the Bubble Bath Boat, the Luau Boat, the Miss America Boat, the Jaws Boat, and of course, the Amphicar.

Doucette said there were 13 patriotic boats in the parade as well.

"We changed it up a little bit, so we're experimenting every year," said Doucette. "We did three trophies instead of our regular nine, (which) just took so long and was so hot and the kids were over it by then."

"But today, we realized there are so many good boats that we should've had five trophies. Five will be a good medium."

Jeff Fredericks, owner of the Amphicar (amphibious car), which is a staple in the boat



The Miss America Boat was one of several runners-up in the parade that Saturday. Photo by Mark Smith



This Minion-themed boat won Best in Parade during the Annual Fourth of July Boat Parade at Nottely Marina on June 30. Photo by Mark Smith

parade, was proud to show off his floating vehicle.

"This one's a '64," he said. "They built them from '61 to '67. They built a total of about 3,000 of them. Back in the day, they were about as expensive as a Cadillac, and everybody was raising families - they weren't going to pay that for this."

Fredericks said it's got two propellers underneath the rear and the front wheels are

the rudders, so you steer like a regular car. He said it works like a four-wheel drive, but instead of engaging the front wheels it turns the propellers.

The Amphicar will do 60 to 65 mph downhill and about 10 to 12 mph in the water, he said.

When he was 10 years old, he saw one of these cars while at the beach with his mother, and he wanted one ever since, said Fredericks.