

## Arby's...from Page 1A

\$8,000 to pipe the ditch line at the front of the Georgia 515-facing parcel in Downtown Blairsville, which Board Member W.C. Nelson said should be piped whether a deal goes through or not.

But Nelson estimated the cost of piping the ditch line as being between \$2,000 and \$3,000, well below the proposal's estimated cost of \$8,000.

A point of contention in negotiations has been the results of a geotechnical report commissioned by GLM Development showing water near the surface of the property,

which the company is using to leverage a lower land price, citing unforeseen mitigation costs of about \$200,000.

The DDA Board granted a third contract extension last month, giving the developer 30 days from Oct. 18 to make an offer the DDA would accept.

"We did the extension on their contract until the 18th, and this is their action towards that proposal," Thompson said.

DDA Program Manager Darren Harper expressed concern that few potential buyers have the "deep pockets" of Arby's, but Thompson, Nelson and Rogers attempted to ease his concern by saying that there are lots of buyers out there who could pay their price.

After some discussion, it

was decided that, if the Arby's deal falls through, the DDA would install a drainage pipe in the ditch line on the property to avert problems with potential buyers moving forward.

Should the upcoming "drop-dead date" built into the third contract extension come to pass in less than a week's time without an offer, the DDA will become free of any obligation in the contract and will be able to walk away from the deal and retain the land.

Closing on the deal would provide the DDA with enough money to settle its debts with the city, which several years ago paid off an interest-bearing loan the DDA used to acquire the Haralson Property in the first place.

Money from the Arby's deal would also allow the DDA to get started on its parking plans for the downtown area, including the potential development of parking on the Haralson Property parcel across from Cook's Country Kitchen along Pat Haralson Drive.

The promised paved parking area behind Blairsville City Hall is on hold until construction starts on Steve Cockerham's mixed-use commercial development known as Courthouse View.

Cockerham said recently that he had secured a builder for the project, and that the builder was working with the building's architect to lower construction costs before the final contract could be awarded.

## Colwell...from Page 1A

Education held a particularly important place in Colwell's heart during his tenure as an elected official, and to this day, he believes the community's children to be "the most precious thing in the world."

Of course, things have gotten much better and easier in the realm of education since Colwell first entered Georgia politics in 1964, especially the funding.

Back then, the state had an annual budget of around \$600 million, with little to go toward education. Compare that to Georgia's fiscal year 2020 budget of \$27.5 billion, which will see \$10.6 billion going toward K-12 education.

In addition to securing education funding while in office, Colwell sponsored a number of initiatives introducing educational opportunities to North Georgia communities over the years.

"Everybody before me who ran for office said, 'We want to take care of the old people,'" Colwell said. "When I ran, I said, 'I guess I'm a little different, because I want to do something for the young people.'"

A primary reason Colwell wanted to help out young folks was because he'd grown tired of watching them leave the community to find work after graduating high school.

"I wanted to see something come into the county that would keep some of them here where they wouldn't have to leave," Colwell said. "It was real tough then. We just didn't have money here hardly for anything, we had to fight for it in Atlanta to get money coming this way."

Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill was the one who nominated Colwell for the Second Annual Pioneers in Education Awards. In the ceremony, Hill enumerated the many ways in which Colwell expanded educational opportunities for untold numbers of Georgia students.

"I would like to bring to everyone's attention that if it was not for Mr. Colwell, we all might not be together today, because he built most of the roads in Northeast Georgia," Hill said. "And it is most fitting to acknowledge Rep. Colwell's vital role in the creation of Pioneer RESA."

"In the 1970s, in an effort to provide specialists in small school systems long enjoyed by larger counties, Mr. Cowell arranged a meeting between then-Gov. Jimmy Carter and local North Georgia superintendents.

"The result of the meeting was the proposal for establishing the first RESA, which is today known as Pioneer RESA. Furthermore, Rep. Colwell was instrumental in securing \$500,000 to form this organization, thus beginning our RESA facilities in the state of Georgia."

Hill went on to credit Colwell with introducing legislation paving the way for the 1% sales tax known as the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, thereby providing schools funding for "capital outlay projects without resorting to increased property taxes."

"Due to Mr. Colwell's legislation, taxpayers can look at our modern school facilities today and see how this method of funding has impacted all of our school systems," Hill said.

Furthermore, the former legislator served as a key supporter of the Capital Projects Act, Hill said, enabling state and local systems to avoid overcrowded classrooms through adequate planning.

Colwell also got the state to return Tennessee Valley Authority property taxes to the local level, according to Hill, resulting in millions of dollars in revenues being redirected to 10 North Georgia counties, a portion of which went toward local education.

"Last but certainly not least, it is important to note that Rep. Colwell has provided guidance and support to the school leadership at Union County for decades," Hill said, "and he is the No. 1 Panther Fan in Union County, never failing to miss a game and support our student athletes."

"On a personal note, he has served as a mentor to me and is a man I have looked up to my entire life."

For his part, Colwell said he appreciated both the nomination and the award, adding that he believes Union County Schools to be doing extremely well under Hill's leadership.

As the No. 1 Panther Fan, Colwell is proud to watch his grandkids move through the schools, and he hopes that local stakeholders remain vigilant in their efforts to maintain the system's long-running era of success moving forward.

"It's an ongoing thing," Colwell said. "If you're not on

the cutting edge of technology now, you'll get behind so quick. You've got so much to do to keep up with education that there's always work to do.

"So, just remember to elect good school board members and have good superintendents and support them in their work."

Joining Colwell as fellow Pioneers in Education were representatives from each of the Pioneer RESA's districts:

Jennifer King of White County; Scott Hamilton of Towns County; Roberta Aguilar of Rabun County; Dionne Hardy of Mountain Education; David Luke of Lumpkin County; Bill and Kathy Leard of Hart County; Nath Morris of Hall County; Orval Porter of Habersham County; Merrienne Dyer of Gainesville; Patsy Watkins of Franklin County; Morgan B. Arp of Fannin County; Elaine Wilson of Dawson County; and Christopher B. Erwin of Banks County.

## City Council...from Page 1A

everyone who voted for me," Cook said. "I'm just really sorry more people didn't come out. That really disturbs me that we have so much apathy for our city elections, but I do appreciate everyone's vote."

"I hope we can continue to be the great town that we are. I hope the residents will embrace any changes that we happen to vote on, knowing that we do it for the good of the public and not for personal gain. We try to be very conscientious about what we decide when we vote. It's not for personal reasons at all, it's for the good of the community."

"I'm glad we're growing. I don't adjust to change well, but I do know that in order for growth to happen, things

have to change. And we're trying to keep the change to a minimum but still provide for the population."

"If people have a grievance against the council or against anything that's happening, come to the meetings. Your voice will be heard. Don't sit there and complain."

## NGTC Board of Directors meeting

North Georgia Technical College's Board of Directors will meet at 3 PM on Wednesday, November 20, in the President's Home Conference Center on the Clarksville Campus. For more information, contact 706-754-7702.

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