

Harkins...from Page 1A

Harkins' neighbors helped him with clothes and other items in the days immediately following the fire, and he ended up moving in with his baby brother Clyde, now 92, while his new home underwent construction.

Builders recently completed the finishing touches on the brand-new house, which has risen much like a Phoenix with a largely similar floor plan, just in time for the Suches native's 99th birthday on March 15.

"I'm happy I can get started living in it," said Harkins.

During construction, Harkins' two sons, Robert and Tom, took turns staying in a camper on the property, and they couldn't have been more pleased with the way the Suches community has treated their father.

"The community was marvelous in giving support and letting us know that, anything we needed, to let somebody know and they would get it," said Robert Harkins of Columbia, South Carolina. "We want to make sure the whole community knows that we really appreciate it, and that we're thankful and grateful they did that."

Following a fire investigation, a forensic investigator concluded that the Oct. 30, 2016, fire was likely started by a rodent

chewing through an electrical cord in the garage.

Harkins' quick thinking with the garden hose that evening may have prevented a much larger fire, as all of North Georgia had succumbed to extreme drought that fall of 2016.

Many Harkins Family memories and belongings have since been salvaged through cleaning and restoration, including photographs and some of their more durable furniture.

The home rests on the original site of the Baxter Post Office, which Harkins separated and moved to another part of the property when he built the family home there in 1982.

A veteran of the U.S. Army, Harkins spent over 31 years serving his country before retiring as a sergeant major in his 50s.

IT and his four brothers – Eldo, Harley, Ralph and Clyde – are well known in these parts for having served at the same time during World War II.

The Harkins siblings also have a sister, Stella May, who was born 17 years after the last of the Harkins boys, and who also served honorably in the U.S. Armed Forces.



Photo by Shawn Jarrard

I.T. Harkins walking across his property, which now features a brand-new house built from the ground up.



Photo by Lisa Arbourn

Harkins' house as it burned on Oct. 30, 2016.

Cummings...from Page 1A

meeting every September.

For those interested in qualifying to run for the EMC board in several months, Cummings said that the job is challenging yet rewarding.

"All those board seats are important jobs," said Cummings. "People need to understand it takes more than just an hour or so a week. A lot of us were told that."

"Some weeks it doesn't take much time at all, but then there will be other weeks it will take more. EMC work, I probably average somewhere around 20 to 30 hours a month ... it's pretty intense sometimes."

Cummings sees the EMC director role as a chance to give back to one's community, and he encourages anyone who might be in a position to run to do so, especially since the EMC is staffed with people he admires on a daily basis.

"The employees of the EMC are the finest anywhere," said Cummings. "Thinking back over the last couple of years through storm events and all this, I've never seen a harder working group of people in my life."

"So, we've got some really great people to work with. The EMC has got some things that we'll be dealing with in the future that can really make life a lot better for Americans, but especially members here."

As an EMC director, Cummings has gotten to take part in special board trainings that have opened his eyes to the future of the EMC – a future that was on full display at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's annual meeting last month.

"This industry is going to be part of history," said Cummings, who was impressed with the technology on hand at the NRECA meeting.

There, he saw how electric cars may be useful in protecting the environment, and he heard from industry experts who felt the cost of these automobiles would be decreasing in the future.

Cummings also spoke with a woman specializing in smart home technology, and she outlined a vision of an automated home that prioritized household tasks to be conducted outside of peak demand hours for electricity, thereby saving both the EMC and homeowners money.

The future is bright, according to Cummings, and being on the EMC board is a way for people to embrace and possibly shape the future of this region.

"When I was born, not everybody had electricity," said Cummings. "I don't think the house I lived in had electricity when I was first born."

"But now everyone has electricity, and we are finding new ways to use it to make our lives more comfortable."

Another exciting development for the EMC is the expanding horizons for broadband internet adoption and infrastructure in the mountains, as right now, both state and federal leaders are looking to build out those capabilities in rural areas to connect more residents and businesses to the world.

"Our greatest natural resource in this and other counties in the state of Georgia

are the people that live there," said Cummings. "That's what makes this such a wonderful place to live. So, being able

to do something for those people is a great opportunity for somebody."

An open invitation from the Union County Historical Society

The Union County Historical Society is now conducting their 2018 membership drive. Membership is open to anyone and is your investment in preserving the history of Union County. This drive will continue through March 31, 2018. If you are interested in becoming a member, please

complete the attached membership form, enclose your check and return it to the Union County Historical Society, P.O. Box 35, Blairsville, GA 30514

If you have questions please contact us at 706-745-5493. Thank you for your continued support of our efforts here at the society.

Union County Historical Society Membership Form

Name _____

Organization _____

Mail Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Individual (\$20) Business or Non-profit Org. (\$100)

Family (\$30) Corporate Partner (\$250)

Sustaining (\$100) New Membership

Individual/Lifetime (\$350) Renewal

Couple/Lifetime (\$500) Gift of \$ _____

Please note your comments or any skills/services/resources you would be willing to donate: _____
