

# Marijuana...from Page 1A

production to get low THC oil into the hands of patients who need it.

"If they need that oil, that's fine – let it be shipped in from some other state where it's already been regulated and tested," said Sheriff Mason. "Send it in to the state of Georgia on the pharmaceutical end, and then distribute it out to those who need it through medical doctors who prescribe all other regulated prescription drugs. That's all they've got to do."

Mason has many concerns about legalizing marijuana production for any reason in the state, including the gateway nature of marijuana as a drug that leads to the abuse of harder substances.

He's also concerned about the health of the public generally, as he believes the cultivation of marijuana for medical purposes will eventually lead to the legalization of recreational marijuana use.

And with greater recreational marijuana use, more and more babies will suffer the consequences of their parents' decisions, as THC stays in the body much longer than alcohol, for example, potentially causing serious issues for babies in the womb, newborns and infants.

"No amount of marijuana has been proven safe to use during pregnancy," according to marchofdimes.org. "Using marijuana during pregnancy may cause problems for your baby, like premature

birth, problems with brain development and stillbirth ... If you use marijuana, don't breastfeed. You may pass chemicals from marijuana to your baby through breast milk."

Additionally, the legalization of marijuana has been shown in some cases to actually decrease the perceived harmfulness and increase the recreational use of marijuana among eighth and 10th-grade students, according to a 2017 study published by the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

Sheriff Mason is not alone in his thinking, either. He has the backing of the Georgia Sheriffs' Association, which heard from Sheriff Kirk Taylor of Pueblo County, Colorado, in the association's Winter Training Conference in January.

Taylor has been sheriff of Pueblo County for more than

10 years, and he has seen the effects of marijuana legalization firsthand.

Colorado first legalized marijuana for medical purposes back in 2000, and just as Sheriff Mason and his fellow Georgia sheriffs fear will happen here, legalized recreational use of marijuana became a reality in Colorado in 2012.

Sheriff Taylor attributed the growing acceptance of recreational marijuana use in the public sphere – and especially among Coloradoan children – to the state first allowing the medical use of marijuana.

In his presentation, Taylor shared a number of post-legalization facts and statistics he's collected regarding recreational marijuana use in Colorado since 2012.

He has observed a 75 percent increase in teen ER visits due to marijuana use,

an increase of 15 percent of babies being born with THC in their systems each year, a dangerous increase in THC levels of marijuana, increased THC vaping on school grounds among students ages 7 and up, a rise in THC-related motor vehicle accidents and more.

The bottom line for Sheriff Taylor, Sheriff Mason and the Georgia Sheriffs' Association is this:

Marijuana is a dangerous and addictive gateway drug that causes harm to communities and children, and HB 324, however admirable its goals, will surely quicken the arrival of legalized recreational marijuana use in Georgia.

Residents are being urged by the GSA to contact their state lawmakers and even Gov. Kemp to express their concerns about the legalization of low-THC oil cannabis production in the state.

# EMC...from Page 1A

the Tennessee Valley Authority Board of Directors in August, meaning the EMC would have to decide before June what to do with the increase, which would go into effect in October.

For the past two years, the EMC has opted to pass the TVA rate increase directly on to members via the customer charge, and this year's TVA rate hike would result in a customer charge of \$22.91 a month, up from the current \$21.37.

Also in the meeting, Nelms announced that TVA had chosen a new CEO in Jeffrey Lyash, who will succeed Bill Johnson as president of the \$11 billion federal corporation in April.

Lyash has charted a

similar career path to Johnson, according to Nelms, meaning the EMC can likely expect a very familiar TVA glidepath in years to come.

Nelms also reported in the March board meeting that the fiber expansion plan for fiscal year 2019 was well underway.

The plan includes \$740,000 in total funding and will reach neighborhoods in all five counties serviced by the EMC.

Areas in Union County to receive fiber expansion under the program include Forest Drive, Boxborough Drive, Pleasant Hill Road, Murphy Drive, Canal Lake and Litton Way.

In Towns County, areas to receive fiber expansion include Bald Mountain Park, Holly Hills, Tater Ridge, Hiwassee Estates, Old Forge Estates, and parts of Lower Bell Creek and Upper Bell Creek.

So far, all of the above locations have been staked, and systemwide, nine locations have been built or are in the process of being built.

Of those nine, four have been completed and have garnered new account signups. Two full crews are working toward completing the project before the end of the fiscal year, with a plan to add a third crew to ensure the EMC meets its deadline.

# Kemp names Chelsea Rathburn as Georgia's Poet Laureate



Governor Brian P. Kemp announced he has selected Chelsea Rathburn as Georgia's next Poet Laureate. Rathburn, a professor of English and creative writing at Young Harris College, succeeds Judson Mitcham as Poet Laureate.

"Chelsea Rathburn is an accomplished poet whose passion for literature will fuel her success as an ambassador for Georgia's literary arts," said Governor Kemp. "She has had a brilliant career as a poet, writer, scholar and professor and I'm confident that in her role as Poet Laureate she will serve as an ambassador for the arts in every community across Georgia."

Rathburn joins a long line of distinguished poets who have served in the position, including David Bottoms, Bettie



Chelsea Rathburn

Mixon Sellers, John R. Lewis, Jr., Conrad Aiken, Agnes Bramblett, Oliver F. Reeves, Wrightman Metlon, Earnest Neal and Frank Stanton.

"It's thrilling and a bit bewildering to be named to this position and I'm honored to have a chance to advocate for poetry, literacy, and Georgia's rich literary culture," said Chelsea Rathburn. "Georgia has such a deep literary history, and I hope to highlight the ways that poetry, language, and stories can connect us and help us build stronger communities."

Rathburn is the author of three poetry collections, *A Raft of Grief* (2013), *The Shifting Line* (2005), winner of the 2005 Richard Wilbur Award, and *Still Life with Mother and Knife* (2019). Her poems have been widely published in the nation's top journals, including *The Atlantic*, *Poetry* and *New England Review*, among others, while her prose has been published in the nation's most esteemed journals, including *Creative Nonfiction* and *Ploughshares*. In 2009, she received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Born in Jacksonville and raised in Miami, FL, Rathburn has deep roots in the state of Georgia, where her mother's

family has lived since the 1830s. Rathburn holds a B.A. from Florida State University and an M.F.A. from the University of Arkansas. Rathburn moved to Young Harris from Decatur, GA, where she taught poetry workshops at Emory University and chaired the poetry track for the Decatur Book Festival. She lives in Young Harris, GA, with her husband, the poet James Davis May, and their daughter.

"We are delighted to have Chelsea Rathburn join the distinguished ranks of Georgia's Poets Laureate," said Karen Paty, Executive Director of Georgia Council for the Arts. "Chelsea is the third woman in nearly one hundred years to hold this position and we are eager to not only introduce her work to all Georgians, but to support her as she cultivates and inspires young women and young men alike to explore the work of great Georgia poets and cultivate their own literary voices. I am confident that we will all grow deeper in our connection to the written word through her service."

The position of Georgia's Poet Laureate was established in 1925. As the state's Poet Laureate, Rathburn will be an ambassador for the literary arts in Georgia, championing the rich legacy of Georgia writers, past and present and cultivating new audiences. In this role, Rathburn will serve every corner of the state to voice the value of reading, writing and literacy in the lives of every Georgian. The work of the state poet laureate is facilitated by Georgia Council for the Arts on behalf of the Governor. Working closely with Executive Director, Karen Paty, Rathburn will continue programs to advance the literary arts in Georgia such as the high school writing initiative, the Poet Laureate's Prize, begun by former Poet Laureate Judson Mitcham and add innovative new initiatives to support literacy, poetry and creative writing.

# Hamilton Gardens second annual photo contest

Grab your camera and tell our story with your picture! Welcome to the Hamilton Gardens' second annual photo contest. Our peak bloom season is mid April to mid May and we love to show off our rhododendrons and native azaleas. Your photo can be of flowers, insects, foliage, structures, sculptures, or anything existing in the garden. Be creative, find the best angle, and watch for light that really highlights your subject matter. A new exhibit is in the gardens. Come and discover!

Each contestant may enter up to three images for judging. Fees are \$15 for first entry and \$10 for each additional entry (limit 3). First place will receive \$100, a ribbon and a one-year individual membership to Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge. Second and third place will receive a ribbon. First, second and third place winners will have their photo displayed on Hamilton Gardens' website and be included in a Hamilton Gardens' e-newsletter.

We would like for the public to enjoy your photos so they will be on display at the library to which you have sent your photo. Deliver or mail photo(s), along with entry fee, to either location between May 1st and May 15, 2019. Towns County Public Library, 99 S. Berrong Street, Hiwassee, GA 30546, (706) 896-6169; Mountain Regional Library, 698 Miller Street, Young Harris, GA 30582, (706) 379-3732. Rules and restrictions apply.

For more info, please visit [www.hamiltongardens.org](http://www.hamiltongardens.org) or call (706) 970-0011.