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a tool for reliable navigation, the long white cane has become a symbol for mobility and independence.

The beginning of the symbolism behind the white cane started with an English photographer, James Biggs, in 1921.

After a tragic accident, Biggs became blind and began relying on a cane to navigate. However, he was uncomfortable with the congestion and traffic around his home, so Biggs decided to paint his cane white for greater visibility.

A short nine years later in 1930, Illinois Lions Club President George A. Bonham proposed the idea of taking Biggs' white cane concept and painting a singular red band around it as a means of assisting those who are visually impaired.

Shortly after Bonham's

proposal, dozens of white canes were made and distributed. Even the town Bonham lived in, Peoria, Illinois, passed an ordinance giving those with the white cane the right of way at intersections and crosswalks.

Soon after, thousands of visually impaired citizens and supporters heard of the concept and began participating in various towns and cities across the country.

While the United States was experiencing the "white cane movement," Europe was not far behind. Fearful of the danger visually impaired individuals faced in high traffic areas, Guilly d'Herbemont launched her own "white cane movement" across France in 1931, where she donated 5,000 white canes to the visually impaired community in Paris.

Over 30 years after the first recognition of the white

canes, the U.S. Congress approved a resolution in 1964, declaring Oct. 15 as National White Cane Safety Day.

Five years later in 1969, the International Federation of the Blind declared Oct. 15 as International White Cane Day.

In Union County, the Lions Club designates two days in spring to honor those in the blind community and raise funds to help those who are visually impaired.

"It's all volunteer, but it makes your heart feel good because you know you're helping people," said Union County Lions Club Member Louise Little. "We can help people have eye surgeries if they need it and can't afford it. We can help people get glasses if they need them. That's why we do our fundraisers, so we

can help people who couldn't afford to get the things that they need."

In support of the White Canes Days in the area, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris met with Union County Lions Club members to sign a proclamation declaring the support and the participation of the county in the event.

The proclamation reads:

"Lions International, with over 1.35 million members in the free world, has been dedicated to serving sight for over 60 years.

"The Union County Lions Club has been outstanding in its community in helping the needy with sight problems through the use of its White Cane donations.

"The Union County Lions Club has invited its neighbors to share in saving vision by donating to its White Cane Days event.

"The Union County Lions Club voluntarily provides all manpower and leadership.

"Therefore, I, Lamar Paris, Sole Commissioner of Union County, Georgia now proclaim April 21 and April 22, 2017 to be 'White Cane Days,' and I also invite our citizens to join me in sharing the Lions' concern for the best sight possible for our neighbors in need, by giving generously on White Cane Days.

"Every penny will give 'The Gift of Sight,' signed this 11th day of April, 2017."

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access to the service.

Nelms maintained his previously stated position, that his immediate goal was to figure out a way to increase the fiber take rate among members who already live within reach of the service.

Instead of taking on new debt to expand the fiber network, Nelms said that he wants to increase the current take rate to generate revenue to pay for future fiber expansion.

Another of Nelms' goals that also relates to his position on fiber is for the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC to increase its equity position to be more in line with other EMCs nationwide.

Borrowing money to build on its existing fiber network instead of increasing the customer base within reach of existing fiber infrastructure would actually run counter to the goal of building the EMCs equity.

"Right now, our equity position is roughly about 30 percent, whereas the median for the nation is in the 40s," said Nelms. "We already have \$116 million in long-term debt.

"In order to cross another 5,000 or 10,000 homes, I would be required to take out another fairly large mortgage just to build out, with hopefully getting my 30 percent take rate where I'm going next. That's my biggest concern.

"I want to make sure I have my marketing in place for my existing infrastructure before I take that big leap forward and spend the millions of the members' dollars to extend that service, and then just get the 30 percent take rate again."

Nelms also defended his decision to recommend a 30-year loan to build a new substation, stating that he would rather the burden of paying for the substation be spread out over the life of the equipment, than for current members to have to see big rate increases to cover the costs.

When asked about what the EMC is doing to sell the old headquarters building, Nelms said the EMC is carefully considering next steps.

Interestingly, the Georgia Department of Transportation has involved the EMC in its plans to widen/relocate Georgia 515 between Blairsville and Young Harris.

The big EMC parking lot across from the old headquarters building will need to be acquired for the project to accommodate one of the roundabouts for the Young Harris bypass, and Nelms said that pretty much all of the power poles along the widening/relocation portion of the project will need to be replaced.

Operation Round Up is still in the works, with plans calling for a nonprofit entity to be charged with allotting donations from members who opt-in to give money to causes to be determined down the road.

Also discussed in the town hall was the policy concerning opening board meetings to the membership. The policy in question will be



EMC Directors Cory Payne and Gene Mason



EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms

called, "Member Attendance at Board Meetings."

Once in place, Board Vice President Steven Phillips said that members will be able to sign up to attend board meetings.

Phillips said that members will need to sign up in advance of meetings due to space constraints in the board's meeting room, and that, in the interest of time, those who wish to address the board will need to sign up in advance to speak, supplying the topic to be discussed at signup.

Nelms reminded those in attendance that the annual meeting will take place at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center in Union County on Sept. 9, instead of its usual location at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiawassee.

Also in the meeting, Board President Mickey Cummings and Nelms bragged on the caliber of the EMC's employees, and Cummings thanked everyone for coming.

At the end of the meeting, Phillips let everyone know that they could contact the EMC board with more questions by visiting the company website, [https://brmemc.com/Board\\_Directors](https://brmemc.com/Board_Directors).

## Allegheny Spring BBQ April 28th



The Allegheny Spring BBQ will be held on Friday, April 28, 2017 from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Allegheny Masonic Temple, 60-B Rogers Street, Blairsville, GA. Price for Whole Butts is \$32, and plates are \$7 each. (Plates: large BBQ sandwich, chips, dessert pie and drink).

Dine in is available. Delivery is available within the city limits of Blairsville.

If ordering whole butt, please place your order with one of the contacts no later than April 20th: Ivy Smith (478) 731-6050; William White (478) 997-1011; Doug Shae (404) 556-3898; Ron Benfield (706) 897-5907; Bobby Overstreet (678) 409-7234. NTApr19Z2JCA