

Harper ...from Page 1A

local monies out of Fannin and Towns counties.

There's about \$14,000 in contingency funds built into the budget to cover unexpected emergencies and repairs in the new fiscal year, though Stone said they'd prefer closer to \$20,000 in contingency.

These funds can be utilized to make up for additional payroll due to employee sick time, repairs, and more.

"If we get down to the end of the year and still have contingency funds, we try to spend those on materials and programming, which are the most challenged areas financially," said Stone, adding that the budget typically

zeroes out after the use of contingency funds.

In terms of size, the budget is roughly \$20,000 more than the 2016-2017 fiscal year budget, which Stone said had to do mainly with additional funds from the state and a budget increase from Fannin County.

"The one thing that has put a pinch on us this coming year, and it's going to pinch us again next year, is the increase in the amount that we have to contribute to TRS, that's the retirement program," said Stone. "It jumped for this year, and it's jumping again next year."

Stone, who received a glowing director evaluation

report from the regional board in the June 21 meeting, spoke briefly on the system's new newsletter called "Mountain Regional Connection."

"We hope to do this on a quarterly basis," said Stone. "It gives me a chance to communicate to the community with an editorial, and that'll change from issue to issue."

"It allows us a feature on the front, which could be any number of things, plus a feature article. It could be whatever we wish to do. Once we cover those items, then we've got full-page promotions for all the scheduling of every branch."

The newsletter is especially helpful in the Mountain Regional Library System, said Stone, as this area caters to an older demographic of residents, many of whom may not use computers.

Also in the meeting, Regional Board Member Karan Harper of Fannin County became the new board chairperson after an election held by her fellow board members.

Normally, the board holds its officer elections in the August regional meeting, according to its bylaws.

However, the board elected a new chairperson in the June meeting because Chairperson Ron Bolin, also of Fannin, was up against the end of his second full term, which coincided with the end of the fiscal year on June 30.

A single term on the MRLS Board of Trustees is three years, and board members can only serve two consecutive terms before they must come off the board.

Harper will serve as chairperson for a term of two years, at which time another chair will be elected from within the board's ranks.

The regional board is composed of local board



MRLS Director Vince Stone handing out ballots for the board chairperson election. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

members from each of the libraries in the three-county system of Union, Towns and Fannin.

Regional Board Member Ernie Seckinger, representing the Towns County Library Board, was the other chairperson nominee.

Harper and Seckinger received nominations from a board committee after showing interest in the board chair seat.

Peggy Deyton and Peggy Callaway, both of Union County, were elected vice chair and secretary respectively in the August 2016 regional meeting, and the two will serve in those positions for another year.

Also in the June 21 meeting, Union County Public Library Branch Manager Susie Brendle gave key statistics from her library's third quarter:



MRLS Training and Outreach Coordinator Dyana Costello Banks and new Fannin County Library Manager Andrew Vickers. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

41,930 items checked out; 33,656 people attended; 154 new library cards issued.

Attendance is up nearly 30 percent over the same

period last year for the summer reading program at Union County, and the last day of the program will be July 24.

County golf course receives awards, hosts pros

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Butternut Creek Golf Course is putting Union County on the map for golfing, recently making it into the ranks of three "best of" lists on the famous golfing website, GolfAdvisor, for the 2016 calendar year.

GolfAdvisor is one of the most highly respected purveyors for golf-related news. Anything and everything about the sport can be found on the website and oftentimes golfers use it as a go-to source to determine their next golfing destination.

"This site, GolfAdvisor, is owned by NBC," said Buddy Linderman, Pro-shop Manager. "It's part of Golf Channel. Every year they give out a 'best of' list in different categories. "These lists are submitted by golfers who have played different golf courses. These golfers submit their own reviews. The courses have nothing to do with any of these awards."

"Last year, we were in the Top 25 in three different categories."

In 2016, Butternut Creek ranked in the top 25 golf courses across the state, cracking the top 10 for Georgia at a solid number 10, according to reviews from golfers, which is not an easy feat by any means.

To make the list, a course's score is determined by two factors: its overall rating, which makes up 50 percent of the score, and the subcategory average, which accounts for the remaining 50 percent. Each review left for the course is weighed based on how active the reviewer is on GolfAdvisor. If the course's score is higher than the average score given by the reviewer, the course receives a boost in its rating to match.

Not only did Butternut Creek rank in the top 10 across the state of Georgia, the course also made it into the Top 25 courses across the nation, coming in at a solid number 16. Out of the thousands upon thousands of golf courses around the country, Union County has been established as having a "course value" that is incomparable to most.

Making the list is certainly not easy, as GolfAdvisor examines more than 100,000 reviews that have been submitted throughout the year to determine which course consistently provided guests with a valuable experience, based on the ratings.

"This is a big deal, when you have outside people playing your golf course and



Union County Manager Larry Garrett, Butternut Creek Golf Course Superintendent Jason Munn and Pro Shop Manager Buddy Linderman. Photo/Lily Avery

telling you how good it is," said Larry Garrett, Union's county manager. "For us to fall in here, you're competing against every golf course in the state of Georgia. There's a lot. And for the Top 25 U.S. golf courses for value, there are thousands of golf courses across the United States. It's something that we're proud of that we've received."

While ranking among the top 25 in the nation and the state are huge accomplishments for Butternut Creek, the one that Garrett is most proud of is top 25 courses rated for staff friendliness across the United States. Butternut Creek was chosen for this honor from courses of all price points, from more than 100,000 reviewers over the past year.

"One of the biggest things that I'm the proudest of is the staff friendliness honor," said Garrett. "The goal here is to be number one, but I'm very, very happy to be recognized as number 16 of the friendliest golf courses in the United States. That's a big deal. There's a lot of courses across the country and this is huge."

All of these awards were chosen primarily from reviews left by golfers coming into the area from other regions rather than local golfers who

use the course on a regular basis. Typically, Butternut Creek sees a revenue of roughly \$10,000 a year, though that does not include the additional revenue its patrons bring to the community from lodging, eating at area restaurants and shopping at Union County businesses.

"For us to be recognized in Blairsville, Georgia, about the golf course, it's a big deal for our golf course," said Garrett. "This is a huge deal for the county as well because most of this is from people coming into the county. We're a destination inside the county that brings business here."

Now that Butternut Creek is receiving both state-wide and national recognition, Garrett hopes to see an even larger influx of golfers coming to the course to spend time at the course, in Union County and bring a little economic boost along with it.

Economics aside, all of the staff at Butternut Creek are ecstatic about these achievements and have high hopes of climbing even higher in rankings for the 2017 calendar year.

"We're really pleased that our golf course is being recognized in the United States and the state of Georgia," said Garrett. "This is a big deal."

Volunteers needed for the Fair

The Georgia Mountain Fair (July 21-29) is looking for volunteers to work where needed at our upcoming events. The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds has been the prime tourist attraction in Towns County for 67 years and is a major player in the economic growth of our beautiful mountains. By volunteering to work at the Georgia Mountain Fair

you are playing a major role in keeping our local economy stable and bringing in needed tax dollars. If you or someone you know has an interest in volunteering to work at our events please contact Hilda Thomason at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds at 706-896-4191 or gamtfair@windstream.net and we would be glad to help get you involved. NT(JUL5,A)JSH