

Millage Rate...from Page 1A

medical losses from one year directly affect rates the following year, and it's hard to tell how employee health is going to vary between years.

"We've had the option to where we could just buy set policy insurance, but over the 18 years I've been here, we have saved millions of dollars on our health care costs," said Paris. "This last year was the first year that it's actually caught us where it was more

than what we budgeted.

"Every other year before that, just about, it's been less, and we've saved a lot of money. Where a lot of counties have had their medical insurance rates go up 30 or 40 percent a year, ours have been hanging down there around 5 or 6 percent a year, until this year.

"We're hopeful that this coming year that won't happen. If it doesn't happen and we stay steady, then that's going to help

us meet our budget based on what we are actually raising in taxes, and that's our hope, but we don't know that for sure.

"So, somebody said, well, can you guarantee that you're not going to have to raise taxes next year? I said no, I can't guarantee it, because there's too many unknowns."

In making his point, Paris noted other areas where costs have increased over the years, including the need for competitive wages, especially at the Union County Sheriff's Office; jail housing; provisioning for E-911 and public safety equipment; higher materials costs for roadwork; etc.

And even though costs continue to go up, Paris said he remains committed to keeping Union County as having one of the lowest tax rates in the state.

"We're going to cut everywhere we can cut, we're going to watch everything we can watch, and we're going to try to make this all work out without an additional tax increase," said Paris.

The commissioner has received some pushback from members of the community who think he has gone overboard in his pursuit of recreational opportunities for adults and children alike.

Paris is particularly outspoken about his passion for public recreation, and moving forward, he said he plans to continue expanding recreation in Union County.

That being said, if an advantageous land deal

comes up that could benefit the recreational prospects of the county, as happened this past year with the Davenport property at the Union County Farmers Market, Paris said he will find someplace else to cut in the budget.

Furthermore, Paris said the county still has more than two months' worth of operating reserves, and that his office is currently working to sell two properties that will bring in additional revenues to the county.

BRMEMC...from Page 1A

reviewing our internal protocols and procedures to ensure we are as protected as feasible from any future incidents.

"Once we have a more accurate picture of the details of this crime as well as our planned course of action, we can provide updates as appropriate."

In its coverage of the 2018 Annual Meeting that appeared in the Sept. 12 edition of the newspaper, the *North Georgia News* reported in error that customer banking information had been the target of the attack.

As stated in both the annual meeting and in the statement available online, "this crime appears to have been focused on the bank accounts of the EMC, not personal or financial member information."

And while the cybercrime is still under investigation, the EMC did say in the Frequently Asked Questions portion of its online statement that the perpetrator apparently gained access using a method known as "spear phishing."

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, regular "phishing" consists of "a virtual trap set by cyber thieves that uses official-looking emails to lure you to fake websites and trick you into revealing your personal information."

What happened at the EMC in July, however, has been described by law enforcement officials as a "more mischievous type of phishing."

"Instead of casting out thousands of emails randomly hoping a few victims will bite, spear phishers target select groups of people with something in common," according to the

FBI. "The emails are ostensibly sent from organizations or individuals the potential victims would normally get emails from, making them even more deceptive."

So, how does "spear fishing" work?

"First, criminals need some inside information on their targets to convince them the emails are legitimate," according to the FBI. "They often obtain it by hacking into an organization's computer network or sometimes by combing through other websites, blogs and social networking sites."

"Then, they send emails that look like the real thing to targeted victims, offering all sorts of urgent and legitimate-sounding explanations as to why they need your personal data."

"Finally, the victims are asked to click on a link inside the email that takes them to a phony but realistic-looking website, where they are asked to provide passwords, account numbers, user IDs, access codes, PINs, etc."

Spear phishing can also trick people into downloading malicious programs using links embedded in emails, which can lead to computer takeovers and greater internal access.

But to reiterate, according to the EMC, "the crime appears to have been focused solely on our internal banking accounts. At this time, we have no evidence indicating that any of our members' personal or financial information was compromised."

Concerning the question of how much money was stolen during the attack, the EMC has

said that, for now, "due to the criminal investigation pending, specific details of this crime cannot be divulged."

The Sept. 11 board meeting marked the first occasion for the new directors – Jack Lance Jr. of Union County and Gayland Trull of Fannin County – to come together with their fellow board members, including returning director Roy Perren, inside EMC headquarters.

It was also the first meeting chaired by new Board President Ray Cook of Cherokee County, North Carolina.

Also that evening, the board welcomed Woody Trimble of accounting firm Jackson Thornton, and he presented the EMC's audit report for the most recent fiscal year ending June 30, 2018.

In his presentation, Trimble gave the EMC a clean opinion, meaning that the financial records provided by the EMC were free from any misrepresentations.

In other business, Nelms and the directors talked a bit about the upcoming fiber broadband expansion pilot program.

Program particulars are still being ironed out, but at the moment, the EMC plans on spending \$500,000 this year to bring fiber broadband to a number of member homes.

So far, 25 areas have been identified as potential markets for this pilot fiber push, and as many as 1,000 homes could receive fiber as part of the pilot program.

The EMC will provide more details on its broadband expansion plans in the coming months.

Homecoming...from Page 1A

Cydney Rich.

The sophomores are represented by Katie Baumeister, Braydi Burnett and Hannah Todd, while Allie Brey and Mia McCombs are the freshman class

representatives.

Friday night's Homecoming Game is the culmination of UCHS' annual Spirit Week that concludes Friday afternoon with a Homecoming

Parade through Union County Schools.

During the week, students are encouraged to dress up according to each day's theme: America Monday, Tacky Tourist Tuesday, Pro/College Wednesday, Throwback Thursday and Panther Spirit Friday.

Crash...from Page 1A

incident was not available by press time, but according to authorities at the scene, the accident occurred when a Honda CR-V turned left from K Creek Road into the path of a Chevrolet TrailBlazer traveling west on Georgia 515.

The CRV flipped on its side following the collision,

and Union County Firefighters had to stabilize the vehicle before freeing its occupants.

One of the occupants of the overturned vehicle needed assistance getting out, so a firefighter went in through the back hatch to help.

The Georgia State Patrol,

Union County Fire, Union County Sheriff's Office and Union General EMS responded to the scene.

As with any accident, and especially those involving a traffic light, passerby motorists are advised to follow the explicit directions of on-scene personnel to maintain safe conditions when maneuvering around a wreck.

AARP Driver Safety October special

Special offer for October. AARP Driver Safety will offer the AARP Smart Driver classroom course for \$10 to individuals insured by AARP Medicare Supplement Plans insured by United Healthcare Insurance Company in Georgia.

The AARP Smart Driver classroom course on Thursday October 4th will be hosted by the Union County Senior Center located at 95 Senior Center Drive, Blairsville, GA. Sign in time is 8:30 am. The classroom course starts promptly at 9 a.m. ending at 4 p.m. Course fee is \$15 for AARP members and \$20 for non members.

Registration is recommended to secure your place in the classroom. Telephone the instructor, Rosemary Kerr, at 706-745-7046, please speak clearly when leaving your name and telephone number. For call back confirmation you must leave a message.

You will learn defensive driving techniques, proven safety strategies, new traffic laws, rules of the road and new vehicle technology innovations. No test to pass or writing required.

The AARP Smart Driver Course is opened to licensed drivers of all ages. AARP is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for all as we age. At the end of the course you will receive your AARP Smart Driving Certificate. You may also qualify for a multi-year discount on your automobile insurance as well as a reduction of points on your drivers license.

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