

# BRMEMC...from Page 1

those will be held Jan. 25 in Clay County and Jan. 26 in Blairsville. That policy was passed unanimously, so everybody voted for it. I think everybody on the board is in favor of doing that. We want people to understand what we're trying to do, and we want as much input as we can possibly get from our members."

The first meeting will take place on Monday, Jan. 25, in the Multi-Purpose Room of the Clay County Courthouse in North Carolina at 6 p.m., with the second Town Hall Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 26, at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center at 6 p.m. in Blairsville.

Board Secretary Roy Perren is heading up the General Manager Search Committee, and he gave an update to the process in the media Q&A that Tuesday.

"We have put out requests for proposals for search firms to apply to be the search firm to do the search," said Perren. "And we, to this point, have had several who have expressed interest. We sent it out to probably about 15 different firms, and we received two of the proposals today - have not looked at them yet at all.

"So that's where we're at in that. The search committee will recommend the search firm to the full board, and once that's done, then the search firm will help us in looking for candidates for the position."

In a continued spirit of transparency, the board has posted to www.brmemc.com a public survey called the General Manager Search Survey, which is meant to take

the membership's concerns and considerations to heart.

"The Board of Directors of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and its General Manager Search Committee want to hear from the membership concerning the next EMC General Manager," according to the website. "The board and committee feel strongly that in order to attract and hire the right person for the job, they need to know the qualities and levels of education and experience our membership believes is most important in the EMC's next leader. The following anonymous survey was developed to meet this goal. Thank you for taking the time to provide this much-needed feedback."

The board also reported on the total cost of the BRMEMC New Headquarters Project - \$33,107,829.88 - which opened in October of 2012.

"We've had every nickel accounted for for this building, from the dirt all the way to the shingles on the roof," said Steven Phillips, president of the BRMEMC board of directors. "We've got every dime, even as far as the carpet on the floors."

A comprehensive summary of the New Headquarters Project has also been made available on the BRMEMC website, and it offers an itemized list of which contractors were used for the project and how much they were paid.

The report takes into account every aspect of the project, from start to finish, including interior design costs and costs of furnishings, as well as how much it cost

to purchase the 102 acres - property costs, survey costs, closing costs, etc. - within which the complex resides.

Also, the board reported in the media Q&A that the EMC was in good financial health, with positive margins. And though the latest financial audit was not made available as of press time Monday, Phillips did say that the board planned to post the results of that audit to the website in the near future.

When asked whether or not the board had plans to make board meetings or parts of board meetings open to the public, Cummings, who chairs the board's Policy Committee, said that he had been looking into the various possibilities, including live-streaming board meetings, or moving to a larger venue to accommodate for membership attendance.

"We did recently go to a meeting in Nashville, and we were able to talk with other EMCs from across the country - not just Georgia, but across the whole country, and we kind of polled them to find out how they do some of the board meetings, and we've got some good ideas that we want to put in policy that will allow us to open up some of our board meetings," said Cummings.

The tidal shift toward transparency found within the current board of directors began with the election of board members Steven Phillips, Chris Logan and Charles Jenkins in September of 2014, and continued in September of 2015 with the election of Mickey Cummings, Roy Perren and Larry Williams.

Having listened to the membership, the board of directors continues to put into place many new policies and practices aimed directly at

transparency. In an open letter provided to area news agencies, the board listed various policy changes that have been enacted since September 2014, including a conflict of interest policy prohibiting board members from having profitable business relationships with the EMC. Furthermore, the board took away the ability of its board members and board attorney to obtain medical benefits through the EMC, and the board has also made security deposits for service based on personal credit ratings, to reward members with good credit.

Also in that open letter, which is available on the BRMEMC website, the board announced that it would be hiring an auditor to conduct a forensic audit of the EMC, which would leave no financial stone unturned, and will certainly go a long way toward enticing a new general manager with an open and clean financial slate.

A freer flow of information is central to the board's push towards transparency to the membership, as evidenced by the various documents the board has been publishing to its website.

"Before the last election, the minutes of the board were placed in the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald*," said Phillips during the Q&A. "Since we've got the new board, the minutes are on the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC website each month, so anybody can go to the website and read it at any time. Also, we have a Facebook page, which is updated regularly. So if anybody is interested in reading the minutes of the meetings that we have

here, they are posted on our website.

"Also on our website is each board member and their email address, so if you need representing in your county, you can email anybody on the board, because the email address is there, and the person that represents you - Cherokee County, Clay County, Towns County, whatever, is on there, so that's something else that we've done so far."

Phillips and the board expressed their appreciation for the BRMEMC employees and all of the EMC's members, and pledged their continued support as a united board in their goals of transparency.

"We're just getting started," said Phillips. "We've done a lot up to this point, and I know a lot of people want it done immediately, but we've got the search for the general manager, and we're also looking at the audit and a lot of different things, so we've got a lot of stuff on our plates."

"But we've really been working hard. As far as the board, the board is working good, they're working together. Everybody has got their strong points, and it's really been a pleasure. It's been a lot of work, but it's been a pleasure."

# Youth...from Page 1

history. According to McCombs, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC began sending delegates to take part in the Youth Tour back in 1985, though the history of the program goes back more than 50 years.

"In 1957, Lyndon Johnson, at an NRECA (National Rural Electric Cooperative Association) annual meeting, spoke, and he was a senator then," said McCombs. "He told the crowd, you guys need to send some kids to Washington, and let them know what the flag stands for and represents."

"So a few co-ops took that to heart and started sending students to Washington with that idea in mind. Well, in 1965, Georgia sent its first delegation, which amounted to just about a dozen students who went on that first trip."

Walker, Underwood and Worley appear in the latest edition of Georgia EMC's *GEORGIA* Magazine, and in the Jan. 12 board meeting, the students shared what they treasured most about their trip.

"As far as the trip having an impact on my life, one thing that I've had to do when pursuing my college search is fill out applications, and applications require essays," said Underwood, who plans to play football for the Georgia Institute of Technology while

pursuing an engineering degree. "A lot of the essays ask you about - sometimes they say, what one event in your life has really changed you the most, and for all the essays, I included the Washington Youth Tour as that event."

"Part of the reason was the people, and although that is cliché, the aspirations that they had just really opened up my mind to the aspirations that I can have. Coming back to this town where the opportunities are limited, as we are poverty stricken to some extent, it just really opened my mind to the capabilities and possibilities that we should have here and that we can have here. That's really been the thing that I've taken away from this trip the most."

Walker, who hopes to attend either the University of Georgia or Emory University for a degree in political science, said that for her, the trip was important because of the personal connections she made with other students from around Georgia and the nation.

"When I think of the Washington Youth Tour, I don't think of the fact that I got to go to Washington - I think of all of the people that I met that really had an impact on my life," said Walker, who said she will forever value the friendships she made while on the tour.

"I am really fortunate to have been able to meet all of these people that have the

same goals and ideas - and even people who don't have the same ideas as you. That's the beautiful thing about it. You meet all these different people that you wouldn't meet otherwise."

Worley spoke to the board about the respect he and his peers held for one another, and how much of an impression that made on him during the week-long trip.

"It was really cool to find out that everyone had the same goals or some of the same goals that we had, and what I brought back from the trip was just a respect for everyone,"

# Jail...from Page 1

arrested for violation of Georgia Controlled Substance Act.

"We had information that Rocky was holding a quantity of marijuana, so we went ahead and executed the warrant. We already had several buys from within the residence, so with all of that information, we went ahead and executed the search warrant to go ahead and take him down, to keep him from selling to any more folks."

Robinson is being charged with three felony counts of distribution of marijuana, felony possession of marijuana, felony possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, and misdemeanor possession of drug related objects.

"Our No. 1 goal is to fight the illegal drugs that are coming within this community," said

said Worley. "The trip really did make an impact on all three of us, and it was an awesome opportunity."

Worley plans to attend either the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill or North Carolina State University to study biology or biochemistry, with aims of one day going to dental school.

Walker, Underwood and Worley also expressed their appreciation for the board in having allowed them to participate as delegates in the 2015 Washington Youth Tour.

Capt. Deyton. "It's going to be hard to keep them out, but to stay on top of the game and keep them to a minimum - basically, our unit is going to work hard around the clock to keep it off the streets, keep it away from this community."

On top of those eight arrests, the night shift on Friday arrested eight individuals, five of whom were connected to a house party that got out of hand.

Other arrests over the weekend included individuals picked up in Towns and Fannin counties on theft warrants in Union County.

"I've been here going on 10 years now, and four of those years I served in the jail," said UCSO Sgt. Adam Deyton, who works the night shift. "I can't ever remember so many people coming in in a single 24-hour shift."

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