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the valleys are January and February," Williams said.

In 1996, Union County schools received 67.1 percent of its revenue from the Department of Education, in 2012, the school system received 35.5 percent.

"We received the same amount of money from the state in 2012 as we did in 1996. With the cost of everything going up, the state has not kept up their end of the bargain as far as the amount we have received over the course of the years," Williams said.

With instruction costs fluctuating very little over the last 17 years, expenditures have stayed relatively the same. According to Williams, maintenance and operation has grown a little bit because



Superintendent Gary Steppe presents Carlton Collins with a plaque of appreciation for his service on the board. Photo/Todd Forrest

the school has more buildings.

"If it wasn't for SPLOST we would see a much larger cost in maintenance and operations," he said. "The projected SPLOST-IV earnings are \$18.5 million. The projections are based on the past couple of years. There was one year, in 2009, where the bottom dropped out, but right now we're averaging almost \$300,000 per month.

"These projections are based on zero percent growth for the first year, 1 percent growth the next two years, and 2 percent growth the last two years," Williams said. "We're keeping it in the modest range. Since 2009, we've inched back up each year."

Board Member Tony Hunter added that, "just to be on the safe side, to keep our county from going in the hole, these numbers appear to be a little inflated, even though it doesn't say the actual amounts to be bonded since that's to be determined, it looks like its more of an optimistic outlook."

"You're right," Williams said. "You don't want to put yourself into a situation where we're bonding this much and the bottom falls out. That's where the school board sets the wish list of SPLOST projects."

Chairman Davenport clarified that once the ELOST amount is set, any monies coming in over the projected amount can't be collected.

"On SPLOST-IV, we're projecting \$21 million," Davenport said. "So if we set it at \$15 million and in 3 years we reach the \$15 million, that's all we can get. That's why you have to set the bar up there, because whatever you set it is as far as you can go."

"If it passes, we'll come back with a low ball projection, what's an average projection, and what's a high projection," Williams added. "By then we will have six more months of data to look at the countywide and statewide trends."

Williams went on to point out that over the past 16 years, Union County schools

have collected \$60 million in ELOST, which is about \$4 million a year, the equivalent to about three mills.

If you strip away everything, it comes out to about \$1 million to \$1.25 million a year that is needed just to keep the school going.

ELOST can't be used for personnel, typical maintenance and operations, only on projects.

The state has capped teacher pay, but if someone goes from a four-year degree to a five-year degree, that's an automatic pay increase, the same as from a master's degree to a specialist degree, based on the state salary scale, plus an additional 4 percent from the county.

If you take all of our teachers and average them out, it's about \$56,000 per teacher from the state.

Hunter made it clear that you can't put a price on good teachers.

"That's why we constantly have test results that rank as some of the highest in the state," Hunter said. "The proof is in the test scores."

"We're blessed to have good teachers and they're worth every penny," Superintendent Gary Steppe added.

Before the meeting a reception was held in honor of outgoing board member, Carlton Collins, who still has the best interests of the county's schools at heart.

"If there is anything you need, don't hesitate to call me," Collins told the board. "I'm just a phone call away and will help in any way that I can. We've made some good strides but it was a tough road to hoe. There's still some roads left, but you can do it."

"I really appreciate Carlton and the years he's given us," Davenport said. "He's been a valuable board member and I'll miss him."

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their own money," Sen. Gooch said. "This resolution will continue to reduce the burden on Georgia taxpayers as well as promote job growth within our state."

If approved by Georgia voters, Senate Resolution 8 would phase out the income tax completely by the year 2027.

The process would be gradual, reducing the tax rate by .5 percent every year until the income tax is eliminated.

Georgia's income tax

rate stands at 6 percent. Several states don't levy an income tax on their residents. Those states include Florida, Tennessee, Texas, Wyoming, Washington, New Hampshire, Nevada and Alaska.

Other states have the abolition of their state income tax in the cross hairs, including North Carolina, Louisiana and Nebraska.

Sponsors of the resolution include Sen. John Albers (R-Roswell), Sen. Butch Miller (R-Gainesville), Sen.

Gooch, Sen. Judson Hill (R-Marietta), Sen. Mike Dugan (R-Carrollton), Sen. Brandon Beach (R-Alpharetta), Sen. Hunter Hill (R-Smyrna) and Sen. Barry Loudermilk (R-Cassville).

Amendments to the Georgia Constitution may be introduced in either the House of Representatives or the Senate.

An amendment must be approved by a 2/3 majority of each legislative chamber in order for it to be placed on the ballot for voter approval.

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which we are very grateful."

In other business, Paris accepted the intergovernmental agreement with the City of Blairsville for the allocation and distribution of the proceeds from the state's Energy Excise Tax.

The county also agreed to a contract with the Union County Sheriff's Office and Data Survival for the jail and Sheriff's Office Internet Technology services at a cost of \$2,333.33 per month.

In the final business of

the day, Commissioner Paris announced that all capital purchases (more than \$5,000) by the county from July 2012-December 2012 are available at the Union County Courthouse free of charge and without an open records request.

## SFC Gordon Spears inducted into Kentucky High School Class 2013 Hall of Fame

Georgia Guardsman Sergeant First Class Gordon Spears (32 years of service 6 deployments and 3 combat tours) married to Shari Spears (United Community Bank) of Blairsville and daughter Jessica. SFC Spears is a 1981 Graduate of Johnson Central High School in Paintsville Kentucky, his senior year had 23.5 Quarter back Sacks and help lead the team to their first district win in school history. SFC Spears 1996 received the "Valley Forge Certificate of Heroism" from then Governor Zell Miller of Georgia (now a retired Senator) for his actions at the bomb site at Olympic park. Spears also work as a Lieutenant shift OIC for the Georgia State Department Corrections (Lee Arrandale State Prison) for 20 years. Spears has been a guest on Fox Judge Hatcher and DR Joy brown Shows on Fox doing Intervention (drill sergeant). Spears also appeared in a Red Cross Commercial to raise money the disaster in the country of Haiti. Spears was select to be in a War Story segment due to his 6 deployments and 3 combat tours to tell his story working as a leader in combat. SFC Spears works part time in Officer Candidate Academy as an instructor



in Atlanta Georgia Army National Guard RTI. SFC Spears 6th and last deployment was 2005-2006 as a Bradley Commander/Platoon Sergeant and completed 235 combat patrols

in Baghdad Iraq.

Spears is the son of Wetzel Spears of Vanlear Kentucky and the (Late Phyllis Spears).

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## Garden Club monthly meeting

On Wednesday, January 16, 2013, the Blairsville Garden Club held their monthly meeting at the GMREC. The program, about native backyard birds and their natural and man made habitats, was given by Mr. Terry W. Johnson. Mr. Johnson has been a wildlife biologist and program manager for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Nongame-Endangered Wildlife program for more than 35 years. He is Georgia's first resident hum-

mingbird bander, a noted author of Georgia Nature Weekends, and a columnist for the Munroe County Reporter (Munroe County Outdoors) for 25 years.

Mr. Johnson developed the Colonial Coast and Southern Rivers Birding Trails; coordinates the Non-game Wildlife Conservation Section and the Garden Club of Georgia's Community Wildlife Project. He has received more than 40 awards for wildlife conservation, and is a researcher for better ways

to promote conservation education to students and adults. He is also a lifetime member of the Georgia State Garden Club.

Hostesses for the meeting were Marcia Little, Jeanette Warnock, and Marge Reach, who provided a light lunch. A new slate of officers was introduced and voted in by the members present.

Anyone interested in the Blairsville Garden Club can look at website, www.blairsvillegardencub.com. N(Jan23,Y1)CA