

## BOE...from Page 1A

Dr. Williams said that the school system has been slighted about \$10 million from the state over the past few years. With the economy rebounding, the state is putting money originally designated for local control back into the hands of local school boards.

"Last year we lost \$1.6 million from the state, and \$1.5 million for austerity cuts,

and the state also took \$6 million for the local fair share," Dr. Williams said. "The Fiscal 2015 budget is in line with the tax collection rate and the state money we're receiving."

Meanwhile, the student totals at Union County Schools is on the rise.

More than 2,700 students K-12 are on the books.

"That's not including Pre-K," Dr. Williams said.

Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe said the numbers are almost as much as has ever been recorded at Union County Schools.

"That's a lot of kids," Steppe said.

The school system is increasing by an average of 25 to 30 students each year.

"We just graduated a class at the high school of 125 students," Dr. Williams said. "We'll be starting the new school year with right at 800

students at the high school. The rising senior class is at 171.

"Our high school is doing a better job of keeping students," Dr. Williams said. "We don't have as many students transferring to Mountain Education Charter High School."

The rising sophomore class is at 202 students, the rising junior class is at 228 and there are 171 rising seniors. It will be the largest high school

class in Union County High School history, Steppe said.

"Our dropout rate is very low," Steppe said. "We

were sixth in the state last year in graduation rates."

## DDA...from Page 1A

project off the ground is acquiring the appropriate designation of a small creek that runs through the property. If it is designated a stream, then the DDA would have to purchase mitigation credits outside of the county to develop the land. If the area is designated wetlands, then there are various improvements the DDA can make to the creek to offset the cost of mitigation and increase the usability of the land by residents and potential downtown customers.

"We're talking about covering up 300 feet of creek could run us \$150,000, \$200,000," said Harper. "So, by having it declared wetland, it completely changes that dynamic. Instead of buying credits from some other water basin, we can keep it in the county and spend that money on improvements to the creek, rather than sending it out where we'll never see the benefit of it. It's really a win-win if we can get it declared wetlands."

The DDA has contracted H&H Resources, a consulting engineering firm, to walk it through the process of preparing the land for construction by organizing tasks such as soil sampling and evaluating elevation levels.

The latest update from the DDA Board of Directors dealt with an upcoming meeting that took place Thursday in Morrow, between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and H&H Resources. Board members hoped to get the wetlands classification to make developing the land as cost-effective as possible, and also to keep as much money as they could within the county.

"The next step is this determination that we're seeking from the Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Division for Georgia — the two aren't necessarily in agreement on what we have here," said Harper. "One of them says it's a creek, the other says it's a wetland, and that's a huge difference as to



Downtown Development Authority Program Director Darren Harper updates the DDA Board of Directors on the Haralson Project. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

what we can do with it." The process has been time-consuming, and the DDA has exhausted many efforts in the pursuit of the least expensive classification.

"We've written congressmen, we've had congressmen come up here and walk the property. We've had people from the Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Division here from Georgia. We've had all kinds of people with interests in what goes on here," said Harper.

The Morrow meeting did not go exactly as the DDA had wanted, as the Army Corps of Engineers did not end up designating the stream as wetlands. But other options are now on the table.

"So, what they're looking at now is a different angle on how to purchase credits from a different watershed, and one that will be 50 cents on the dollar cheaper than what we're looking at today," said Harper.

Currently, Blairsville gets its water from the Tennessee Valley area watershed, and the DDA is hoping to afford cheaper credits than current estimates by going out of state instead of purchasing credits in a watershed that

does not affect this community.

"There's a state law that says if you purchase mitigation credits it has to be within your state," said Harper. "And our argument is, why are we protecting a watershed that has nothing to do with us?"

Since the Haralson Development Project has been ongoing since 2010, the DDA is trying to wrap things up. There is still a chance of getting the wetlands designation, which, again, would make the ultimate price tag for the project lower than without wetland designation, but for now, the DDA is looking at all possibilities.

"At this point there's pressure on us to pee or get off the pot," said Harper. "Something's got to be done. So, it may be that as the time grows nearer, that we just say, alright, we've done all of our research, we've done everything we can, and this is the direction we're going to go, and give up on researching other options. But I can assure it was not for lack of effort."

And Harper is realistically optimistic about future prospects for the project and the new exit ramp from 515.

"It's like steering a very large ship with a very

tiny wheel. But it'll get done. That's the thing — we keep working on it and we keep working on it," said Harper. "We're still hopeful that come this fall we'll be able to break ground on this road. That's key, getting this in here, and then we can branch out in every direction from that."

Regardless of the indeterminate status of the stream causing a hold up, the ultimate goal for the project remains the same.

"We want people to look off 515 and think, 'Ooh, what's down there,' instead of, 'Eh, what's downtown, there's nothing to do,'" said Harper. "Right now, if you want to go out and have a cocktail and do some shopping, you're probably either going to go to Blue Ridge or Murphy. Those are your two best bets around here. You don't do that here in Blairsville, and we're trying to change that."

## Arrests...from Page 1A

rests.

"Back in March and early April, we started having a string of burglaries," Sgt. Osborn said. "These break-ins all had the same pattern.

"Basically, all the homes were being broken into and everything was cleaned out," he said. "Cooking and cleaning supplies, laundry, pictures on the walls, right down to the last roll of toilet paper.

"They took clothes, baseball cards, TVs, everything," Sgt. Osborn said.

Recently, Union County Sheriff's detectives received information on a potential break-in. Items were piled up at the back door of the residence.

"It really looked like a good place to set up a video camera," Sgt. Osborn said. "It was apparent that these items had been shifted to a position

to load up real easy.

"We set up a video camera at that location," he said. "We went back to check on the camera the next day and we discovered the home had been broken into again.

"We took the video camera, gathered surveillance footage off of it, and caught a suspect," Sgt. Osborn said.

"We took that information and started our investigation," Sgt. Osborn said. "During the course of the investigation we were able to identify a suspect, Rusty Lee Albietz."

After identifying Albietz, detectives obtained search warrants for his residence, Sgt. Osborn said.

"We executed the search warrants and found stolen property inside his home," Sgt. Osborn said. "We took pictures of other items inside

his home.

"We showed these photos to other burglary victims and the items that were photographed were identified by victims as being their personal possessions," Sgt. Osborn said.

"Subsequently, we served two additional search warrants at the Albietz residence and recovered several more pieces of stolen property," Sgt. Osborn said. "Basically, we wrapped up five burglaries at one time.

"We have several charges on Rusty Albietz and Gina Burnette," Sgt. Osborn said.

"Albietz has another charge added to his list of charges," Sgt. Osborn said. "Riot in a Penal Institution. He started a fight with another inmate in his cell block, and that is a felony charge."

## Lone Mountain Band at Brasstown Civic Center

The Lone Mountain Band, a modern traditional bluegrass band, will be playing at the Brasstown Community Civic Center on Saturday, August 23. They are based in Chattanooga, TN, and collectively have over 100 years of musical experience.

The band consists of Bobby Burns, Diana Phillips, Jim Pankey and Roy Curry. Bobby has played in professional bands since his teenage years, he sings lead and harmony vocals. Diana Phillips was trained as a classical pianist, but fell in love with bluegrass music. She plays the bass fiddle and is an excellent singer and songwriter. Jim Pankey is the banjo player, and has won many banjo contests. He won the 1999 Georgia State Championship on the Clawhammer Banjo and the 2005 Tennessee State Champion on the Bluegrass Banjo. His playing and his skill with a yo-yo are featured in the show. Roy Curry has been playing guitar since the age of 11. He has a national reputation as one of the finest flat pickers around. He also sings harmony in the band. Everyone works together producing a great show that



Lone Mountain Band

will leave their guests smiling and feeling they've spent an evening with old friends.

The Brasstown Community Center is located in Brasstown at 255 Settawig Road across from the Brasstown Post Office. The center is a non-profit and proceeds from the concert and facility rental are for maintenance and upkeep of the center.

The door opens at 6 p.m. and the music starts at 7 p.m. Admission is \$5. BBQ plates, hot dog plates, homemade cobbler,

ice cream and root beer floats are available for purchase.

This is the last concert of the season for the Brasstown Community Civic Center, so you don't want to miss it! Concerts are held May through August, on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays. We want to thank everyone for the great response we have had this year and we invite you to come back next year to enjoy more great entertainment!

For more information call Clay Logan 828-837-3797.