

North Georgia News

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MRLS awaits candidate's decision

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Mountain Regional Library System Board of Trustees has selected another candidate to serve as director of the system.

This applicant was recommended by the board of trustees' search committee tasked with finding a replacement for now retired Donna Howell in a called meeting at the Union County Public Library on Tuesday, Jan. 27.

Howell, the former MRLS director, officially retired at the end of December, and Union County Public Library Branch Manager Susie Brendle has been acting as interim director until the position is filled.

This will be the second candidate offered the job, as the first candidate declined the position after being selected on Oct. 30.

The board of trustees voted unanimously to offer this candidate the position, with the stipulation that the candidate undergo a three-month evaluation, followed by a six-month evaluation of job performance.

As of now, the current candidate must pass a background check and accept the position before becoming director of the MRLS.

"If anything changes between now and the board meeting, I'll let you know, because we were in this same position last time, and then the job was turned down," said Interim



The Mountain Regional Library System Board of Directors met last week to discuss the hiring of a new director. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Director Brendle in the called meeting.

The next MRLS Board of Trustees meeting will be held at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 4, at the Fannin County Public Library in Blue Ridge.

This time around, the search committee was responsible for fielding three applications. One of the applicants backed out of the process for personal reasons, and the committee chose not to interview the third applicant, who was from Oregon, because of the distance involved.

"We felt like he was the

person for the job," said Regional Board Chair Teresa Moore of the selected applicant.

The candidate has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in communications, as well as a master's degree in library science. He currently works in a public school system library, has owned his own business in graphic design and is a published author.

And so far, it seems as though the applicant will take the job.

"We haven't heard anything back from him negative,"

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Todd is Union's STAR Student; Hunter is STAR Teacher

By Shawn Jarrard
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Staff Writer

Union County High School senior Rachel Todd and teacher Tim Hunter share a singular distinction – they are both STARs.

Todd is the 2015 STAR Student at the high school, and she chose Hunter as her STAR Teacher.

"I was excited," said Todd on learning she was STAR Student just before Christmas break. "I wasn't completely sure that I was going to get it, because I had heard a couple of rumors about a couple other people, but I was very elated."

The list of Todd's awards and honors, clubs and organizations, community service and work experience, as well as hobbies and special interests is considerable.

She's lead plaintiff attorney for the Mock Trial team, takes private piano lessons, is president of the Beta Club and vice president of the Technology Student Association, serves as assistant pianist and assistant choir director at Track Rock Baptist Church, and also has time for a job at Zaxby's, to name just a few items in a long line of activities both varied and sundry.

Todd is in the running to be valedictorian of her class, and now, she's STAR Student.

STAR is an acronym for Student Teacher Achievement Recognition, and the program is sponsored by the Professional Association of Georgia



UCHS 2015 STAR Student Rachel Todd and her STAR Teacher, Tim Hunter. Both will be honored Feb. 10 at the Union County Community Center. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Student is then asked to name his or her STAR Teacher.

Todd's SAT score was a near-perfect 2250 of a possible 2400 on her single best testing date.

The kicker? She didn't even break a sweat during the test.

"I actually enjoy the SAT," said Todd. "I look at it as more of a game when I'm going through it, so it's almost entertaining. Everyone else is sitting there, like, I don't want to be here, and I'm just like, yeah, I like this – it's funny. When

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Local lawmakers to examine transportation funding

By Charles Duncan
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House District 155 State Rep. Jay Roberts introduced the Transportation Funding Act of 2015 last week, touting it as a way to raise \$1 billion annually in funding for transportation statewide.

The legislation also touts that the \$1 billion in new transportation dollars comes without a tax increase.

The legislation was filed on Thursday, Jan. 29. The bill now goes through the House Committee process and may be amended prior to reaching the State House floor for a vote. If approved, it would then go to the State Senate for consideration.

The Joint Study Committee on Critical Transportation Infrastructure Funding, co-chaired by Senate District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega) and State Rep. Roberts, was created by House Resolution 1573 during the 2014 legislative session.

The committee was tasked with undertaking a study of the conditions, needs, issues, and problems associated with Georgia's critical transportation infrastructure needs and the means of funding its construction, maintenance, and repair.



Sen. Steve Gooch

The committee held eight public meetings at locations throughout Georgia.

Sen. Gooch, in his weekly column distributed throughout Senate District 51, commented on the Transportation Funding Act.

"This week, our House counterparts unveiled legislation that will adequately fund our transportation infrastructure. I plan to spend a great deal of time analyzing this proposal, while also considering other legislative options. Creating a responsible transportation plan is of utmost priority to lawmakers under the Gold Dome during the 2015 legislative session. What we do – perhaps more



Rep. Stephen Allison

importantly, what we don't do – will echo throughout our state for decades to come."

House District 8 State Rep. Stephen Allison, (R-Blairsville), said in his weekly news column that he's still mulling over the proposed legislation.

"Something of great concern to many is the news coming from our Chairman of the House Transportation Committee announcing plans and instruction for a \$1.6 billion overhaul to fill the transportation gap we are facing for projects and maintenance. The actual bill was not dropped and available until late Thursday evening, though, so I am still in the process of mulling over it," Rep. Allison wrote.

"Once I have had the opportunity to review the bill and consider the implications and outcomes, I will be happy to field questions and feedback with your concerns."

The act would convert the sales tax on motor fuel to an excise tax. The excise tax would be set at 29.2 cents per gallon, which approximates the sales tax rate, which has been imposed on gasoline using a weighted average of the price of gasoline over the previous four years (\$3.39 per gallon total price at pump), according to State Rep. Roberts' plan.

This excise tax would be indexed to Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards as well as CPI and adjusted annually to ensure that it keeps pace with the ever-increasing fuel efficiency of vehicles. This provides a reliable, predictable funding source dedicated to transportation, according to State Rep. Roberts' plan.

Converting the sales tax on motor fuel to an excise tax adjusts Georgia's participation in, and takes advantage of, the International Fuel Tax Agreement (IFTA). Doing so will result in an additional \$60 million to the state, according to

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STAR Student Banquet set for Feb. 10 at UCCC

By Charles Duncan
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STAR Students and STAR Teachers will be honored on Feb. 10 at the Union County Community Center.

The event is scheduled for 6 p.m. and will honor Union County High School STAR Student Rachel Todd and her STAR Teacher Tim Hunter.

It also recognizes Mountain Education Center Charter High School's first STAR Student, Victoria Lynn Nguyen, and her STAR Teacher, Carrie Vandergriff.

To be named STAR Student, one must be a high school senior and obtain "the highest score on any single test date of the three-part SAT taken through the November test date of their senior year and be in the top 10 percent or top 10 students of their class

based on grade point average," according to the foundation website.

Furthermore, those nominated as STAR Students must achieve SAT scores equal to or higher than the latest available national average on the critical reading, math and writing sections. Each high school STAR Student is then asked to name his or her STAR Teacher.

Both Todd and Nguyen will be honored Feb. 10 at the Union County Community Center during the Annual Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce meeting and PAGE STAR Student Banquet.

The event is labeled An Evening With The STARS! the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce's annual recognition and celebration of Union County's shining

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Allison weighs in from the Gold Dome in Atlanta

The legislature convened for four full work days this week beginning on Monday. The pace of the legislative session is picking up, bills are dropping left and right, and legislation is being assigned to committees. I am expecting each coming week to be busier than the last.

I was elated to have several Rabun County residents down at the Capitol on Tuesday for 'Tourism Day' to recognize Rabun County Tourism Development Authority members with House Resolution 58 naming Rabun County the "Farm-to-Table Capital of Georgia."

I also had the opportunity to oversee my first committee meeting as Chairman of House Special Rules. While we have not yet had any bills to consider, I expect them to be headed our way in the coming weeks.

Over the course of the week, I signed on to HB 93, which would limit the amount of time law enforcement agencies can store data collected by license plate scanners, and HB 128, which would require the



Rep. Stephen Allison

Georgia Department of Agriculture to restore the allowable number of chickens for individual poultry producers to the economically sustainable 20,000 maximum instead of 1,000. Currently, Georgia restrictions are more stringent than those of the federal government and not maintainable or feasible for small poultry producers. I am

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Two charged with robbery in purse-snatching incident

By Charles Duncan
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Two Union County men are behind bars following a purse-snatching incident at a local convenience store, Union County Sheriff's Sgt. Shawn Dyer said.

The incident occurred Jan. 28 about 7 p.m., as a woman at the convenience store off Georgia 515 was talking with a young man, Sgt. Dyer said.

Sometime during the conversation when the woman was not looking, authorities say 21-year-old Josh Cramer grabbed the woman's purse and got in a red pick-up and left the parking lot, Sgt. Dyer said.

"It really didn't make a



Josh Cramer

whole lot of sense, the woman knew the young man," Sgt. Dyer said. "She could only tell us that the young man got in a red pick-up and she didn't know who was driving that vehicle."

Sgt. Dyer said he was



Ryan Keith Wigley

familiar with Cramer through other arrest incidents. Deputies were on the alert for Cramer and eventually, they had the name of the getaway driver, Sgt. Dyer said.

"We determined that the red pick-up belonged to

an address on Paul Nicholson Road," Sgt. Dyer said. "I went to the address, of course the pick-up isn't there. There was some one there, and he gave me the name of the person we were looking for. Ryan Keith Wigley, 22 years old, was the person driving the red pick-up."

Deputies maintained surveillance of the residence throughout the evening, Sgt. Dyer said.

To find out who they were looking for, authorities turned to social media and found a photograph of Wigley on Facebook, Sgt. Dyer said.

"At this point, we know who the driver is, we know who the passenger is," Sgt.

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