

Franklin...from Page 1A

"I've been blessed to work here for all these years," Franklin said. "It's been a good while, and the time went by real fast. It doesn't seem like I've been here that long."

The retiring supervisor was glad to see members of his team present for the occasion and told the mayor and council that he felt confident he was leaving the maintenance operation in good hands.

Attending from the Water/Sewer Maintenance Department were Curtis Corn, Kenny Duckworth, Ernie Soriero and Pat Stancil. Corn is taking over from Franklin as department supervisor.

Franklin's wife of 44 years, Dorothy Ann, also attended. She promised that evening to "keep him out of trouble" in retirement, to which Ottis replied that he'd "already got a (honey-do) list this long."

Last week was Franklin's first full week in retirement, but instead of sleeping in, he awoke at 4:30 a.m. like always and reckons it'll be some time before he gets used to not having to wake up so early.

"Anything the city had to do, they called on me to do it," Franklin said, supplying a comprehensive list including but not limited to water/sewer expansions and leak repairs, street maintenance, Christmas decorations, parade detail, picking up trash and more.

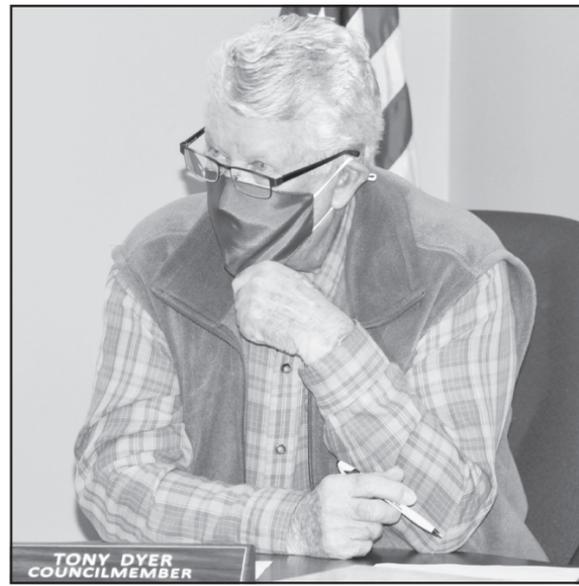
"I done everything," he said. "I had seven employees, and we took care of the city."

Blairsville has grown an awful lot since Franklin started his position, and with it, the city's water and sewer offerings, and he feels fortunate to have had the job he did, as he can remember a time not too long ago when opportunity was scarce.

"Back then, there wasn't much work in Blairsville," Franklin said of the mid-1980s. "I done whatever I could. I repaired boats and motors, just whatever I could pick up - cut grass or cut trees or sell firewood, you name it; whatever it took to get by and make a payment."

His break came when Bill Kelley, who served on the City Council at the time, asked him if he was interested in the job with the city. It was an offer he couldn't refuse, and he took it gratefully and never looked back, starting out with only two crewmembers and retiring with seven.

As to why he's decided to retire, Franklin said that, at 72 years old, it just feels like the right time to take things



Councilman Tony Dyer will serve as mayor pro tempore for 2021, which places upon him the responsibility of running the city should Mayor Conley become unable to do so for whatever reason.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

a little easier. He's looking forward to traveling some with his wife, getting more into gardening, and working a few side jobs and projects in his newfound spare time.

"I'll stay busy," said the maintenance man who has held a job since he was 15 years old. "I'm going to miss work, I know that; it'll take a while to get over that. When you've been together as long as we have, it's like family, everybody working at the city, and my customers, too."

When it comes to his legacy, Franklin hopes he's remembered for being fair and honest with people, and that he's thought of as someone who "tried to treat everybody the way they needed to be treated."

And while he's definitely retired, he plans on staying in touch with people and his former coworkers at City Hall, adding that "I'm not going nowhere - I'll be checking in with them to keep them straight."

Also in the Feb. 2 City Council meeting, the council approved a resolution to allow for on-premises sales of alcohol specifically for Super Bowl Sunday, or Sunday, Feb. 7. The city last approved such a resolution for New Year's Day 2017, which fell on a Sunday also.

Additionally, City Council members approved the SPLOST purchase of a New Holland backhoe from Nelson's Tractor for use by the Water/Sewer Maintenance Department. The backhoe costs \$67,376 with the trade-in value of the city's current

backhoe.

The council voted to upgrade 38 streetlamps around the Blairsville Square with integrated LED systems from City Plumbing & Electric, to be paid for with \$16,094.12 in SPLOST funds. The new lights should greatly improve downtown visibility at night and early morning.

Council members upped their commitment to the Union County Library by an additional \$500 from the \$7,000 approved in the January meeting. The total amount budgeted in 2021 is \$7,500, so the February amendment gets the actual amount in line with the budget.

In last month's meeting, the council appointed various elected official departmental liaisons: Robert Moore, Airport; Tony Dyer, Police; Mary Ruth Cook, Streets; Betty Easter, Water/Sewer; Blairsville DDA Board; Rhonda Mahan; and Mayor Conley, Historical Society.

Historically, Buddy Moore has served as mayor pro tempore, but this year, Tony Dyer is taking on that role. He will perform the official duties of the city if Mayor Conley should become incapacitated or unable to attend a regular meeting.

The council also set 2021 qualifying fees ahead of this year's municipal elections: \$162 for each of two council seats up for grabs, and \$1,090 for mayor. Qualifying will run Aug. 16-18, with qualifying packets available at City Hall during regular business hours starting Aug. 2.

Academy...from Page 1A

this grant for the last few years. It's a big deal, because the grant is worth \$3.075 million toward construction costs, with the remainder to be paid for using already budgeted SPLOST funds.

"We are going to build a new facility on the flat piece of ground between our Vocational Building and the Glenn Gooch Bypass," Davis said. "That facility will house our Construction and Automotive Programs."

"We will renovate our Vocational Building, which currently houses our Automotive, Construction, Engineering, and Welding Programs. When we renovate that facility, it will make two larger areas to house our Welding Program and our Manufacturing and Engineering Programs."

Estimated start time for the project is early September of this year, with a goal of completing the new building in the spring and the renovation project in the summer. The high school will begin accepting vocational students from neighboring districts in August.

"The addition of (this academy) means we are providing more students with learning opportunities that link directly to workforce needs," Commissioner Dozier said. "More high school students will experience an education that connects the classroom to a career through valuable partnerships made with local industry."

Upon completion, the Union County academy will be one of 52 College and Career Academies in the state, and the school system here is proud for the opportunity to serve the entire region as the first such academy connected to North Georgia Technical College.

Programs offered through the academy will be tailored to each individual student to ensure all school children are getting exactly what they need to maximize their efforts.

"We are going to be looking at our current STEM Academy and their model of instruction," Davis said, "where they blend academics and CTAE courses and teach them simultaneously where it makes sense."

"For instance, currently, they teach algebra and geometry alongside engineering. They also have been teaching human anatomy and biology alongside the health care program."

"We are really looking to expand that throughout all CTAE areas and start blending academics where it makes sense. We can blend geometry and construction, which would be the perfect match."

High School Principal C.T. Hussion said the academy will provide students the skills needed to become more in-demand as employees, giving them the upper hand when trying to find a job after graduation.

"We realized that the industries in the area, from health care to manufacturing, they said that our graduates and all the students in the area may be good at calculus," Hussion said, "but they didn't have the critical curriculum like basic skills needed for the job."

"Mr. Davis went and visited a lot of the industries and got feedback on their critical curriculum and what they would like to see our graduates be able to do and know."

Added Davis, "The main goal for this thing is for every student that walks across the

stage and gets a diploma to have a career goal in mind and a way to get to that career goal, whether it be through college, going through the workforce, technical training, the military, or whatever it is."

Guiding the academy will be a Governing Board that meets once a month and is composed of various community partners, including voting members from local businesses and organizations and non-voting ex-officio members from area schools.

Steve Rowe serves as president of this board, and he believes the addition of the academy in the community will be vital to the area as the need for workers grows with the rest of the region.

"Whether you talk to members of our community or any other community, one of the basic and most current needs is workforce," Rowe said. "We're excited to be a part of this because this is helping our workforce. Not everybody is going to a four-year college; some are going directly into the workforce."

"With that being said, people can still go into a four-year college after they graduate, but we are just excited to look at new ways and develop new ways to improve our workforce here."

The Union County Board of Education met for a called Zoom meeting on Jan. 28 to hire Charles Black Construction to manage the project.

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