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country and the Revolutionary War.

Representing the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter SAR that evening were President Jared Ogden, Vice President Sid Turner, Historian David Cook and Secretary Stephen Weaver, with Police Chief Michael “Bear” Baxter accepting the award.

“Our purpose is to preserve our Constitution, which establishes the representative republic, and to defend it against all foes,” Ogden said. “We do that by preserving our history through awareness programs and education, and also patriotism.

“It’s a tremendous honor to be here tonight to present this award of appreciation to Chief Baxter and the Blairsville Police Department. And it’s a special honor to be before the City Council meeting, because there are a lot of city council meetings in this country in which this would not be appropriate.”

The award was presented in appreciation for BPD’s “services, commitment, sacrifices and professionalism of its members,” and Chief Baxter made sure to express appreciation in return, stating unequivocally that “these folks have been supporters of public safety for years here.”

“Not just law enforcement, but firefighters, EMTs – for several years, they have just been outstanding to public safety in showing their full support,” Baxter said. “We live in one of the best places for support of law enforcement.

“It doesn’t matter what you see on TV or how bad it gets, our community supports us, and we owe it to them to continue doing what we’re supposed to do. The public doesn’t really know how much we appreciate the kind gestures.

“They drop stuff off at our office; they pick up a meal for a table of cops; they just stop by and say, ‘Thank you for what you do.’ That happens here. It doesn’t happen everywhere like that, I promise you. We go other places, and they’ll tell you support like that doesn’t happen.

“So, we are very appreciative of it, and we just live in a great community. I know why everybody wants to move here, there’s a reason for that – it’s a caring community, and that means a lot to us.”

Accepting the award on behalf of his department, Baxter commended the hard work of his crew, noting the team effort that goes beyond just Blairsville PD in protecting the community.

“We work alongside Sheriff (Mack) Mason and his folks,” Baxter said. “It’s very unusual that you see working relationships with law enforcement like we have, whether it be the (Union County Schools) Police and us or Sheriff Mason and us. It’s a community partnership.”

Added Baxter, “We all get along, we make this community safe, we make it a good place to live for our residents, visitors and businesses alike. That’s what makes the town run. I’m very proud of all of our law enforcement in Union County.”

Another way the community supports the Police Department is through the Shop with a Cop for Christmas Program benefiting local children, which in 2020 experienced its best fundraising year ever thanks to the overwhelming turnout for the Second Annual Rubber Duck Derby.

Other Business

Also in the March regular city meeting, Mayor Jim Conley updated the council on the lighting situation in Downtown Blairsville.

The city has purchased 34 bright white LED lights to replace the orange streetlamps located around the square. Conley and Chief Baxter approached the council recently with the idea of brightening up downtown as a safety issue for businesses that operate in the dark.

Conley said the lights are ready to be installed as soon as an electrician can get to it. The lights were purchased from City Plumbing for \$14,400 using SPLOST dollars, and



Buddy More
Blairsville City Councilman

each one is expected to last up to 100,000 hours before needing to be replaced.

The mayor also touched on an upcoming project requested by Granddaddy Mimm’s Moonshine Distillery to run a sidewalk from the square down Wellborn Street to the beginning of the distillery’s driveway.

All told, the project will cost about \$65,000, 70% of which will be covered using LMIG grant funding through the Georgia Department of Transportation. The sidewalk will have to be terraced due to the steepness of the grade, so it won’t be handicapped accessible.

Next steps include the delivery of official documentation from property owners Janna Akins and the Candler Property for easements between the square and Granddaddy Mimm’s, with all property owners on board.

There’s no construction timeline, but Conley is confident the project will be completed this year.

The council voted to amend the 2020 Operating Budget, to include a \$500 Union County Public Library contribution increase, an \$11,499 police budget increase for the Shop with a Cop Program, and a \$5,999 increase in maintenance and repairs at the airport.

After 13 and a half years as Utility Billing Clerk, Karen Carver will be retiring from the city. She’s staying on until the end of April to continue training her replacement, Karla Franklin, who started part-time about a month ago.

The council officially

Zell Miller...from Page 1A

the fact that we both represent the north Georgia mountains and the conservative values of the Appalachian culture.”

Newly elected to serve in the same district as Miller’s hometown of Young Harris in Towns County, District 50 State Sen. Bo Hatchett said he is proud to be a co-sponsor of the bill.

“Zell Miller was a leader in our state and a champion for education, creating the HOPE Scholarship, which has helped numerous people over the years get educated, myself included,” Hatchett said. “It’s a well-deserved tribute to him and his legacy.”

Miller passed away at the age of 86 on March 23, 2018, after battling Parkinson’s disease. As a politician, he was a highly influential man whose rich legacy will carry on well into the future thanks to his efforts at making the lives of his fellow Georgians better.

His crowning achievement as governor, the Georgia Lottery-funded HOPE Scholarship has broadened the horizons of many students by affording them opportunities to achieve advanced educations in Georgia.

“From Abbeville in Wilcox County to Zebulon in Pike County, Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) has provided more than \$10 billion of financial assistance for educational programs beyond high school,” according to the Georgia Student Finance Commission.

“The legislation for this program was scripted in 1992 under the supervision of Gov. Zell Miller and launched a year later to provide assistance towards the cost of tuition at eligible Georgia postsecondary institutions to incent and reward Georgia’s high achieving students.”

Another of Miller’s great accomplishments is Georgia’s Pre-K Program, also instituted during his time as governor. Since its inception, the program has appropriated more than \$7 billion to send nearly 2 million 4-year-olds to Pre-K programs throughout the state.

Taken together, the HOPE Scholarship and Georgia’s Pre-K Program were Miller’s “proudest achievements in his 46-year career in public service,” according to his family.

Once SB 140 passes the House, the monument will be designed, procured and placed by the Capitol Art Standards Commission, “subject to final approval by a monument committee composed of (six) members of the General Assembly.”

Additionally, the bill stipulates that funding for the monument is to come from private sources.

Controlled Burn...from Page 1A

hazardous.

“However, the right fire at the right place at the right time helps maintain healthy forests, communities and watersheds.”

Forest Service Public Affairs Officer Steven Bekkerus reiterated this position, saying one of the primary goals of burning is to restore natural forest.

“Today’s burn was to kind of prepare the land in the particular tract,” Bekkerus said. “We actually did a controlled burn several years ago, and we had some drought effects there, so we are trying to help some of the oak and short leaf pine regrow.

“We planted some seedlings about a year ago. Now, we are going back and trying to remove some of the competition. Think of it as kind of weeding the garden. We want to reduce the plants we don’t want, and help the plants we do want.”

Bekkerus said Union Countians can expect more local controlled burns in the

coming months, which are all done professionally so as not to get out of hand.

“We do about 35,000 acres total every year,” Bekkerus said. “There is a whole map showing all the different geographic areas. They can range anywhere from five acres to several hundred acres. They rotate every year and change a little bit.

“We try to go in there on a rotation basis probably about every three to five years ... to mimic a natural fire that would normally be in there. These are low-intensity fires that are done in a controlled manner and controlled conditions.”

The chances of uncontrolled fire are much higher on forest land that is left unattended, ultimately leading to larger issues like the wrong plants burning, which could have an impact on nearby communities.

“It really restores the forest,” Bekkerus said. “The forest needs that low-intensity fire to help remove invasive

species such as weeds and other plants that shouldn’t be there. Those plants are stealing water and nutrients from the plants that we do want, so we are trying to limit them.

“A lot of plants and species actually need that fire to open up their pinecones and release the seeds. We call them fire-dependent, and when you restore those plant species in the forest to a natural healthy state, it provides habitat for wildlife and food sources.”

Union County Fire Chief David Dyer said such prescribed burns serve the vital function of preventing wildland and other uncontrolled forest fires.

“One of the reasons we do the controlled burns is to get rid of the fuel,” Dyer said. “The leaves and debris that have fallen in the forest are burned in a controlled setting and done preventively so that they wouldn’t build over a large amount and start any major fires.

“The Firewise program is the biggest thing that we promote. There is a ton of information on that through the U.S. Forest Service. The main thing is to clean up around your house and have a green zone where you keep that fuel away from your home.”

Updates on the fires can be found through the Union County Fire Department Facebook Page, which has been keeping the community up to date on planned burns.