

# Civic Awards...from Page 1A



Ivy Smith of Allegheny Lodge thanked Jim and Sharon Whittle last week for their contributions to the community with the Derrick Whittle Memorial Blood Drive and scholarships for local graduating seniors. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

scholarships in memory of their beloved son," Smith said. "In 2013, they began a joint venture with Blood Assurance, which everyone in Union County and Blairsville has come to know as the Whittle Blood Drive."

The Whittles expressed their gratitude to the lodge and the community that evening for assisting them with their goal of remembering and honoring Derrick.

"I just want to thank everybody in this lodge that has helped us," Sharon said. "We

have done it for eight years, and we know no matter what that someone from this lodge is going to be there to help us. And we appreciate it so very much. Thank you."

Chief Baxter also commented on the community and the importance of working together to make the area a great place to live.

"I'd first like to thank the lodge," Baxter said. "Without a good support system, our office wouldn't be able to function ... We have some of our guys here.

We have great employees, and everyone knows, if you are the boss, great employees make it easier.

"I have to say, some of us have grown up here. David and I have grown up and went to high school together and made it to where we needed to. We live in a great place, folks. There is a reason people are moving here in droves, because it is a great place, and we need to keep it that way."

# City of Blairsville...from Page 1A



Last week, council members held their first in-person meeting since March, and also their first meeting in the newly renovated council chambers at City Hall. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the city limited the number of audience chairs in the expanded council chambers, though everyone who attended was able to fit in the meeting.

The 2020 millage rate remains unchanged from 2019 but will bring in \$899 less in property taxes due to a \$400,000 decrease in the property digest this year, mainly in real and personal property.

At 100% collections, the city will be taking in \$122,429 in taxes on properties located within city limits.

City property owners who have already received property tax bills in the mail will need to remember that city taxes are collected separately from property taxes levied by the Union County Government and Board of Education, which are collected by the Tax Commissioner's Office.

County and school property tax bills were mailed Sept. 19, Tax Commissioner Lee Knight said, and Mayor Conley said property tax bills for the City of Blairsville will likely be mailed this month, so people who own property inside the city limits will have two distinct property tax bills to pay.

The council also held a budget public hearing Oct. 6, during which nobody commented, followed by a first reading to adopt the city's 2021 Operating Budget.

This year's budget is about \$50,000 more than the FY

2020 budget, for a total balanced budget of \$4,506,729.

Most of the increased expenditures will be occurring in the Police Department, Wastewater Treatment Plant, Water Treatment Plant and Water/Sewer Maintenance Department, with additional offsetting revenues expected to come from water/sewer services and sales tax collections.

Leachate once again became a topic of discussion, with Councilwoman Mary Ruth Cook offering an emotional apology to Mayor Conley for not doing more to show support for the city in the Sept. 23 virtual meeting held by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comments on the proposed draft permit renewal for the City of Blairsville's Wastewater Treatment Plant. The permit governs the operation of the plant.

Twenty-five people left comments during the EPD meeting, including Mayor Conley. Cook attended but did not offer any comments.

"There was a lot of comments made there that they didn't trust the mayor or the council either, no matter what," Conley said. "That didn't set right in my craw, but I didn't let that affect me. I spoke my piece and we got on with that."

"We'll probably be hearing from EPD within the

next 30 days. They're going to take all the comments into consideration and then make their decision."

Most of the commenters in the Sept. 23 hearing attended to ask the EPD to explicitly exclude leachate treatment in the city's wastewater permit, even after the city voted in September to discontinue treating the out-of-county landfill runoff.

Steve Herbst offered comments in the EPD hearing, and he also attended the Oct. 6 city meeting to address council members and the mayor.

Herbst informed the council that he'd been circulating a leachate petition that had already garnered about a thousand signatories.

"The goal of the petition is to communicate to you, in a unified voice from our citizens, that we want to ensure that leachate will permanently be prohibited from being dumped into our precious lake," Herbst said.

He went on to request a local ordinance prohibiting future leachate treatment by the city, and he proposed the development of a local stakeholder task force "to ensure full disclosure of future actions that may affect the water quality of Lake Nottely."

Conley recommended that the council table Herbst's requests until City Attorney David Barrett got a chance to review his proposal.