

School...from Page 1A

process through our instruction and different things that we're going to do to provide our kids with opportunities and growth.

"Our No. 1 goal, we're focusing on employability of students this year. Our

leadership team met in June, and we discussed a lot of things that were important, and it all basically comes down to people being employable.

"Regardless of what they decide to pursue after high school postsecondary,

they have to be employable, and we're going to do our very best this year to focus on employability skills on top of the academic instruction."

Principal Hill is also excited about the synchronous learning experience the high school will be sharing with Young Harris College, which will give students the

opportunity to earn college credit before graduating.

Open House for all schools will be Thursday, Aug. 4, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., and parents are encouraged to bring their children to meet their teachers and find out what's in store for the upcoming school year.

Of course, every new school year comes with changes all its own, and this year, one of the biggest changes in the school system is new Union County Schools Superintendent Dr. Fred Rayfield, who officially assumed his role here on July 1.

"I'm excited about our new superintendent, Dr. Rayfield," said Gary Davenport, of the Union County Board of Education. "He brings a lot of knowledge and a lot of experience. I'm excited about our new school year, all of our people coming back. Our Fine Arts Center is a big addition that we got added about a year ago that I'm excited about.

"I'll be done the end of December, and with 20 years here, I've been able to serve with a lot of great superintendents, a lot of great teachers, a lot of great administrators, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, lunchroom people. We've got a good school here, but what makes a school is the people, the employees, and that's why our school system, I think, has been so good."

Something else that will be new this school year – the Agricultural Science Center, a SPLOST-funded learning facility on Gainesville Highway that will serve the needs of various ag disciplines, that the school system is looking to have finished by October.

Dr. Rayfield, who has an extensive background in agricultural education, said he is looking forward to getting to know everyone once the school is back in session.

"The (faculty and staff) that I have had the opportunity to meet truly have what I call a passion for the work," said Dr. Rayfield. "They've already developed a culture of high expectations, of excellence, and that's what we're going to continue to build on."

Added Dr. Rayfield: "I'm really excited about the progressive nature of the school system. What they've done to this point with the resources they've had to work with has really been amazing. And we're pretty excited about the new Fine Arts Center and the Ag Center.

"We're also excited about what we're doing with STEM and growing that program, and we're going to be able to put Chromebooks in most of our students' hands."

Nerney...

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quences. He will explain the science behind why the brain of a teenager works differently than at other ages, and how teenage brain differences affect the way adolescents perceive the world, themselves and their behaviors.

Michael Nerney has 34 years' experience as a consultant in prevention and education plus 12 years as a teacher and coach. He has worked with federal and state agencies including the Federal Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, New York State's Education Department and the Governor's Office of Employee Relations, and has served as consultant for two major television networks, most recently appearing on ABC's 20/20.

Sponsors for this event are the Union County Government, Union County Board of Education, Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, United Community Bank and New Hope Counseling. This event is brought to you by Drug Free Mountain Life – a program of the Union County Anti-Drug Coalition.

Fatz Café Job Fair August 5th

We are hosting an in house job fair at our Fatz Café in Blairsville, GA on Friday, August 5th from noon - 6 p.m.

Senior Pavilion and Dog Park closed Friday

Attention! On Friday, August 5th the Senior Pavilion and Dog Park will be closed from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. and will be reserved strictly for the Union County Sheriff's Office, Blairsville Police Department, Fire & Rescue, and EMS services which will be holding an active shooting training session.

We appreciate your cooperation in this matter! If you have any questions please contact the Union County Recreation Department at 706-439-6074.

Millage...from Page 1A



Union County Associate Superintendent Dr. Jeremy Williams and Superintendent Dr. Fred Rayfield address the board concerning the millage rate for Fiscal Year 2017

Rayfield said that, upon receipt of the tax digest from the Union County Tax Assessor's office, they wanted to go ahead and get the millage rate proposal and Five-Year History announced in the county's legal organ ahead of the next board meeting.

And though the rate is staying the same, the schools will be collecting \$90,363 more in property taxes over 2015, due to an increase in property values over the 2015 tax digest.

"When we receive the digest, we take that information, put it into the five-year history, but more importantly, we put it into the budget that was adopted in June to see if the amount of revenue that's projected to be generated matches up with the estimate that they have to put in the budget," said Dr. Rayfield.

Continued Dr. Rayfield: "Leaving it at the same, it gets us to our budget number. That's very simplistic, but that's the way that you analyze whether you're going to stay the same, go up or roll back, is, did you have enough change in the digest to significantly alter that number that you put in the budget?"

"That's the terrible thing about school budgets, is you have to adopt and submit your budget to the state before you get a tax digest, which is your primary source of revenue. So it matched up, and it was

very close in terms of the amount of money and the dollars generated. It actually generates a few more dollars this year, because as you look around, things are starting to pick up construction-wise and progressively in the community. This allows you to keep it the same."

For Board Member Gary Davenport, whose last board meeting will be in December after serving for 20 years, it's all about keeping taxes as low as possible.

"For everybody," said Davenport, though there have been times over the years that he's had to vote to increase the millage rate. "In situations through my term of 20 years, you're in a situation if your budget's bigger than your income's going to be, you have to go up on millage. We've had that before.

"And when everything turned down in '07 and '08, when the land values went down, that brought us in less money. Even the millage rate being the same, when your land values were \$20,000 an acre and now they're \$10,000 an acre, you're going to bring in half the money."

Fortunately, the board hasn't had to raise the millage rate in quite a while, and according to the Current Tax Digest and Five-Year History, the millage rate has either stayed the same or decreased since 2011.