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Akins discusses the ongoing construction of the showroom/storage building with Stacey Stephens of the Union County Road Department, who helped to grade the site.

all the way to Downton Blairsville through two power wires, which then lit up the lampposts in what was surely a sight to behold – the first electric lights to brighten Blairsville's nights.

Akins approached Dockery and asked him what he was going to do with the old lamps, to which Dockery replied, "Throw them in the city dump," said Akins.

And as Akins watched those four original streetlights being taken down, he did what has always come natural to him – he preserved history.

He asked Dockery if he could have one of the lampposts, which he first remembered seeing as a young boy, and he took the lamppost home where it remained safely

in his possession until he had it installed outside the Grapelle Butt Mock House five years ago for the Union County Historical Society.

Akins has been an active member of the historical society since very near the society's inception, and he has been a lifelong preserver of Union County history.

In the society's annual Christmas dinner last month, Akins was awarded the prestigious "Preservationist of the Year" award in honor of his work to keep the history of Union County alive and well.

As it turns out, safeguarding history is something that runs in Akins' family.

"It's just a big honor for me to be a preservationist

of Union County history," said Akins. "My grandmother would have been so proud of me, because she liked history.

"She was the daughter of Tom Coke Hughes, who was a big man in the county. My grandmother and I got along real good, and she liked old stuff in history. She was history herself, too. I lived in her house when she first got electricity."

Akins' passion for county history runs deep, and he's been known to say that he'll be involved in the historical society until he's buried.

"This is something that the kids need to know about," said Akins. "They don't have any idea what it's like to live in a house with an oil lamp. I lived in my grandmother's house, and we had fireplace light and oil lamps.

"It's just the greatest thing that ever happened to me to know that we have progressed in Union County like we have."

Akins served as president of the historical society in 2013, 2014 and 2015, and continues to lead within the organization as its current vice president.

The latest endeavor being spearheaded by Akins is the construction of a new display and storage building immediately next to the Butt Mock House. The new building will use matching siding and roof materials to mirror the look and feel of the historic Mock House.

Akins is excited about the new building, because with it the society will be able to keep a rotating display of donated antiques, including some of the bigger items that are either hanging out in storage elsewhere or are sitting exposed to the elements because they don't fit anywhere else.

The 40-by-40 structure will feature two climate-controlled stories, a first floor and a basement. The basement will have a garage opening to allow for larger items to be stored out of the weather, like the Civil War-era wagon that's just sitting in the backyard of the Mock House.

Akins anticipates that the building will be completed with its first round of display items ready for viewing by April 1.



Once the new building is completed next to the Butt Mock House, items like this priceless Civil War-era wagon will be stored and displayed in the building's climate-controlled space.



Here's the Butt Mock House the morning after the recent Jan. 6/Jan. 7 snowstorm.

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Bad road conditions were made worse by constantly low temperatures each night over the Jan. 6 weekend, creating especially icy back roads that stuck around well into last week.

the 70s, there's still plenty of winter left.

"There's certainly a good chance we're going to need some more (snow days) later on in the winter," said Dr. Rayfield. "We'll discuss that and take a recommendation to the board if it's going to change the calendar.

"The two days we just missed can be taken care of by the three days that the state allows us, and then we can adjust work schedules or do something with post-planning to take care of the teacher time if we needed to."

As it currently stands, nothing has been affected for the school year – graduation will not have to be moved, and makeup days are not yet mandated.

The decision to assign makeup days is ultimately up to the Union County Board of Education, however, Dr. Rayfield doesn't feel at this time that they're in a position to need to make up any days.

"They'll look to me for a recommendation if we get to a point where we've used up what was available to us, and if we need to start changing a

workday to a school day, then that will obviously go to them and they will amend our current calendar to reflect that," said Dr. Rayfield.

Deciding to close school for weather is always a tough call, especially considering that forecasts can be wrong. In this instance, Dr. Rayfield said he feels confident that they did the right thing.

Dr. Rayfield stayed in close contact with school superintendents in neighboring counties, and they offered each other insight back and forth during the snowy weather.