

**Paris ... continued from Page 4A**

**Q. How is the county paying off the SPLOST debt?**

A. We are using only SPLOST sales tax funds to pay off the debt. Remember that it is estimated that nearly half of all SPLOST revenue is paid by visitors or those passing through. Our SPLOST IV collections began April of 2015. Each month, the county sets aside funds to, first, pay the debt before any other payments are made on SPLOST construction projects. At the end of this 6 year SPLOST program, this debt will be paid in full. We always have the option to pay it off early and we certainly could do that, but we also have such a low interest rate of 1.69% that we want to have the flexibility to continue with some of our smaller projects.

**Q. Does the county have any other debts?**

A. Only for accounting purposes. Those include landfill closing, volunteer fire station co-signed note, Development Authority co-signed note, compensated absences and copier and equipment leases. The point being that these are all inconsequential listings in our audit of Long Term Dept.

**Q. How has Union County been able to build so many projects over the past few years with SPLOST money, more than other rural counties seem to be able to do, and still be able to pay for the operation of those facilities?**

A. It is simple. We have employees, contractors and detainees who work hard and are dedicated to our projects and build them at the lowest possible cost. We plan ahead before constructing projects so that we are sure to have funds for operation. We also use consultants to advise us on the best financ-

ing methods. We are able to do this without increasing property taxes because of two reasons. First, we try to maximize revenue from the operation of a facility and are very successful at this. Second, because of our high quality of life and nice facilities in Union County, we also attract new property owners to the county. They build new homes or retail businesses, which all bring in additional property tax revenue, which helps keep our property tax rate as one of the lowest in the State of Georgia. (4th lowest out of 159 counties in 2015.)

**Q. How did the SPLOST Bond indebtedness occur?**

A. It is the same method that we have utilized for the past 16 years I have been in office and even before I became commissioner. When a new SPLOST comes to the voters, either every 5 or 6 years, part of the vote is to approve SPLOST bonds to basically pre pay projects. It is the same principal as building a new home. You have the option of saving your money for 30 years and then building your home, or build it, enjoy it and then pay for it while you are able to enjoy and raise your family in it. The difference is that government has much lower interest rates. Usually, by borrowing the funds for some of the larger projects, we are usually able to borrow the money at a reduced rate that is lower than the inflation rate. So the interest we pay is normally less than the increase in cost of building materials had we waited six years to begin the project. So either way we save money and have use of the facility much sooner. That is why this process has been utilized by everyone for the past four SPLOST periods, including one prior to my taking office.

**Cummings... continued from Page 4A**

the time the mailman arrived.

Paul heard the mailman coming down the road and in a panic the boys ran and hid. The mailman opened the box and the cat shot out of the box and into the old car. The cat made at least three laps in the car and tore up the mail, the interior of the car and the mailman before exiting the car. Nobody ever found out how Old Tom got into the Cummings mail-

box. But, the boys knew and they were remorseful. Later when the weather turned cold Uncle Bud suggested to Granny, "Why don't we put some big rocks by the fire place and when the mailman comes we can give them to him. He can then place them under his feet to help his feet stay warm." The mailman was very appreciative and the boys never saw Old Tom again.

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of the surroundings of this bridge will increase the costs and time required to make the necessary repairs.

Another unique factor with this project is the fact that the land surrounding the bridge is US National Forest. So there will need to be a lot of coordination between the local, state, and federal governments in order to facilitate permitting, engineering, and construction of the replacement of this 75 year old bridge.

The process of completing a project of this size and scope is a multiyear undertaking. We are in the very early stages of conceptual planning and estimating. More detailed designs and layouts will come as more information is collected through the public hearings and interaction with stakeholders. Actual construction is not anticipated for a couple of years and that is a tentative schedule barring unforeseen circumstances and delays with permitting and coordination with the National

Forest Service. This is not a typical bridge replacement project but the process is used all over the country almost every work day of the year. I feel strongly that the DOT will work diligently to find the most appropriate course of action to complete this project as soon as practically possible.

All three of the elected officials you refer to as "Cockroaches" have already asked the DOT to go back to the drawing boards and come up with additional options that include keeping at least one lane of Hwy 180 open to traffic. The district engineer has already concurred that they plan to consider that request. In the meantime, I will continue to work closely with the DOT and Commissioner Paris to ensure the people of Suches are being heard and represented to the best of my ability. I take my responsibilities very seriously as I know Representative Allison and Commissioner Paris do as well.

**Steve Gooch**

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we don't want to drive to "town" and more importantly, times when we can't. A large part of their business comes from tourists, motorcyclists, and bicyclists who love our mountain roads and count on our store as the only stop within miles to purchase food and gas. I'm afraid that closing 180 would be the death of our little store. Not only do we love the Gooch family and would hate for them to lose the store, but everyone in Suches would suffer, having lost our only store and our anchor to the community.

Closing 180 would greatly impact the livelihood and pocketbooks of our citizens. Many of our residents work, shop, worship, and attend to county business such as jury duty and other official business that must be conducted at our county courthouse, in Blairsville. Every trip to Blairsville, without the benefit of a direct route via 180, would be twice as many miles and require twice as much gas. Subsequently, that would not only affect us, but also the merchants in our county. Because of the added time and expense, many people will choose to do business in Dahlonega, which means our dollars will be spent in a county other than the one in which we pay our taxes.

Please allow me to share a little math which puts things in a very clear, startling perspective.\*

For a person living in Suches and working in Blairsville, traveling 5 days a week to and from Blairsville, the proposed detour will add an additional 10,972 miles and 277 hours to his commute in a year's time.

only alternate detour of Skeenah Gap, he would add 9828 miles and 260 hours in a year's time.

Our school children, who are required to attend a minimum of 180 days in school, and specifically the ones that ride a bus to Blairsville, would add an additional 7596 miles and 192 hours to their commute time in one school year. If they were to use the Skeenah Gap route, it would add 6804 miles and 180 hours.

\*These figures are based on mileage and travel time from a central location of the town square in Blairsville, to and from Winfield Scott, and using the proposed detour, unless otherwise stated.

I realize and understand the need for replacing the bridge at Winfield Scott, but implore you to research alternative options, such as allowing the current bridge to operate as a one-lane bridge while the new bridge is being constructed (the best and most desirable option) or constructing a temporary road that would connect existing roads running through Winfield Scott Park with 180 (and could possibly serve as a future north entrance to the park) or improving upon forest service roads that might be used as a much shorter detour.

The closing of 180 would negatively impact the well-being, livelihood, financial status, and possibly the very health and survival of the residents of Suches. We, as taxpayers and citizens, urge you to please devise a more viable, reasonable solution to this issue.

I very much thank you and appreciate your time and consideration in this urgent matter.

**Lisa Sligh Arbour**

**Mattee...**

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For more information on water testing, please contact your extension office to receive our "Testing for Water Quality" publication.

Don't forget about our SepTIMBER Forestry Ag Day on September 28th at GMREC in Blairsville from 9 a.m. to 1:45. Admission is \$5 and includes lunch and a chance to win door prizes. Topics covered include native tree identification, nuisance wildlife management, invasive species control, tree disease, pest management, and fire prevention. This program will offer three hours of commercial pesticide credit in categories 23, 24, and 27, and one hour of private applicator credit. To RSVP, please contact GMREC at 706-745-2655 by September 14th to ensure your spot.

**Fowler...**

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which makes lip-reading very easy." He chuckled and said he needed to keep that in mind. "We who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5).

The church already has its victory in Jesus! What's left is for us to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb 12.1). Next time someone complains that you're too fond of football, explain that you enjoy pondering its metaphorical implications!

**Allison ...**

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visits were not an option. Several years later, they decided to make the jump to being full-time residents and start Blairsville's own community radio station, WUCG FM 93.1.

When asked what the favorite thing about his job was, he shared with me a little bit of how he got started in radio. "I started as a radio announcer when I was 15 years old. Every time I am on the radio it is like reliving some of the best days of my life as a young rock n roll radio D.J. I like putting together a show I know will be good for the listener. It is my way of being an entertainer... especially since I can't sing."

When asked about his background and his previous work experiences in radio, this is what he had to say: "I was and still am an online college professor. I love helping others be all they can be. I received my Doctorate in 2003 and have now chaired 15 dissertation committees helping others receive their doctorate. I teach for American Military University Online. As a Vietnam vet I enjoy working with military students. By the way, along the way I have worked for 14 radio stations and was nominated to the Florida Radio Hall of Fame in 2011."

He has also had an opportunity to meet someone famous and shared that experience with me.

"I had the pleasure of meeting and spending the afternoon with David Thomas, founder of Wendy's in Chicago several years ago. I was President of Sales and Marketing Executives of Atlanta at the time and he was the speaker of a national conference I attended. I always liked the way he did his own commercials and saved Wendy's from bankruptcy."

When asked to share a piece of inspirational advice he was given as a child, he recalls one that his Mom shared with him.

"It is so simple but my Mom always emphasized to us kids to treat others like we wanted to be treated. It works so well."

The final question was for him to share with us a favorite quote; it is from Thomas Edison "I have never failed; I have just found the ways that won't work."

Be sure to tune in to the Chamber Connection on Local TV4 Windstream to see my complete interview with Dr. Larry and representatives from the Georgia Department of Labor; Janet Chapman and Danette Smith.

For a complete listing of all of our Chamber Members as well as events happening in the community, visit our website at VisitBlairsvilleGa.com. If you would like to receive our weekly e-newsletters contact us at the Chamber office at 706-745-5789.

**Chief ...**

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a disaster. If the funds are not used during this disaster, they can be used to better prepare for the next one so please consider donating. Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~