

# BOE...from Page 1A



**Former long-time State Rep. Carlton Colwell received recognition in the Nov. 19 school board meeting. Joining him that evening were Luke Colwell, Carla Drake, Karla Colwell and Bill Parker.**  
Photo by Mark Smith

man had and still has a vision for what's right – for kids, for girls and boys, for our state, for our country."

Joining Colwell for his recognition ceremony were his grandson, Luke Colwell, daughters Carla Drake and Karla Colwell, and former Union County Schools Assistant Superintendent Bill Parker.

"I just want to say that I appreciate this," Colwell said. "But you all do a job that – I don't envy you, let me just say that. And I appreciate the superintendent and the board, because it's not easy. Thank you all very much. I appreciate this."

In other school news, Hill said a lot of positive things have taken place this year, including a flourishing athletics program under Athletic Director Dr. Banks Bitterman, a well-

attended patriotic Veterans Day program, a 100% graduation rate in the four-year cohort for special needs students, and more.

Also in the meeting, Assistant Superintendent David Murphy recommended that the board use two different vendors to replace the playground equipment at the elementary school, Woody Gap School and the primary school.

Great Southern Recreation will be replacing the equipment at the elementary school and Woody Gap School for \$110,000, and KorCat, Inc. will do the primary school for \$85,000.

Murphy said they were right on budget with these bids, which were unanimously approved by the board.

Finance Director Karen Bundy commented in the

meeting that the school auditors noticed the low amount of outstanding property taxes in Union County and commended Tax Commissioner Lee Knight for a job well done.

The board unanimously approved a motion to accept the first reading of a board policy update making board officer appointments for chair and vice-chair yearly instead of every two years.

Board members also unanimously approved the graduation petition for Tyler Travis Jones on the recommendations of high school administration and staff.

The next school board meeting will take place on Dec. 17 at 7 p.m. inside the board office at 124 Hughes Street.

# Fire...from Page 1A



**Spry Family Dry Cleaners owner and operator Mary Spry and supporters survey the damage at the family business the morning of the fire.**  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

gap between them, though an exterior wall covers the gap from public view.

The front entrance area of the business located in the adjacent connected building suffered heat and smoke damage, while the fire had no discernible impact on the second building's basement.

Firefighters remained on scene for several hours and even returned twice that morning to extinguish flames that flared back up from smoldering debris buried within the collapsed half of the business.

First responders reached out to business owners Chris and Mary Spry after fighting back the fire, and the couple arrived at their burned building – Chris right away and Mary after taking their children to school – in utter shock.

The Sprys have been in contact with their insurance company about next steps for their business, to include how to go about rebuilding, purchasing new equipment, and cleaning/replacing customer items that were inside the business at the time of the fire.

Mary Spry said they have every intent of returning to business as soon as possible, but they're still working out what they need to do and how long it will take because they've never been through a situation

like this.

And while the couple does have a clothing dropoff/pickup location in Hiawassee, the Blairsville location was where all the actual dry cleaning took place for the business, meaning the Sprys and their employees have lost their source of income for the time being.

"We're just sitting here going, where do we go next, what do we do next?" Mary Spry said. "We both worked in the cleaners, so we had no other income. So, we're worried about our own family and the families who worked for us and just wondering how everybody's going to make it."

"And we're also worried about the people who had items in the cleaners that got destroyed, worrying about how we're going to deal with this with the insurance company on getting those people reimbursed for those items."

Spry said the family will be updating customers on the status of their clothing pending direction from their insurance company on how to move forward with salvaging/replacing items or reimbursement.

Jan Teague of Blairsville has started a "Spry Family Dry Cleaners Fire Fund" on GoFundMe.com, and people looking to assist the family

should be sure to visit the fundraiser online.

"The Spry family are some of the hardest working, kind-hearted folks you'll ever meet," Teague said. "They took a dream and made it into reality and have become a staple of Blairsville, carrying on the traditions of their predecessor Harbins."

"They poured their hearts, blood, sweat and tears the past few years into gaining the confidence and trust of this community. They are an important part of our small businesses here."

"And though insurance may cover the loss, it won't cover the dream they lost. It doesn't keep a roof over their heads. They are the only dry cleaners in our town, and we need them! Please help us help our friends and family, The Sprys."

Mary said she and Chris were extremely grateful for the outpouring of public support during their family's difficult time, and that the Sprys were looking forward to getting back on their feet.

"We have no plan of quitting. We want to rebuild or get another building, whatever we have to do to re-open the business," Spry said. "We want to say thank you to everybody for all their support and all their help."

"Please bear with us – we are going to get everybody taken care of for their items that are in there as soon as we can, we just have to wait on the process that we have to go through with the insurance."

The Sprys have operated their business for about four years out of that building, which formerly housed Harbin Dry Cleaners for decades.

In a completely unrelated incident, state fire investigators are still looking into the Nov. 7 fire at the Nantahala Village Apartment Complex. Investigators have ruled the apartment fire arson and are offering a \$10,000 reward for information that leads to a conviction.

# Gilleland...from Page 1A

attended First Baptist Church of Blairsville, moving here from

Athens, Georgia.

"Besides his parents, Austin is survived by his wife, Samantha, of Blairsville; daughter, Emma Grace; brother, Avery Keith Gilleland; and grandparents Ben and NiEata Telenko and Dennis and Linda Fowler. Many other relatives and friends also survive."

Funeral services for Gilleland were held on Tuesday, Nov. 19, in the chapel of Cochran Funeral Home, with Dr. Fred Lodge and Rev. Derrick Hartley officiating.

Gilleland was a 2014 graduate of the Mountain Education Charter High School Union Site.

**Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse**

**Bell ringing information at 706-745-5493**