

City ...from Page 1A

Blairsville.

The challenger, Payton, a political newcomer, is seeking his first term as mayor.

Payton is running on a platform of lowering city water and sewer bills, abolishing the Downtown Development Authority, asking city residents if they want an extension of the Blairsville Municipal Airport, which is currently underway, and extending the city's Streetscape to include all city streets, from striping, to repairs, to installing sidewalks, to lighted walkways.

Payton, 48, is a full-time student at Young Harris College, and has a 14-year-old son. Payton's wife is deceased.

He has served as a youth league coach.

Mayor Conley, the pres-

ident of the Georgia Municipal Association's Second District, and the City Council during his tenure as mayor, have completed an unprecedented package of projects related to water and sewer.

Since 2008, more than \$9 million in upgrades have been completed using low interest loans, grant dollars and less than \$750,000 in city funds.

The city's sewer capacity has been increased from 400,000 gallons of treatment capacity per day to 1 million gallons of sewer capacity per day.

Also, the city has used Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax shared with the county government, to complete a total renovation project at City Hall.

Payton is opposed to the extension of the 1-cent sales tax, while Mayor Conley and the City Council have entered into an intergovernmental agreement that would support SPLOST and bring \$1.5 million to the City if voters pass the referendum on Nov. 5th.

In his political advertisements, Payton has repeatedly chastised Mayor Conley for voting for a tax increase for city residents.

The SPLOST referendum is not a tax increase, rather, it is an extension of the existing 1-cent sales tax.

If approved, the city would receive 7.89 percent of the proceeds from SPLOST collections, which would last for six more years beginning April 1st, 2015.

The existing SPLOST

III ends March 2015.

Payton proclaims he will be the *People's Mayor*. He aims to disband the Downtown Development Authority, calling it a taxpayer-funded authority.

The DDA is funded through the Hotel/Motel Tax receipts, and not the city's general fund.

Payton also accuses Mayor Conley of failing to tell city residents that sewer rates increased by 12 percent, and water consumption was lowered by 33 percent.

Sewer rates actually increased by 18.6 percent, as passed by the City Council in April.

News of the rate increase was reported on the front page of the April 3rd, 2013 edition of the *North Georgia News*.

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those funds for other projects or purpose, according to the agreement.

The county is responsible for the cost of the election, according to the agreement.

The proposed projects for the county include approximately \$5 million to pay off the bond debt of the Union County Community Center, \$3.4 million for parks and recreation upgrades and improvements, solid waste upgrades and improvements, library upgrades

and improvements, roads, streets and bridges, and economic development facilities and land acquisition.

The City of Blairsville's proposed projects include water and sewer improvements, public safety equipment and vehicles, public works vehicles, equipment, roads, and sidewalks.

"The proposed collection of \$19 million is over a six-year period," Paris said. "We based these numbers on

actually less than we've collected over the last six years.

"We've been through one of the worst recessions I believe in American History," Paris said. "We've been through downtimes and still we've been able to hold our numbers above \$19 million."

"We feel comfortable that this is a really safe and conservative number," Paris said. "Previously, we projected \$31.5 million for SPLOST III. At the time, that was an

accurate projection in 2007, that was when we first started, and before the economy went in the ditch.

"In this particular SPLOST, we're trying to keep our numbers right at what we conservatively think they will be."

Early voting continues through Friday, and the last chance to cast a ballot is Tuesday, Nov. 5th. The polls are open on Tuesday from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Winery ...from Page 1A

vignon, and *Just Loferin'*. Names like that are certain to pique the interest of wine connoisseurs.

"We've been open for a few weeks now and are holding off on our grand opening until three more of our labels are approved," Steve Odom said. "The government shutdown has really messed us up on getting all five of our wines available. But after we get those other three labels approved we're going to have our grand opening through the chamber." As the vineyard continues to stretch across the landscape, more choices will become available in the spring, but for now, the Odoms offer two selections that are sure to please any and all wine enthusiasts who make the short drive out to Odom Springs.

Earl's Reserve is named for the late Earl Odom, the iconic Union County Panther basketball coach and former Union County Schools Superintendent, and father of owners Steve Odom and Shari Odom Rohrbaugh.

This wine is periodically available when the vineyard releases its finest vintages. This year, *Earl's Reserve* is a bold 2010 Merlot. Earl Odom is honored with his own wine as he preserved the land where the winery and vineyard now stand.

RoDawg Red is a blend of red wines that will vary from year to year. Currently, *RoDawg Red* is a blend of 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Sangiovese. The Sangoivese, a dominant grape in Italian Chianti, gives this blend a nice fruity flavor to compliment the boldness of Cabernet and Merlot.

In the spring, *Sharptop Seyval*, a white wine, and *They Lord*, which is a nice blend of estate grown Seyval Blanc and a semi-sweet Vidal Blanc, each will be available.

According to the Odom Clan, "They Lord" is what Grandma Odom would exclaim when she was pleasantly surprised. And you will also be when you taste it.

The goal of Odom Springs is to provide the finest estate grown wines possible in the fertile Appalachian soil. According to Steve Odom, quality takes time, so some of the initial wines are used from grapes purchased from other local wineries as Odom's vineyards and wines mature.

The grand opening is right around the corner, but until then, you can visit the tasting room located in the beautiful Young Cane Valley. You also can enjoy the wines



Odom Springs Winery is open for business. The winery features *Earl's Reserve*, named for iconic UCHS basketball coach Earl Odom. Photo: Todd Forrest

and mountain views on the open-air pavilion as you look out over the vineyards and ponds.

The land where the vineyard and winery now stand have been in the family for more than 150 years, but Steve Odom and family began planting grapes a few years ago. And like the fine wines offered at Odom Springs, the winery is certain to get better with age and become a staple

in North Georgia's blossoming wine country.

"We planted our first grape in 2008, just to see if we could do this," Steve Odom said. "So we played around with the idea for a couple of years and then we realized that it was possible. Right now we've got about three acres of vines and this spring we're planting another block to get up around four (acres) and we'll just take it from there."

Valor ...from Page 1A

dition is a copyrighted group, and the quilts are made according to QOV guidelines.

Each quilt is made unique, and sewn with love, prayers, and gratitude for each combat veteran.

"We consider them our true American Heroes for their courage, sacrifice and valor," said Linda Gorman, with Quilts of Valor.

Misty Mountain Quilters are scheduled to hand out QOV to veterans at the First United Methodist Church in Blairsville at 1 p.m. on Tuesday.