More Top Headlines ...

Arrest nets drugs, stolen goods

Special to the *Times-Courier*
Gilmer County Sheriff's Office

Detectives from the Gilmer County Sheriff's Office and agents from the Zell Miller Mountain Parkway Drug Task force conducted an undercover operation in Gilmer County which resulted in the arrest of Michael Pro, age 46, of Ellijay, Thursday, May 15.

Agents with the Zell Miller Mountain Parkway Drug Task Force and Gilmer County detectives Calvin Wilson, Rick Clayton, and Lane Bennett were conducting an investigation involving stolen property and illegal drugs. During this investigation Pro approached an undercover officer and sold drugs. Pro also sold the undercover officer savings bonds that were taken in a burglary in Gilmer County.

Pro is currently being held on the following charges: distribution of Schedule 4 drugs; possession with the intent to distribute Schedule 4 drugs; conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine; 21 counts of theft by receiving stolen property; and 21 counts of forgery.

In a separate incident on May 15, Sgt. Brian Crump, Capt. R.T. Henry and Det. Bennett solved two residential burglary incidents that occurred in the Yukon Road area. Numerous stolen items were located and returned to the victims. Some of the items recovered were building materials, ladders, landscape materials, hand tools, leaf blowers and table saws. This case is still under investigation and arrests are expected.

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Water autority eases outdoor restrictions, but schedules, penalties still in place

by Michael Andrews
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Due to improved river conditions and new allowances by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD), the Ellijay-Gilmer County Water and Sewerage Authority (EGCWSA) has eased the outdoor watering restrictions put in place during exceptional Level Four drought conditions.

This does not mean that watering schedules have returned to pre-Level Four conditions, however, since certain restrictions are still in place. The water authority is stressing that the Gilmer County area is still grouped under Level Four drought conditions, but due to the recent lifting of 10 percent production cutbacks ordered by Gov. Sonny Perdue, that some uses of purchased water not allowed previously will now be OK'd.

Under the modified restrictions, certain watering activities can take place at any time. These include "irrigation of personal food and vegetable gardens, as well as capture and reuse of cooling system condensate (or air conditioner drippings), storm water and gray water in compliance with applicable local ordinances." Gray water is defined as "used wastewater from a sink, dishwasher or other appliance," according to EGCWSA assistant director Chris Merz.

Several of the new allowances are specifically for commercial customers. A list of acceptable uses and occupations compiled by the authority reads that the following commercial outdoor uses of purchased water are now allowed: for irrigation contracting (during installation and as needed for proper maintenance and adjustments only), use by sod producers, use by ornamental growers, use by fruit/vegetable growers, use by retail garden centers, for hydro-seeding, for power washing, for use on construction sites, for production of food and fiber, use by car washes, for watering-in of turf pesticides/ herbicides and for other water-utilizing activities essential to daily business.

The following two allowances apply to both residential and commercial users:

1. "Each household, business or other institution/property owner will be allowed to hand water existing landscaping, using one garden hose, 25 minutes per day within the hours of midnight to 10 a.m. only on designated days. Odd-numbered addresses may hand water Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. Even-numbered addresses may hand water Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. The hose must be hand held during watering and equipped with a standard spray nozzle that automatically turns off when not hand held."

2. "Newly installed landscaping that has been in place less than 30 days may be watered up to three days a week within the hours of midnight and 6 a.m., but only for 10 consecutive weeks and during plant installation. Odd-numbered addresses may hand water Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. Even-numbered addresses may hand water Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays."

Under new water authority guidelines, any person watering newly installed landscaping must register with the Outdoor Water Use Registration Program. The online address at which to register is http://www.urbanagcouncil.com.

Questions about registering and how to access the site, as well as questions about what is and isn't allowed under new regulations, should be addressed to the EGCWSA at (706) 276-2202.

Though some watering restrictions have been eased, the authority still has strict violation penalties in place. A warning is issued for the first violation, a $100 fine for the second, a $1,000 fine for the third and a $5,000 fee for the fourth violation. If a customer reaches five or more violations, the fee will continue from $5,000 and be doubled for each additional violation. For example, a fifth violation could garner a $10,000 fine and so on.

"It's usually someone violating by intent if they get up there to those third, fourth or fifth violation fines," says Merz about the stiff penalties. "We're trying to be informative, not harsh, about what is and isn't allowed." Merz notes that, under the new allowances, sprinkler use is only allowed for watering in newly installed landscaping between the odd/even schedule days and designated hours (up to three days a week, within the hours of midnight and 6 a.m.).

"The biggest problem we're probably going to see under these new regulations is people thinking it will be OK to go ahead and turn on their sprinklers," says Merz. "On new landscaping, only, can they use sprinklers. The problem is that people might have different interpretations of what new landscaping is. The new allowances define it as having been in place for less than 30 days. If you have landscaping that's been in place over that amount of time and you go buy new plants to add to that landscape, then you should, really, hand water them and not use sprinklers. Technically, using sprinklers in that situation would be a violation. We strongly advise those with actual new landscaping to go online and register it at www.urban agcouncil.com. That way, they will have proof if there is any confusion."

Elect Tony Whitaker
Commission Chairman
To the Taxpayers of Gilmer County

As the old saying goes, the only two things certain, are "Death and Taxes." Most of us received letters from the tax assessors office the past few days, and can appeal the new assessments. After all, we fought for our independence over taxation without representation! I hope all citizens who disagree with their assessments will exercise their right to appeal.

Property Taxation

There should be a percentage limit that the county can raise the property assessment from one year to the next. Everyone in the Tax Assessors office should be a resident of Gilmer County if at all possible. There should be a time limit from one reassessment until another, minimum three or four years. People serving on the "Board of Equalization" should be residents of Gilmer County, and serve no longer than three-year terms.

My Platform for the Citizens of Gilmer County

I'm for less taxes
I'm for cutting spending
I'm for the taxpayers
I'm for a balanced budget
I'm for not supporting special interest
I'm not for the county and taxpayers funding
the Gilmer County water authority.
I'm for the county officials answering to the taxpayers
as to where their money is going.

With excessive taxes, we will not have new growth or industry.

It's time for a change, wake up Gilmer County, we're in a recession! There's never a good time for excessive taxation. If elected as your commisson chairman, I will work to improve on how your county is operated.

Sincerely,
Tony Whitaker

Paid for by the candidate.

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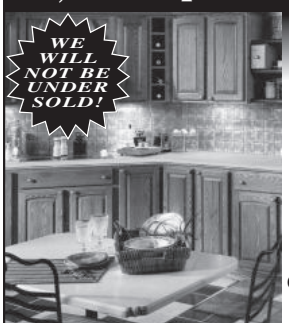

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