



Ellijay's latest author introduces novel

See Gilmer Living 1B



Lady Cats finish second in season opening tourney

See Gilmer Living 1B



B.E.S.T. Series Christmas Concert this Friday

See Around Town 1D

Times - Courier

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Gilmer law officers have 'booming' Thanksgiving

by Al Summers
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Deputies from the Gilmer County Sheriff's Department and agents and technicians from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) gave more than thanks for food, health, and family on Thanksgiving Day. They were thankful that nobody was injured by some dynamite and blasting caps that were found in the woods.

During the afternoon on Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, Nov. 27, at approximately 4:30 p.m., Gilmer Sheriff's deputies responded to a suspicious item and possible explosives call in the Coosawattee River Resort. The items were found in the woods off Debbie

Court.

Upon arrival, Dep. Jamie Knight observed items which consisted of five white tubes approximately eight inches in length with electrical wires wrapped around them. Knight and other deputies secured the area and Coosawattee public safety personnel evacuated a couple of nearby residences.

Gilmer County Sheriff Stacy Nicholson arrived on the scene and examined the suspicious items and determined that they appeared to be commercially manufactured explosives with blasting caps attached. He contacted GBI's Bomb Disposal Unit.

After members of the GBI Bomb Unit arrived and conducted their

investigation, they confirmed the items were explosives of a commercially manufactured nature. They secured most of the items and brought them safely out of the wooded area. Those items that appeared unstable were detonated at the scene.

"I'm sure many residents heard the rather loud 'boom' around 9 p.m. Thursday evening. This was a result of the controlled detonation by the bomb unit," said Nicholson.

The sheriff concluded, "Of course, the question to be answered is where the explosives came from, and how did they get dumped in the woods where neighborhood children play?"

These are questions that the sheriff's office will be trying to answer."

Gilmer voters go for Chambliss, McDonald

by Al Summers
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Voters in Gilmer County returned to the polls in a runoff election Tuesday, Dec. 2, to vote for their choice on a U.S. Senator, a member of the public service commission, and a judge on the Georgia Court of Appeals.

Of the 15,381 registered voters, only 6,551 turned out to cast votes, which represented 42.59 percent of the voting population.

In the vote for U.S. Senate, Republican Saxby Chambliss received 5,051 votes, or 77 percent, to Democratic challenger Jim Martin's 1,477 votes, or 23 percent.

Statewide results were not available at the press deadline, but Chambliss was ahead in the precincts that had reported.

In the race for Public Service Commission in Gilmer County, Republican Lauren McDonald received 4,642 votes, or 75 percent, to Democrat Jim Powell's 1,509 votes, or 25 percent. Of the precincts reporting statewide, McDonald led that race.

In the race for a judgeship on the Georgia Court of Appeals, Sara Doyle received 2,962 votes in Gilmer County, or 56 percent, to Mike Shefield's 2,283 votes, or 44 percent. At press time, Doyle was leading statewide.

Pilgrim's Pride files for bankruptcy

by Becky Antworth
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Pilgrim's Pride Corporation — owner of the processing plant in Ellijay — filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, Monday, Dec. 1.

Their stock gapped lower at market's open on Monday and continued to plummet, leading up to and following the bankruptcy announcement.

Pilgrim's Pride stock has been falling precipitously over the past year, as the poultry industry at large has struggled with high feed and fuel costs, and a market surplus of meat.

In March, Pilgrim's Pride shut down seven facilities.

As of September 27, the company reported it had \$3.75 billion in assets and \$2.72 billion in debt. Many analysts attribute the company's debt problems to its \$1.3 billion takeover of rival Gold Kist Inc. in 2007.

In the past few months, Pilgrim's Pride repeatedly sought extensions from creditors, the most recent of which was set

to expire Monday afternoon. Combined with fourth quarter losses projected over \$800 million, the company had no choice but to fly the coop — seeking the safety of Chapter 11 protection.

With 35 processing plants — including the one in Ellijay — and 11 prepared-foods facilities, Pilgrim's Pride makes up about one-quarter of the U.S. poultry market.

The company said the filing is not expected to result in layoffs or plant closings. In a statement issued to the *Times-Courier*, Pilgrim's Pride spokesman Ray Atkinson said Chapter 11 will allow the company to better address their financial challenges, and that there are no plans to cut additional employees or close facilities as a direct result.

"Through this process, we will be able to maximize profitability and emerge from Chapter 11 as a stronger company, well-positioned for long-term success," said Atkinson.

In a statement on the Pilgrim's Pride Web site, president and CEO Clint Rivers

said, "First and foremost, this does not mean we are going out of business. In fact, I'd like to emphasize that we expect it will be 'business as usual' as we work through this restructuring process."

The company is working to secure \$450 million in debtor financing to cover wages and other obligations.

But while management says it will be 'business as usual,' analysts say bankruptcy will allow Pilgrim's Pride to rid itself of excess production capacity to get back in the black.

In other words, the company has been killing too many chickens, and further con-

tributing to a market glut of meat. By slowing production, the company could cut expenses while waiting for excess supply to ebb and demand to rebound.

The Ellijay plant already decreased production recently, following a business decision in August unrelated to Monday's filing.

In response to an inquiry from the *Times-Courier* last week, Atkinson said the plant eliminated approximately 170 positions in the "big bird department" on the third shift, after a switch to smaller birds resulted in less product to process.

All eliminations were han-

dled through attrition, meaning no employees were laid off.

Next week, however, the plant will lay off workers. Another 170 positions in the first shift of the big bird department will be eliminated.

Atkinson said employees have been notified of the change. The company would not disclose specific financial information on the Ellijay branch, or its future viability.

The branch currently has about 1,500 employees. Area farmers also supply poultry to the plant.

In addition, Pilgrim's Pride makes up about half of the Ellijay-Gilmer County Water and Sewerage Authority's

business. The recent production cuts have already resulted in a 10-million gallon per month decrease in water and sewer needs, which is costing the EGCWSA an estimated \$50,000 per month. They have tightened spending, and, in October, laid off all three of their part-time employees.

The EGCWSA is currently working on strategies to cope with additional production cuts at the plant or, in the worse case, a complete shutdown.

Strategies include a further reduction in expenses or a "significant rate increase," said EGCWSA director Emory DeBord.

A county divided

Part 1 of 3: They came to work

by Becky Antworth
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Miquel looked at the lights in his rearview mirror.

"La policia."
"Otra vez, he could have added. Again.

The four men in the car kept their faces forward.

Their shift had just ended — this week, cleaning the equipment that killed and cut up chickens at the poultry plant. A hot shower was waiting. Perhaps a hot meal of anything but chicken.

Miquel felt around for his wallet. He was the designated driver — not because anyone had been drinking, especially not at that early hour, when the hills were barely a silhouette against the sky and the town still lay sleeping — but because he was the only one who knew how.

And, when red and blue lights flashed behind him, he knew the drill.

He cranked down the window of the late-model Taurus. He hadn't been speeding; he didn't run a light. Maybe he'd drifted into the other lane. Or maybe the street light had shone, for just a second, on his brown skin. After all — so many of them didn't have

licenses.

His hands shook on the steering wheel. A few drops of sweat slid down his back. He'd paid \$1,000 for his license, along with a Social Security card — borrowed money for which he'd washed the killing machines, or hung flapping chickens by their feet, for 165 hours before earning enough to pay it back. Work he did while the smell of death (infectious torn open, the metallic taint of blood) settled in his hair and stayed forever in his nostrils.

But even if he was deported — even if tomorrow he was sent back to Guatemala — it had been worth every minute spent in that stinking, squalid place.

Rising Numbers

Hispanic immigration to the U.S. has been climbing for decades. In 2005, Hispanics and Latinos made up 14 percent of the population, a number that's expected to triple by 2050. In Georgia, they were 1.7 percent of the population in 1990, 5.3 percent by 2000, and an estimated 8 percent in 2008.

Gilmer County is somewhat
See Immigration page 4A

Christmas story deadline this Friday

The deadline for entering a Christmas story is next Friday, Dec. 12 at 5 p.m.

The winning stories, and as many of the others as space allows, will be published in the Dec. 25 edition of the *Times-Courier*. The first place winner will receive \$35, second place \$25, and third place \$20.

Entries should be 500 words or less, and typewritten, if possible. Artwork may be submitted with stories, but it will not be judged as part of the contest.

Stories can be submitted via e-mail by sending them to editor@timescourier.com, or they can be mailed to the *Times-Courier*, P.O. Box 1076, Ellijay, GA 30540. You may also drop them by our office at 47 River Street. Please include your name, address, and phone number.

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Photo by Becky Antworth
Carlos (left) and Ricardo (right) from Guatemala have been living and working in Ellijay for two and nine years, respectively.



Photo by Becky Antworth
A Hispanic shop and church sit side by side in Ellijay. They are just two of many easy-to-miss, Hispanic-owned establishments in the county.