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# Times-Courier

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## Marijuana farmer has crop harvested early

by Al Summers  
alsummers@timescourier.com

At least one farmer has had his crop harvested early, and not by the pickers of his choosing.

Agents from the Zell Miller Mountain Parkway Drug Task Force (DTF) arrested Woodrow Alfred Seibert III, age 41, Thursday, May 28, and charged him with manufacturing

marijuana. The arrest concluded a two-week investigation after DTF agents received information he was growing several plants at his Roundtop Road home.

Task force agents obtained a search warrant for the residence, and with assistance of deputies from the Gilmer County Sheriff's Office executed it during the day Thursday.

According to a statement

released by the DTF, "Two plants were located in the front of the home. These plants were approximately one to two feet tall. There were 225 seedlings located on the property. These seedlings were in planters and a manicured area next to the home."

The statement went on to explain, "If allowed to mature, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) con-

siders each plant to be able to produce one pound of marijuana, with a street value of \$1,200 per plant. These plants, if grown to maturity, would have a street value of \$272,400. In another month his plants would have been several feet in height, and could have been distributed to the community."

A DTF spokesperson said, "We usually locate plants

when they are tall enough for neighbors or hunters to readily identify. In those situations, we always ask ourselves how many were processed and made it into the community. In Mr. Seibert's case he did not get that far."

With the present state of the economy, this could be a record year for plant seizures in the Appalachian Circuit. The majority of

seizures are generated by citizen tips. Many of the tips come from hunters and outdoor enthusiasts who stumble across the plants.

The spokesperson said, "If you do (locate plants), please leave the area and report the information to 911 or the drug task force. You can contact the DTF at 1-866-920-6384 or 706-253-8920. All calls are considered anonymous."

## Assessors office sends out 2009 value notices, responds to state-imposed assessment freeze

by Michael Andrews  
andrews@timescourier.com

The Gilmer County Assessors Office has mailed out 8,895 real and 641 personal property assessment notices for 2009, as was confirmed at the board of assessors regular meeting held Wednesday, May 27. The notices are required to be mailed even though most values will remain frozen at their 2008 configurations for the next three years due to the recent passage of Georgia House Bill 233.

The bill, signed into law May 6, places a moratorium on tax assessment increases until the Sunday immediately preceding the second Monday in January of 2011. Says Gilmer Chief Appraiser Dawn Pruett, even though the law suggests that January 2011, is when the freeze ends, frozen values will still remain in place until 2012, because of the tax year criteria that must be adhered to by assessors offices and other municipal bodies.

This also means, says Pruett, that local assessors offices will now have to keep track of two assessed fair market values - the one determined by the local agency for sake of uniformity, which will still be allowed to fluctuate, and the frozen value that will be used to help determine county, city and school

taxes. The move to freeze assessed values may sound like a benefit to taxpayers, but many who work in Georgia's municipalities fear that it will, instead, cause either school or commissioners' boards to adjust their millage rates in order to compensate for the frozen assessments. Such a situation could mean higher property taxes for homeowners than if the assessments had been allowed to fluctuate as they would normally.

The freeze prevents only against assessment increases, says Pruett, but if certain changes are made to a property or a filed appeal is recognized, some assessed values could be lowered even further. This is another reason, despite the values being frozen at the 2008 level, that assessment notices are still being mailed to property owners.

The bill also includes a freeze on automobile ad valorem tax rates, says Pruett. Traditionally, the more a vehicle ages, the more its value depreciates and the more affordable its annual tag renewal becomes. But, this way, such reasoning does not apply.

The assessment freeze arrives within the same time frame as the Georgia General Assembly's news

See Assessors page 4A

## Gilmer citizens, protectors, honored for community service at BOC meeting

by Becky Antworth  
bantworth@timescourier.com

Gilmer County Board of Commissioners, Chairman Mark Chastain and post commissioners Will Beattie and J.C. Sanford, met for their bi-monthly meeting Thursday, May 28.

The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution started things off with an awards ceremony. The Sons of the American Revolution recognize individuals who have demonstrated exemplary service to their community. They presented two Gilmer County public protectors with medals of achievement at the meeting.

The Gilmer County Sheriff's Department nominated deputy Greg Dotson to receive the Law Enforcement Medal. Deputy Dotson has served in the sheriff's department since February 2006, and "reflects the professionalism the Gilmer County Sheriff's Office strives to present to the public on a daily basis," said the department.

The Gilmer County Fire and Rescue Department selected volunteer firefighter Paul Elder to receive the Fire Safety Medal, saying "Paul is always willing to



Photo by Becky Antworth

The Blue Ridge Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, represented by Chapter President Harry Strickland (far right) and local representative Mike Britton (far left), presented awards to deputy Greg Dotson, second from right, with the Gilmer County Sheriff's Department, and Paul Elder, second from left, a Gilmer County firefighter, for their exemplary community service.

do the extra work and take on needed tasks that others may not."

Harry Strickland, president of the Sons of the American Revolution's Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter,

and Mike Britton, a local representative, presented the awards.

Commissioner Sanford proposed a potential change to the county bidding process. Sanford rec-

ommended sealed bids for county projects be opened in the presence of the BOC, and that all bidders be notified of the time and date of

See Commission page 4A

## Water authority approves 2009-2010 operating budget

by Michael Andrews  
andrews@timescourier.com

When meeting Tuesday, May 26, the Ellijay-Gilmer County Water and Sewerage Authority (EGCWSA) Board of Directors approved the authority's 2009-2010 original operating revenue budget.

The 2009-2010 budget stands at \$4,696,870.36, confirms EGCWSA Director Emory DeBord. The budget represents the operating revenue of the authority and what will be available in house to fund current and future water authority projects.

DeBord says that the '09-'10 budget is "only about five percent higher" than the 2008-2009 budget, which was reduced from

that of previous years due to the local Pilgrim's Pride facility filing for bankruptcy and a subsequent drop in revenue related to state-imposed 10 percent water withdrawal cutbacks.

DeBord adds that, if incoming revenue stays on an even keel, that the authority does not expect to have to implement any subsequent rate increases except for the typical inflationary adjustment occurring in July along with similar adjustments by power and gas companies.

DeBord also gave updates on current authority projects including construction on the six-million gallon water storage tank on Victory Circle in Ellijay and progress on acquiring Georgia Environmental

Facilities Authority (GEFA) stimulus funds that, if awarded to the EGCWSA, will be used for line rehabilitation work in the neighborhood of \$70,000, while the Coosawatee River Resort development.

Construction on the Victory Circle tank, itself, is complete said DeBord. The EGCWSA is waiting on Lanier Construction to start work on the facility's high service pump building.

The proposed Coosawatee rehabilitation work is still a "wait and see," project, said DeBord, as GEFA has yet to award any stimulus funds to the authority. DeBord confirmed that there is a very long list of Georgia municipalities seeking the same money.

If the EGCWSA does

receive the funds, DeBord stated that the engineering and costs to be paid by the authority would be in the neighborhood of \$70,000, while the Coosawatee development would be required to put up around \$30,000 for the work.

Due to work that will be related to bringing a new pump station online, Ellijay's Coosawatee Drive, which connects Highway 515 and Progress Road, will probably be closed for a few days within the coming week, said DeBord. The exact dates have yet to be determined. Motorists will, instead, need to take the new Simmons Road or Maddox Drive to reach Highway 515 while the construction is underway.

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