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Gilmer High evacuated due to anthrax scare

by **Al Summers and Whitney Crouch**

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One day after Ellijay City Hall was shut down due to an envelope containing an unidentified white powder and a note mentioning "anthrax," Gilmer High School had to be evacuated last Wednesday, March 3, for the same thing.

Just before school was supposed to begin that morning, a food service worker opened an envelope that contained a "white powder substance" and a note "similar" to that which was delivered to Ellijay City Hall. The food service worker delivered the envelope to school resource officer Sam Smith who called 911.

According to Gilmer County Sheriff Stacy Nicholson, who was one of the first to arrive on the scene, very few if any students were in the building.

Nicholson said the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was notified as was the United States Postal Inspector and agents from Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Professionals from the

Cherokee County Fire Department's Hazardous Materials Unit were dispatched to Gilmer County for the second day in a row to secure the suspicious envelope and its contents. They entered the school building and bagged the material and turned it over to the postal inspectors so they could test it at the postal laboratory.

After the discovery of the letter and powder, school administrators immediately reported the threat and put the school's emergency management plan into effect. Everyone was evacuated from the building, except for potentially contaminated individuals. Fortunately, there were very few students in the building at the time, since school had been delayed two hours because of snow.

As students arrived, they were sent to the gymnasium to wait for rides or for the buses to run in the afternoon. Those who had personal vehicles were sent home immediately.

Gilmer County School Superintendent Randy Parson noted that most students quickly found rides home and

by lunch, only about 150 students remained in the gym.

He also said the school's emergency plan worked well and only needed a little tweaking for the situation. Additional safety precautions are being taken across the school system and all incoming mail is being checked closely.

Investigators determined that the powder was a non-harmful substance, but it will undergo further testing at the postal laboratory.

Parson commended the Gilmer sheriff's department for handling the situation so well. He described the officers as "very well organized and professional" and expressed gratitude for how effectively they directed traffic and calmed anxious students.

While Parson is thankful for how well the disruption was handled, he expressed frustration that the hoax disrupted school. Gilmer County students have missed a lot of class time this semester and every missed day has a negative effect on education. Parson is especially concerned for students who are scheduled to begin the graduation test next Monday, March 15.

GHS announces top graduates for 2010



Contributed photo

Salutatorian **Brittany Newberry**, Valedictorian **Davis Lacey**, STAR student **Grey Newell** and STAR teacher, **Melinda Abercrombie**.

by **Whitney Crouch**

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Gilmer High School's senior class of 2010 is currently enjoying the homestretch toward graduation.

In preparation for this event, the administration recently announced the names of this year's 47 honor graduates. These students have worked extremely hard over the past four years to maintain a high grade point average.

According to GHS Principal Erik Hofstetter, this class has consistently been focused on success. As a whole, this year's seniors have "completed more AP (Advanced Placement) classes than any prior class."

He added, "We are very

happy with our honor graduates."

GHS has also announced the 2010 salutatorian, valedictorian, STAR student and STAR teacher.

The 2010 salutatorian is Brittany Newberry. She said that receiving this honor was "completely unexpected," but is greatly pleased that all of her hard work has paid off.

In the fall, Newberry will be attending Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem. She plans to double major in English and Spanish and eventually wants to become an international lawyer.

Davis Lacey is the valedictorian of the 2010 graduating class. He described finding out that he was top of his class as "one of

those really cool moments." As a freshman, Lacey set his sights on becoming valedictorian and is pleased that he has achieved his goal.

He will be attending Mercer University for a degree in environmental engineering.

Hofstetter applauded these top students for their outstanding achievement and for completing a "rigorous curriculum."

Gilmer's 2010 STAR student has also been selected.

The STAR student is recognized by the Student Teacher Achievement Recognition program for having the highest SAT score in his or her graduating class as of November of senior year. Recipients must also

See **Graduates** page 4A

Airport board faces a barrage of paperwork

by **Ryan R Rees**

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Running an airport apparently involves a lot of paperwork.

The Gilmer County Airport Advisory Board met March 5 and two agenda items up for consideration both involved additional paperwork that is needed to be completed. A third item was added to the agenda involving yet another letter request.

The Gilmer airport was one of 3,000 in the nation asked to complete a Homeland Security - TSA review questionnaire.

Jim Smith, community development director, noted that the report had been filed earlier that day by e-mail.

"The questionnaire looks at a variety of security issues," he told board members. "The top five things on the form concerned enclosed fencing, signage, lighting, closed-circuit TV and personnel badging."

Smith also noted that the Federal Aviation Authority also requires a National Based Aircraft Report on a regular basis, something the county hasn't done since mid-December of last year.

"This report needs to be updated on a regular basis. It's not a once-a-year thing he said.

The report is intended to track what aircraft are based at what airport. Currently, the Gilmer airport has five aircraft based there, two of them

recently re-located from nearby airports.

"That's one of the things the report asks for, when planes are relocated," Smith noted.

Board member Mike Jones asked the board to submit a letter to a Georgia Department of Transportation GPS approach survey.

"A full survey that tracks high spots on the field or obstructions can cost from \$15,000 to \$25,000. But the

See **Airport** page 4A

BOC to finalize bond allocation funds

The Gilmer County Board of Commissioners will hold a work session at 4 p.m. Thursday in the board of commissioners conference room to discuss how to allocate \$8.9 million remaining from a \$30 million General Obligation Bond.

The work session will be followed by the commission's regular meeting at 6 p.m. in the jury assembly room at the courthouse.

At a work session two weeks ago, the commissioners reviewed a list of 18 projects under consideration. The list will be finalized and presented at the regular board meeting.

The regular meeting has seven items on the agenda including two zoning changes and a stream buffer variance to create a watercraft launching area on the Coosawattee River at the south end of the Lions Club fields.

Also on the agenda is a resolution to comply with state requirements regarding general obligation sales tax bonds issued by the county school district, a resolution to amend a property deed at Whitepath Golf Course and to amend the terms of a deeded tract of land near Clear Creek Middle School back to the school board.

EGCWSA addresses sewer spill, holds brief board meeting

by **Michael Andrews**

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A sewer line blockage that occurred Wednesday, Feb. 24, along River Terrace in Ellijay amounted to less than 100 gallons of spillage and was confined to the area within a nearby road ditch, according to Ellijay-Gilmer County Water and Sewerage Authority (EGCWSA) assistant director Chris Merz.

The spill was generated by a clog in the sewer line caused by an abundance of paper hand towels, said Merz. Merz also stated that no waterways were contaminated by the spill. The waterway nearest to the spill site is the Coosawattee River.

The EGCWSA Board of Directors discussed an array of current projects when meeting briefly Monday, Feb. 22.

EGCWSA Director Emory DeBord told attending board members Mack Wood, Mike Gibbs, Chris Teague and Tony Whitaker that rehab work on some of the areas of Coosawattee River Resort fund-

ing, in part, by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funds is 100 percent complete.

DeBord said that water system rehab of Navaho Way, Manor Court, Zenith Trail and Centergate Drive within the development has been completed. Work on Zebbin Road is about 50 percent done. After work in that area and work on Riverview Drive has been completed, rehab in the Beaver Bend area of the development will be done, added DeBord.

The EGCWSA plans to tackle the main development gate entrance, the Villa Drive area and the connection between Nexus Drive and Hwy. 382 next.

DeBord also told board members that materials have been ordered to begin the extension of the water main beneath Howard Simmons Road as soon as rehab work at the Cripple Creek subdivision is complete.

An update on an agreement between the EGCWSA and the Falling Waters development was given at the meet-

ing by DeBord. Falling Water proprietors Alan Dover and Joe Hensley planned to operate a private, stand-alone utility called Clear Creek Utilities within the subdivision to which water would be supplied by the EGCWSA as a trustee, said DeBord.

As of the EGCWSA meeting, neither representative from Falling Waters had signed the trustee agreement required by the EGCWSA, or renewed an expired \$50,000 letter of credit required to cover liabilities associated with supplying water to the development, said DeBord.

Board members decided to give Falling Waters until March 17 to comply with the agreement and to renew the letter of credit. If they do not comply by that date, said DeBord, the EGCWSA will have the option to notify the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) that the authority no longer wishes to be a trustee and water supplier for the development.

DeBord said that Ellijay, East Ellijay and Gilmer County are in line for Com-

munity Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds that, if granted, will be used primarily for sewer system improvements. Ellijay has already been awarded its \$500,000 share of CDBG funds, while another \$1,000,000 has yet to be confirmed for East Ellijay and Gilmer County, who have both applied for the state grants.

DeBord also informed the board of an offer by the Pine Bluff Landfill, operated by the Waste Management company, to take and dispose of outgoing sludge from the Gilmer County Wastewater Treatment Plant for \$32 a ton.

Currently, the EGCWSA pays Advanced Disposal \$32.24 per ton for sludge disposal. If the agreement is finalized, the wastewater plant would, in exchange, accept leachate, or rainwater runoff, from the landfill at the cost of \$16 per 1,000 gallons.

The arrangement could eliminate an expense item and create a revenue source, if the accepted leachate exceeds 100,000 gallons a week, for the EGCWSA, said DeBord.



Ellijay Community Blood Drive
Thursday, March 11 • 12-6pm
Ellijay Lions Club
1729 South Main Street • Ellijay, GA

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