

The Erwin Record

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LOOKING BACK

2018 was another busy year for Unicoi County's people, governments and organizations. As a new year begins, The Erwin Record presents its annual look back at the people and events who made news last year.

From Staff Reports

JANUARY



D.A.R.E. program returns to schools

Following at least a two year absence, the D.A.R.E. program returned to Unicoi County schools thanks to the efforts of the Erwin Police Department and the Unicoi County Sheriff's Department.

Leading the classes for the UCSD are Sgt. Chris Boings and Officer Joel Ledford. They bring the program to fifth-grade classrooms at Unicoi Elementary School on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and at Temple Hill Elementary School on Wednesdays.

"The program takes with some students and with others it doesn't, but overall it has a positive impact," said Boings. "When I first started teaching in 2009 it was more about drugs and violence and what to look out for with that, but now it's more about making wiser decisions with your life so that you can stay away from those things."



'Operation Snowball' leads to more than 20 arrests

For six months the Unicoi County Sheriff's Department Narcotics Unit, Erwin Police Department Criminal Investigation Unit and First Judicial District Drug Task Force worked together on what they deemed "Operation Snowball."

The results of this drug investigation, which targeted the sale and use of methamphetamine, Xanax, Suboxone, Hydrocodone and marijuana, were announced during a press conference in Erwin on Jan. 19.

"Since late August 2017, my department, as well as the Erwin Police Department and the Drug Task Force, have conducted several undercover drug operations here in Unicoi County," Sheriff Mike Hensley said at the press conference. "We named this 'Operation Snowball' because when we started one investigation it would snowball into something else. This operation has led to the recovery of several stolen items, as well as taken a large amount of methamphetamine and prescription drugs off the street here in the county and the city of Erwin."

"I want to commend all the officers who have worked on this investigation," Hensley continued.

"There were a lot of man hours put in. It consisted of working not just with the law enforcement agencies but with the Attorney General's office and other agencies."

Twenty-five people faced charges as the result of the operation.



Unsung Hero: Edwards celebrates 50 years of service

On Jan. 22 employees, board members and local officials gathered at Unicoi County Memorial Hospital to celebrate Paulette Edwards' 50th year anniversary on the hospital's staff.

The surprise celebration served as a small token of appreciation compared to the decades of hard work Edwards has put into the hospital and her community.

"Everyone is so busy, and to take their time out to honor me, it really was a shock," Edwards said. "I don't have the words for it... I was so pleased. I felt really honored."

Edwards has been working with UCMH since 1968, and currently works for materials management where she takes care of all of the department supply needs by stocking anything the doctors may need in order to ensure everything runs smoothly when they meet with patients.

Erwin Utilities project to place water tanks built in 1920s

Funding for a water tank replacement project was approved during the Jan. 22 meeting of the Erwin Board of Mayor and Aldermen. The cost of the project is \$750,000 with a 20 percent principal forgiveness, amounting to \$600,000 that will be repaid, plus interest.

Two water storage tanks will be replaced at the O'Brien Water Plant, located at the end of Gay Street in Erwin. The O'Brien Water Plant pumps water into three storage tanks, a 100,000 gallon tank built in 1921, a 150,000 gallon tank built in 1923, and a 250,000 gallon tank built in 1957.

"The two oldest tanks will be replaced with a new 500,000 gallon tank, and the tank replacement will be out for bid in March," said Lee Brown, general manager of Erwin Utilities.

FEBRUARY

Town of Unicoi BMA agrees to bid for golf course

In the final meeting of the Buffalo Valley Golf Course Committee on Feb. 1, the board voted to recommend that the Town of Unicoi submit an offer to purchase the Buffalo Valley Golf Course from the City of Johnson City with the premise that the homeowners would form a private corporation responsible for operating the course in the near future.

"What we had taken from the last meeting was that the Town of Unicoi thought it was best to run the course independently," said Steve Williams, Buffalo Valley Golf Course Committee member and homeowner.

The homeowners' amended proposal included a recommendation that the Town of Unicoi include a timeline for acceptance,

or a provision to enter the property to perform maintenance to the course greens no later than March 5 to prevent any delay in reopening the course.

During the Feb. 5 called meeting for the Town of Unicoi Board of Mayor and Aldermen, the board unanimously approved a resolution to submit a proposal to the City of Johnson City for the purchase of Buffalo Valley Golf Course.

The resolution included a suggestion of change to include a proposal amount of \$400,000 and was further amended to reflect Aldermen Roger Cooper's recommendation to pay \$200,000 down, and the other \$200,000 in yearly payments of \$20,000 over the span of 10 years.

Consultant sees potential for growth

On Feb. 8, the findings of a comprehensive retail study for Unicoi County were presented by Adam Chandler, an economic development consultant with the Oklahoma-based company, Retail Attractions.

The retail study was funded through the Governor's Three Star Program and was intended to give town and county leaders an idea of ways to move forward with healthy growth. In his presentation of the study, Chandler highlighted the topics of retail development, residential development, and intangible factors affecting the growth of Unicoi County.

"One of the main strengths of Unicoi County are the exits along I-26, and the fact that a major interstate cuts through the entire county," Chandler remarked. "It's a huge benefit and offers a lot of potential for the future."

Chandler concluded his presentation by saying that the bottom line for Unicoi County is that growth will occur, and that there is a chance exponential growth could occur in the next five to 10 years. How fast the growth occurs, and how it happens, will be up to the leaders of the area.

"My impression of this area is that it feels like it really wants to move forward," Chandler concluded. "That was attractive to me, because there's a lot of places that have had a rough go of it, and they have quit. I got the feeling that everyone here is trying."



Silo demolished

On Feb. 20, the silo at the former Morgan Insulation property slowly began crumbling to the ground. The Town of Erwin accepted a bid from D.H. Griffith, a local company, for the demolition of the silo.

A hydraulic crushing machine that used a watering system to subdue dust was hauled in the day before in preparation for the demolition. The demolition was funded through a TVA Invest Prep grant, and will render the 15 acre property shovel ready in preparation for any future site development.

Erwin, county governments discuss how to start local ambulance service

On Feb. 15, Town of Erwin, Town of Unicoi and Unicoi County officials gathered in a work

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FAITH

North Ridge Church plans move downtown

By Richard Rourk
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The Choo Choo Café has officially moved. In less than one week, owner Brenda Hawley relocated her restaurant from its location of many years to a new one. Fortunately, she didn't have to go far. In fact, she moved right next door.

Hawley made the move to 113 S. Main Ave. and is currently up and running. What made the move easy for Hawley was she gave away most of the items in her original restaurant.

"I just opened the doors and gave it away. It was my Christmas present," Hawley joked.

The move leaves a large storefront vacant, but it won't be vacant for long. Moving into the old site of Choo Choo Café will be North Ridge Community Church Erwin Campus.

"The plan is to be moved into the new building by Easter of 2019," North Ridge Community Church Erwin Campus Pastor and Worship Leader Gary Schwenke told The Erwin Record.

The new site of North Ridge Community Church Erwin Campus will be at 111 S. Main Ave.

The Erwin Campus has been meeting at Unicoi County High School since North Ridge Community Church opened the campus in the fall of 2015. North Ridge Community Church also has three other campuses, with two in Johnson City, and one in Gray.

Choo Choo Café moves next door to make room for church

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STATE OF TENNESSEE

New laws take effect

From Staff Reports

With a new year comes new state laws.

According to a press release issued from the office of State Representative James (Micah) Van Huss (Jonesborough), the new public chapters cover a variety of topics.

The following is a list of the laws, according to the press release, which took effect on Jan. 1, 2019:

- SB0437: Insurance, Health, Accident - As enacted, revises various provisions regarding when a health insurance entity can make, and when a health insurance entity is required to notify a provider of, changes in the provider's fee schedule. - Amends TCA Title 56, Chapter 7.
- SB1001: Forfeiture of Assets - As enacted, revises various provisions regarding forfeiture. - Amends TCA Title 40, Chapter 33.
- HB0664: Physicians and Surgeons - As enacted, enacts the "Interstate Medical Licensure Compact." - Amends TCA Title 63.
- SB1782: Education, State Board of - As enacted, changes the term of the chair of the state board of education from four years to two years. - Amends TCA Section 49-1-301(b).
- HB1515: Motor Vehicles -

As enacted, increases, from \$400 to \$1,500, the minimum property damage threshold for which a motor vehicle accident requires a written report to be filed with the department of safety, except in cases of damage to state or local government property; increases, from \$500 to \$1,500, the property damage threshold differentiating a Class B misdemeanor from a Class A misdemeanor for the offense of leaving the scene of an accident. - Amends TCA Title 55, Chapter 10 and Title 55, Chapter 12.

• SB2253: Safety, Dept. of - As enacted, permits the department to toll the mandatory 365 consecutive day period during which certain motor vehicles are required to be equipped with a functioning ignition interlock device if the motor vehicle is inoperable based on specified reasons. - Amends TCA Section 55-10-419(g) and Section 55-10-425.

• SB2497: Election Laws - As enacted, reduces from 90 days to 60 days the period before a qualifying deadline for elective office during which nominating petitions may be issued by an administrator, deputy, county election commissioner, or employee of the coordinator's office, other than nominating petitions for the of-

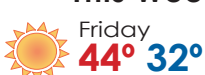
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