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# The News-Reporter

Serving Wilkes County since 1896

75¢ per copy sales tax included

www.news-reporter.com

Vol. CIV, No. 1 Washington, Georgia • Publication No. 387-580 • 10 Pages • Thursday, January 6, 2022



Photo by MICHAEL BOWEN

Fallen trees like this one, which toppled over into Josh Stokes's yard are one of the main causes of power outages during a storm.

## Unbudgeted employee bonuses cause uncertainty at W-W Parks and Rec

At the December meeting of the Washington-Wilkes Parks and Recreation Commission, Chairman Larry Hill allegedly paid unbudgeted and unauthorized Christmas bonuses to the commission's employees.

Prior to the meeting, Hill had sent emails requesting support from the commission members to pay the bonuses, but excluded Matthew Denard from the communication. He reported receiving two replies. According to Hill, one of the members supported the idea, provided the rest of the commission was supportive. The second member was against the bonuses. However, apparently and according to Hill and several commission members, no one else responded to the emails.

Despite opposition from an additional commission member during a phone call, Hill proceeded with the bonus checks and \$3,750 was extracted from the Parks and Recreation Commission's budget for the bonuses and paid out at the meeting. Although the bonuses were paid, there was no formal vote by the commission.

In an interview conducted by this newspaper after the

December meeting, Hill explained, "About a month or so ago, the City of Washington gave its employees a \$1,500 bonus and its part-time employees a \$750 bonus. That was very noble of Jerry deBin and the city to consider all of its employees. So we try to do the same thing and show our employees that we care and are hoping and praying that everybody makes it through this COVID era safe and sound, and we want to do the same thing for our four employees."

Knowing the holiday payout did not sit well with some of the commissioners, he indicated that he has struggled with support from his first day as chairman and maintained that he would eventually address his lack of support.

Hill also indicated that he would push for making changes to the commission's founding resolution (There are no working bylaws.), which he described as being "antiquated." He admitted that the resolution did not specify anything about voting via email but added that voting via email is becoming an accepted method because of social distancing and health

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## Winter storms cause power outages

By MICHAEL BOWEN  
Editor and Publisher

Over Sunday night and into the early hours of Monday morning, Wilkes County was hit by a severe storm that caused extensive power outages across the County.

During the night, the Washington Fire Department responded to several calls and aided in clearing the streets of fallen trees and debris. Several volunteer

fire stations assisted as well. According to Rayle EMC, the first reports of power outages were phoned in at roughly 2 a.m. As the storm progressed, more reports of power outages in Wilkes, Oglethorpe, Lincoln, Taliaferro, Greene, Hancock, Morgan, Oconee, Madison, and Clarke counties flowed in. On Callaway Road in Rayle, a pole snapped in two. A circuit in the Rayle substation was also dis-

abled. Roughly 6,200 customers were affected at the height of the power outages. Rayle EMC director of member services Richard Heard explained that the company worked nonstop and even called for help from Pike crews to quicken the pace of repairs.

Twenty-two roads in total were blocked by fallen trees, but danger was not limited to drivers. "I heard a bunch of crackling and then I just heard a big thump. My initial reaction was like, 'Ok, a tree just fell in the road,' and then I got a flashlight and went outside, and I am like, 'Dang, it's in our front yard,'" Washington resident Josh Stokes recounted. Still at his Spring Street home with his three-year-old son, Stokes listened to the tree fall at roughly 6:30 a.m. Stokes and his wife, Linsey, have been counting their blessings since the storm. "I am just blessed that it did not hit our house. It could have been a whole lot worse," Stokes said.

### Paper size shrinks

Due to an ever-increasing price in paper cost and an ongoing paper shortage, *The News-Reporter* will suffer a decrease in paper size.

According to *Greater Georgia Printers*, paper costs have increased 25 percent over the past year and will increase again sometime this January. The trend seems to be one that will continue for the foreseeable future. While news will still be printed on the "broadsheet" size, the dimensions of the broadsheet are smaller than a typical *News-Reporter*. As far as we can tell, this will be a permanent transition to the smaller size. While our sheets will be smaller, we at *The News-Reporter* remain just as dedicated as ever to getting you the facts and latest community news.

All the best,  
The News-Reporter team

## Border Bowl scheduled for this weekend

The annual Georgia vs. South Carolina Border Bowl football game is slated for this weekend.

Wilkes County players Dalen Cobb and Jo'Vares Harden have been chosen for the team. Additionally, W-W head football coach Sid Fritts has been selected to coach offensive line. Seeing the game as being no different than any other, Fritts said that he expects to win. While team Georgia has not practiced yet, the

coach commented that the roster looked very promising.

The game will be played at the Lucy C. Laney Memorial Stadium in Augusta and will start at 1 p.m. January 8. WJBF will rebroadcast the game Sunday, January 16, at noon.

The game was cancelled in 2021 due to health concerns but is still on for this year. All ticket proceeds will go to the Ronald McDonald House.

## 2021: the year in review part II

During 2021, The News-Reporter covered the happenings in Wilkes County with stories and pictures of events ranging from charitable fundraisers to tourism to government affairs to law enforcement and local elections. As a recap to the year, the main news headlines from the second half of the year are presented here as a follow-up to the first half reported in the December 30 edition.

August 5- Bowen's promise to continue Newsome newspaper legacy... Five-day shooting spree here sees no one injured, but two arrested... Washington fire department ensures safety during repair... Frank Watson wins highest honors from Georgia Green Industry Association... Little Theater will feature return of full cast in 'Sweet Delilah Swim Club' August 12-15.

August 12- Hice hosting annual service academy day... Wesley Pope awarded Rotary scholarship... Tigers face off against Westside for first scrimmage of the season; pull ahead for close 36-31 victory... Operation Wyner Storm; multiple suspects apprehended and charged... City seeking to redevelop old high school for new purpose.

August 19-County commission hears extensive discussion on residential disturbance... U.S. Senate approves infrastructure bill with more than \$11B headed to Georgia... Plaque unveiled in honor of Will Cullars... DNR Youth Bird Competition going virtual.

August 26- Board of Education outlines plan for school years...

Governor's Highway Safety Association awards Georgia a grant to establish a law enforcement phlebotomy program... Lady Tiger softball season stars with impressive 5-1 record... WW2 veteran Evans Moore recognized by Raphael Warnock.

September 2- Dr. Ralph Simpson addresses Wilkes County high school seniors... Wilkes County EMS personnel stretched thin due to false and non-emergency calls... EPA announces \$25 Million in Grants to Improve Drinking Water Quality... Wilkes County continues battling illegal trash dumping problem... Lady Tigers compete against Social Circle resulting in a tough, tight game.

September 9- Former Tigers football players speak about character, values, and unity... Regional Youth Detention Center in Washington received accreditation... Washington's first fair in years... Tiger Varsity football team crushes Cross Creek 45-6 in second game of the season... Washington Wilkes Marching Band fundraiser for instrument equipment... Racers from Raytheon southeast compete at Aonia Pass track.

September 16- City Council decides multiple matters with unanimous votes... Washington Fire Department marches to commemorate 911... Luis Ochoa completes 10-mile commemorative March... The Memory Lane Cruise In held in the square... Newsomes honored with retirement party... Tigers maul the Screaming Devils of Warren County in a 36-14 game... Ma-

rissa Lynch selected to become a member of the National Society of High School Scholars.

September 23- Louis Graziano awarded French Legion of Honor; Fleming presents resolution to Georgia House... Tigers claw ahead to a 42-35 victory against Elbert County Blue Devils... City installs first electric vehicle charging station... Volunteer Fire Department facing personnel shortages... Retired Colonel Andy Anderson discusses 'Horse Soldier Statue'... Toombs House host Halloween tombstone decorating event.

September 30- Affordable internet in Wilkes County; Emergency Broadband Benefit program offered through Relyant Communications... Wilkes County EMS accepts donation of flag and flagpole from Elberton chapter of WoodmenLife... Washington visited by journalist from Amsterdam, Netherlands... Tigers maul Hancock County Bulldogs with 51-0 victory... Washington Wilkes Maker's Market hosts 'Fall for Washington'... Washington Rotary Club's annual auction set for November 6.

October 7- County and BOE set millage rate... Mule Day 40 Anniversary festival upcoming; local girl designs t-shirts... Homecoming: Pop Warner kids to lead Tigers on the field... Voting machine warning message; votes still count... Christmas Parade of Lights on go this year... Tiger Club selling signs for fundraiser... Tigers smash the Social Circle Redskins 40-6... Joro spiders

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Memory Lane Cruisers representatives Barry Holloway (left) and Matthew Denard (right) donated toys to Blake Thompson (center) for Toys for Wilkes County as part of the Wilkes County EMS program.

## Wilkes County Kids toy drive exceeds expectations

The Wilkes County Kids Christmas toy drive received a warm reception from the community during their December 22 toy dispersion.

According to Casey Land of Wilkes EMS, approximately 212-220 children participated in the program. Donations surpassed last year's numbers, enabling the purchase of better gifts, as well as

twelve bicycles. Thirty additional bicycles were donated by the community in addition to an increased number of electronic toys.

Land affirmed that of the \$3,000 donated to the drive, roughly \$800 was spent in Washington for the purchase of toys. Overall, Land stated that expectations for participation and donations were far exceeded.