

The Oconee Enterprise Forum

Oconee's own in service

After 22 years in Afghanistan, the war ended Aug. 31, 2021. However, there are members of the military who either are from Oconee or have relatives here who serve around the world. If you know someone who could be added or removed from this list, email editor@oconeeenterprise.com. Please include a phone number.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| ■ David M. Berger, Petty Officer 2nd class STS2 | ■ LTC Jenifer Gustafson Hope |
| ■ Maj. John Campbell | ■ William Hollis Jackson |
| ■ Myles Cheatum | ■ Josephine Lloyd |
| ■ LTC. Jeff Chambers | ■ Tennyson Lloyd |
| ■ A1C Andrew Chambers | ■ Cara Martz |
| ■ SFC Taylor Cielaszyk | ■ Nick Martz |
| ■ Cpt. Devon Davis | ■ SSgt. Spencer Mathis |
| ■ Daniel Evans | ■ Lt. Col. Jeremy Pallas |
| ■ Maj. Jay Feldner | ■ MC2 Bradley Rickard |
| ■ Richard Gustafson | ■ 1st Lt. Bennett F. Shelton IV |
| ■ Andrew Harris | ■ LCpl James Ryan Stiles |
| | ■ Lt. Col. Brett Thomas |
| | ■ Zach Wiggins |



If we don't build it, they will just keep coming.

REMEMBERING OCONEE

As part of a year-long celebration of Oconee County turning 150 years old, the Oconee Historical Society is providing personal reflections, called "Remembering Oconee," to be published in The Oconee Enterprise.

These memories are meant to give a glimpse of life in yesteryear. Please include your name or the name of the person who passed the recollection to you.

Send your "Remembering Oconee" pieces to editor@oconeeenterprise.com or oconeehistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Colham Ferry name explained

BY LARRY McDUGALD

Having lived here only forty-five or so years, I can't claim to be a native, but I find local lore and history interesting. Road names are often colorful and chosen for historical reasons. Good examples are Wire Bridge, Hog Mountain and Government Station roads.

Colham Ferry Road is a major artery south of Watkinsville, and I often drive it twice or more each day. I assumed the road was named after a pioneering family, but I'd never

heard anything about it. In the early 1980s, it was briefly named Colhen Ferry, due to bad penmanship on an order form somewhere, but I digress. It was only recently that I was talking to Cynthia Smith, the lady who runs Genuine Georgia in Greensboro, and she set me straight.

Cynthia's grandparents had a farm on the road near the Oconee River, and they raised hogs. On weekends, they would make and sell cold ham sandwiches, and

people would drive their wagons and carriages out to buy sandwiches for a picnic. Wagons would be lined up on the road waiting to get in.

At the river, a man operated a ferry. So the road became known as Cold Ham Ferry road. Later, this was shortened to Colham Ferry. More appropriately, I think it should be spelled Col'ham Ferry because of the dropped 'd.' Thank you, Cynthia, for sharing this bit of local history with me.

LOOKING BACK

Forty years ago May 30, 1985:

■ The cause of a fire that destroyed the Murrow Brothers Gin office is being investigated.

Thirty years ago June 1, 1995:

■ The tax digest increases by \$33 million due to new homes and vehicles.

■ The Board of Commissioners votes to spend \$375,000 on new sludge technology, Micronair.

Twenty years ago May 26, 2005:

■ Solar panels are planned to be installed at Oconee County High School.

■ Central Oconee Church celebrates a new building.

Ten years ago May 28, 2015:

■ The Calls Creek Wastewater Treatment plant fails to meet standards.

■ Chops & Hops is the first restaurant in Watkinsville to serve liquor by the drink.

■ Board of Commissioners Chairman Melvin Davis is named Northeast Georgian of the Year.

■ North Oconee High School senior Megan Beckett is crowned Miss Epic.

Five years ago May 29, 2020:

■ ESP reveals a new plan for its playground and ball field.

■ The Watkinsville City Council blocks Mayor Bob Smith's resolution regarding the library.

OWNER MARK MARTIN

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BBB needs to pass

President Donald Trump's Big Beautiful Bill was approved by the U.S. House. Let's take a closer look at what is on to the U.S. Senate.

Critics claim that Medicaid is being reduced, which might be correct if the measure is the overall amount of benefits paid. Benefits will be reduced because they will no longer be paid to illegal immigrants, they will no longer be paid to those capable of working (or performing community service) who fail to do so, and they will not be paid to beneficiaries a state determines are not eligible. Medicaid work requirements are not new. Georgia already has them. Nobody properly getting Medicaid benefits is having their benefits reduced.

Claiming that Medicaid benefits are being reduced is the same as claiming Social Security benefits are being reduced because we're going to stop paying benefits to dead people.

Critics claim that the wealthy are unjustly getting a tax break by the increased deductibility of state and local taxes (SALT), although the increased deductibility is still limited for those with very high incomes. The states with generally the highest SALT are New York, New Jersey, Illinois and California. These states are fiscal disasters. I see no reason the federal tax code should subsidize these expensive and poorly managed states, but sometimes you have to take some bad to get a greater good.

Another big part of the BBB was extending the tax cuts put in place during Trump's first term in office. Thanks to Bert DeSimone for supporting this in his letter published May 22. Not only do we keep lower tax rates, but standard deductions were increased that will lower everyone's taxes. These steps will be a foundation for a stronger economy.

Overall federal government spending is still too high, but steps are finally being taken in the right direction to make this more manageable. The BBB needs to get across the finish line.

Kevin McHugh
Athens, Oconee County

BBB bill shouldn't pass

President Donald Trump and House Speaker Mike Johnson tout their "big, beautiful bill" as designed to eliminate "waste, fraud and abuse," but they are the ones fraudulently abusing the public with their false claims. This bill will significantly hurt or kill some of the most vulnerable Americans.

The GOP is ripping out about \$800 billion dollars from Medicaid over the next 10 years. Almost a thousand rural hospitals are already at risk of closing across the country, and these drastic cuts are likely their death knell. Longer travel times will become barriers to critical care that can prove deadly, especially for the disabled and elderly. What are these

vulnerable patients supposed to do?

Medicaid also pays for about two of every five births in the United States. And in some states, such as Mississippi and Johnson's home state of Louisiana, more than half the births are funded by the program. The loss of support for maternal health will certainly contribute to further deaths, complications and medical bankruptcies.

Just as alarming is that Medicaid is a vital funding source for nursing homes that care for the elderly and disabled. Where can they turn?

Meanwhile, the Trump Administration is planning a huge military parade for his birthday that is expected to cost \$45 million dollars, and billionaires get nice new tax cuts in the plan. What are the nation's priorities?

—Neal Priest
Athens, Oconee County

BOE must lead, listen

I appreciate the efforts of "Community Works, Oconee" to organize a "listening session" and compile community input to share with the Oconee Board of Education. However, it is disheartening that such an event is even necessary.

Every time a citizen addresses the BOE, it should be a "listening session." Yet, over the past decade or so, citizens have grown accustomed to being ignored. Those who have spoken before the Board often describe a lack of eye contact, an air of indifference and an overall sense that their voices do not matter.

The Board's policy of non-responsiveness only reinforces this perception. I recall a rare occasion when a board member acknowledged my comments and responded, only to be reprimanded by another member of the board.

Does the BOE even know why this policy of silence exists? Do members believe it serves the public well? More importantly, do they realize they have the authority to change it?

Oconee's BOE seems to operate in an upside-down fashion. The BOE is meant to work for—and answer to—the taxpayers. It is the BOE's role to set policy and to hire a superintendent who is responsible for implementing that policy through the school system's administration.

Recent events related to The Oconee Enterprise's attempts to access information through the Georgia Open Records Act suggest an alarming reversal of roles. Instead of providing oversight, the BOE appears to be stumbling in the dark while employees set direction and control access to public information.

Further evidence of this confusion comes from the Board's recent approval of an interim superintendent who stated, "I am looking forward to working alongside the Board..." (The Enterprise's May 15 issue). But therein lies the problem: a superintendent does not work "alongside" the Board. The superintendent works under the Board.

The recent "Survey Monkey" posted by OCS on May 21 is yet another example of the BOE's troubling misunderstanding of its own role and responsibilities. Question 22, which asks respondents to evaluate the new

superintendent's "ability to work effectively and in harmony with the School Board," is deeply problematic.

The superintendent is not a peer of the Board but an employee of it. The phrasing suggests a relationship of equals, rather than the clear hierarchical structure that exists under Georgia law and sound governance principles. The superintendent is accountable to the Board, and the Board is accountable to the public. Language that misrepresents this relationship is not merely a semantic oversight; it reflects a lack of clarity that can lead to confusion, poor oversight and erosion of public trust.

Words matter. Governance matters more. For the Board to be effective stewards of public education, it must demonstrate a clear understanding of its authority and responsibility. That begins with getting the fundamentals right. It is time for the Oconee BOE to reclaim its responsibility: to lead, to listen and to serve the public trust with transparency and accountability.

—Joyce Reifsteck
Athens, Oconee County

Electricity costs are on the ballot

While many residents hoped 2025 would provide a breather from elections, there are important elections this year for two seats on the Public Service Commission. (As background, the mission of the PSC is to ensure consumers have access to reliable and reasonably priced power, gas and phone service.)

Due to litigation, elections have been on hold since 2020, but they are back on track this year and 2 of the 5 commission seats will be decided in November. The seats on the commission are by district (Oconee is in District 2), but the elections are statewide, so you can and should vote in both races.

The growing cost of electricity is in the spotlight. Since 2023, the commission has approved multiple rate increases for Georgia Power consumers, highlighted by the enormous construction overruns at Plant Vogtle and subsidizing the infrastructure to support the growing Data Center industry.

Even if you get your power from Walton EMC, you are not totally shielded from rising electricity costs. Walton buys power from a wholesaler, Oglethorpe Power, who owns 30% of Plant Vogtle, so those cost problems ultimately find their way into Walton's rates.

The long overdue elections of the Public Service Commission are important to hold them to account for inadequate cost control over the power infrastructure and for not prioritizing renewable energy sources. Nationally, Georgia ranks 35th in affordability and 43rd in rooftop solar.

Power bills are increasing across the state. By this year, you get to vote for change. We need commissioners who value affordability and increasing sources of renewable energy sources over the status quo.

There's a primary election on June 17, with early voting having started on May 27.

—Harold Thompson
*Watkinsville
Oconee Democratic
Committee Chair*