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# Times - Courier

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## 4th of July festivities reset for Saturday

by Michael Andrews  
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Downtown Ellijay's Fourth of July festivities will take place two, maybe three, days late this year.

Forecasts calling for high chances of heavy rain Thursday, July 4, prompted postponing the Independence Day parade, fireworks and downtown "beach party" event, said Ellijay Better Hometown Manager Mona Lowe.

Lowe said the parade will now be held Saturday, July 6, beginning at 6 p.m. Parade participants will start lining up along Sailors Drive at 4 p.m.

"The parade is not even tentative for Thursday (and) will be Saturday," Lowe said.

The "No Buffett Live" beach party event will take place in the city parking lot on River Street Saturday after the parade, Lowe added. It will be combined with a First Saturday event already scheduled to take place that day.

A celebratory fireworks

See Fourth page 3A

## Old Glory unfurled



Photo by Mark Millican

Old Glory caught a breeze and unfurled grandly during a flag retirement ceremony at Ronnie Thompson Ford recently. Members of the Civil Air Patrol Ellijay Composite Squadron retired a worn flag and replaced it with a new one on June 14 — Flag Day — as a few dozen people witnessed the elaborate military ceremony. Taking care of the colors were CAP youth Joshua Boels, Jacob Engstrom, Will Ridings, Daniel Stephens and Richard Stephens.

## SPLOST referendum denial could mean 4-mill tax increase

by Ryan R Rees  
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County property owners could be faced with a four-mill increase if a proposed new Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) referendum isn't approved this November, according to Board of Commission Chairman JC Sanford.

Exact wording of the referendum will be announced at the BOC meeting next Thursday.

If passed, all funds from the SPLOST one-cent tax would be dedicated to paying off the general obligation bond payments on the county courthouse. The county currently is paying more than \$4.1 million annually in bond payments.

"It (SPLOST) isn't adding a tax," he said. "It's a continuation of the current SPLOST."

"What people don't realize, (the funds) have

already been spent," he added, noting that the bond payments will continue for another 22 years.

During a recent work session, Sanford said the funds from an extended SPLOST would go solely to paying off the bond debt.

"There won't be anything left for roads or other things," he noted.

Sanford explained that if the referendum isn't on the November ballot, the current SPLOST will expire next year.

"If that happens, we won't be able to make our April payment or in October in 2015," he said.

"If it doesn't pass, it will shift the (tax) burden onto everyone," he added.

How much a four mill increase would mean to individual taxpayers

See SPLOST page 3A

## Child sex abuse prevention initiative planned

by Mark Millican  
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A court solicitor in a north Georgia community worked frequently on child sex abuse cases in her jurisdiction and thought she knew all the tactics offenders use to lure their young victims.

Then she took the "Stewards of Children" training that helps adults in a community recognize signs that children may be at risk.

"She found the man

who was teaching her son music lessons was 'grooming' him (for sexual contact)," said Steve Collins, who recently briefed local leaders of children's organizations about a new endeavor called the Gilmer County Child Sexual Abuse Prevention initiative.

Collins, a regional coordinator at the Georgia Center for Child Advocacy, noted the lifetime risk of someone dying in a car accident is 1 chance in 84.

"But the chances of your child experiencing sexual abuse is 1 in 4 girls, and 1 in 6 boys, before the age of 18," he said.

"Those numbers are epidemic in their proportions ... for every one person you know who is a survivor of cancer, there are probably three, four, five — maybe as many as six — survivors (of child sexual abuse) who still may be bearing the pain of that abuse. The impact on that person is huge."

### The high cost

Child sex abuse is the second-most expensive crime in the U.S., Collins pointed out, but added in some rural counties it is the most costly since murders — with extensive investigations and court proceedings — are not as prevalent.

"In Gilmer County, the direct and immediate cost of child sex abuse is \$250,000 a year," he specified, citing a formula

See Abuse page 5A

## Catalyst group sets goals for community

by Whitney Crouch  
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After meeting throughout the spring, members of the recently formed Catalyst for Prosperity Team identified three areas of focus for improving the local community — creating a cohesive marketing plan, business creation and retention and tourism development.

Initiated by the Gilmer County Chamber of Commerce and with additional financial support coming from the Economic Development Authority and Greater Gilmer Community Foundation, the catalyst group consisted

of 18 individuals from the community's private and public sectors.

Members of the Pendleton Group, an Atlanta-based consulting firm, facilitated the meetings and helped participants identify weak points in the community and develop solutions for turning these areas into strengths.

The process began in late March with a brainstorming session about the assets and weaknesses of the community. In subsequent meetings, participants took a closer look at local infrastructure, what gives the area

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## Cherry Log fire station in negotiation

by Ryan R Rees  
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Board of Commission Chairman JC Sanford said negotiations are continuing on relocating a volunteer fire station currently housed on church property in Cherry Log.

At a continuance hearing last week, both the county and the Higher Praise Worship Church of God, agreed to mitigation to resolve the issue. The church had filed an eviction

notice to the county last April.

"I can't really comment on it because it's in mitigation," Sanford said, "but it's not contentious. We're working on it."

Earlier, Sanford told the Times-Courier, "We won't leave the people of Cherry Log without fire protection."

Sanford also said the county is looking at a possible site north of Cherry Log in order to serve more residents in the northern part of the county and keep their ISO

rating lower.

Currently, county residents living within five miles of a fire station have an ISO rating of 7 but that could be increased countywide to 9 if there are not sufficient fire stations in the county. The county currently has four fully manned stations.

The eviction notice came two years after the church first notified the county that it wanted to take control over the 4.9-acre property it purchased in 2010.



American  
Red Cross

1 hour of your time may save 3 lives.  
**Ellijay Community Blood Drive**  
Thursday, July 11 • 12-6pm  
**Ellijay Lions Club**  
1729 South Main St. • Ellijay, GA

