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Stations of the Cross portrayed



Photo by Michael Andrews

Alfredo Gonzolez, left, portrays Jesus Christ and Alesandro Vicente, right, plays a Roman soldier during the Stations of the Cross ceremony held by Good Samaritan Catholic Church March 29 in observance of Good Friday. Throngs of congregation members and observers followed the processional through downtown Ellijay as it reenacted the walk to Calvary and crucifixion of Christ. See more photos in Gilmer Living section of this edition.

General Assembly ended in 'frenzied hour'

by Pam O'Dell

pamodellreport@gmail.com

As the confetti settles and is swept off the chamber floors, there are some generalizations that can be made about the 1013 General Assembly session in which 2,695 bills were filed. Most noteworthy: significant challenges to "home rule," increased influence by the governor, and game-stopping squabbling between the House and Senate.

Governor plays a heavier role

Gov. Nathan Deal is clearly the biggest winner of the session. Deal orchestrated legislative outcomes so as to avoid having to vote on state funding of a Falcon's stadium, a tax (aka: 'bed tax') to hospitals in order to patch a Medicaid shortfall, and a controversial gun bill which would have drawn national scrutiny. Legislators passed a



O'Dell

\$19.9 billion budget a couple of hours before the constitutionally mandated midnight adjournment on the 40th day of the session.

Deal, who supplied legislators with a final copy on the previous day, included discretionary projects (also known as 'pork') in that final version based on a new policy of giving each chamber a pot of money to play with. Bidding legislators a final farewell, he announced he had discovered over \$50 million of 'tobacco money' to keep the state in the black.

Sweeping changes to the juvenile justice system were also made culminating a two-year effort by the governor to save money and localize services for minor offenders.

In an effort to make peace with social conservatives disappointed by what they believe is the legitimization (and inevitable expansion) of video gaming within HB 487, Deal promised to address the issue of tax payer-funded abortions for state employees (in lieu of a legislative mandate prohibiting such).

'Home Rule' challenges

Georgia has a strong history of respecting the autonomy of local gov-

ernments. This session, significant precedents were made which challenge "home rule." Many will likely result in legal challenges.

More than a dozen bills concerning Fulton County government were filed as a result of a new Republican majority within that legislative delegation (favoring the northern portion of the county). Most passed. Democrats vow to challenge at least two of the bills, if signed into law, under section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.

Also during the session, Deal acted swiftly when the DeKalb County

See **Assembly** page 3A

Woman dies in ATV wreck

by Mark Millican

markmillican@timescourier.com

A young mother was killed and another woman injured when an all-terrain vehicle they were riding went off a roadside in the steep Walnut Mountain residential development Saturday, authorities said.

Vanessa Renae Ellis, 22, of Woodstock, was pronounced dead at 6:45 p.m. March 30 at North Georgia Medical Center, according to Gilmer County Coroner Jerry Hensley.

Ellis was the mother of a 9-month-old boy, said Hensley, who added the wreck occurred between 5:30 and 5:45 p.m.

Deputy Christopher Couch of the sheriff's office said in an incident report he and Deputy Jason DeWitt arrived at Skyview Drive and were told they would have to descend a hill to the wreck scene. They



Ellis

found Ellis conscious and the other victim, Samantha Burch, 23, alert but with "apparent back and neck injuries."

"She was visiting her mother," Hensley said of Ellis. "She was just coming down the road there on Skyview Drive, and instead of making the curve she went straight out into the woods. I have no idea exactly what did happen, but I am assuming something went wrong — either the brakes hung up or the gas feed

See **Wreck** page 3A

Catalyst group to help development

by Whitney Crouch

wcrouch@timescourier.com

Members of the newly formed Catalyst for Prosperity Team met for the first time Friday, March 29, to begin discussing ways to stimulate business investment in the local community.

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 is made up of 18 individuals from the community's private and public sectors. Also in attendance were representatives from the Pendleton Group, the Atlanta-based consulting firm that will be facilitating the team's discussions.

Over the course of the

See **Catalyst** page 3A

Bat found in Gilmer delays road projects

by Ryan R Rees

rees@timescourier.com

The discovery of an endangered Indiana bat perched in a dead pine tree in the Rich Mountain Wildlife Management area in Gilmer County last summer has set off a major delay in road projects across north Georgia.

While the discovery was a boon for environmentalists, it created an expensive delay in road construction projects that could amount to \$459 million over the next year and a half.

None of the projects are in Gilmer County, but having the bat found here has created a major headache for the Georgia Department of Transportation.

The delays affect 182 projects in 30 counties.

The tiny Indiana bat, weighing about three pennies, is threatened by a disease that could wipe out the species across its range from Iowa to New York State.

The bat found here carried a tracking device the size of a toothpick and

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Contributed photo

A tiny Indiana bat found in Gilmer County is causing gorilla-size problems for state road projects.

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