



The Oconee Enterprise



Industrial plant built in 1950s

Retired workers reflect on its history. Business, B4



Shelter group's local efforts

Shelter carries on passion for animals. Lifestyles, A6



Area teams tune up for finale

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We'll report more on the new police chief.

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City favors St. Mary's man for police chief

Watkinsville Council expected to vote Wednesday

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The Watkinsville City Council was to be presented with a sole finalist for the position of Watkinsville's police chief at Wednesday's meeting. The council was expected to vote on the hiring of Shannon Dale Brock, the acting chief of police for the city of St. Mary's, Georgia.

Mayor Dave Shearon and City

Administrator Sharyn Dickerson interviewed Brock.

Although the council meeting occurred past print deadline, a story about the decision is posted on theconeeenterprise.com. If hired, Brock's salary will be \$67,144 (conditional on a 90-day review).

Brock, who was one of 12 candidates, has worked for the St. Mary's Police Department since November 2000. He worked there as a patrol officer, patrol division supervisor, training manager, Uniform Patrol Division commander and assistant chief of police.

Before a career in law enforce-



Brock

ment, Brock was a work crew supervisor for Gilman Paper Company. From 1992 to 1996, he served in the United States Marine Corps, where he was assigned as a heavy machine gun crew leader and a nuclear weapon security specialist.

Brock holds certifications as a firearms instructor and emergency vehicle operator instructor. He spe-

cializes in DUI training and has held a certification in drug recognition since 2006. In his application, which was obtained via an Open Records Act request, Brock said training and equipment are two things "officers should never have to beg for."

He told Watkinsville officials that he would like to replicate programs on community building that he previously implemented in St. Mary's. Those include an annual children's fishing tournament and a safety and reading initiative.

"It is very important that the citizens view us (police officers) as a

reflection of them: members of their community [who] are approachable and invested and know that we stand ready to ensure their safety and security," he wrote in his application. "Honestly and integrity are important traits as a chief of police, just as they are for any officer who serves [his or her] community. In order for law enforcement officers to serve with a servant heart, they have to be trusted within the community in which they serve. They establish this trust through being fair, being honest and doing the right thing when no one is looking."

City reserves \$400,000 for park enhancements

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The Watkinsville City Council came to a consensus last week to set aside \$400,000 in SPLOST parks and greenspace funds for improvements to Harris Shoals Park.

These improvements will include new playground equipment in addition to Extra Special People's Miracle League recreation complex.

ESP has raised more than \$1.4 million to construct a ball field with turf that can accommodate wheelchairs, a concession stand, restroom, splash pad and parking lot in an area that is currently wooded.

At ESP's headquarters last Wednesday, citizens viewed a map of the park that conceptualized where various elements will be located.

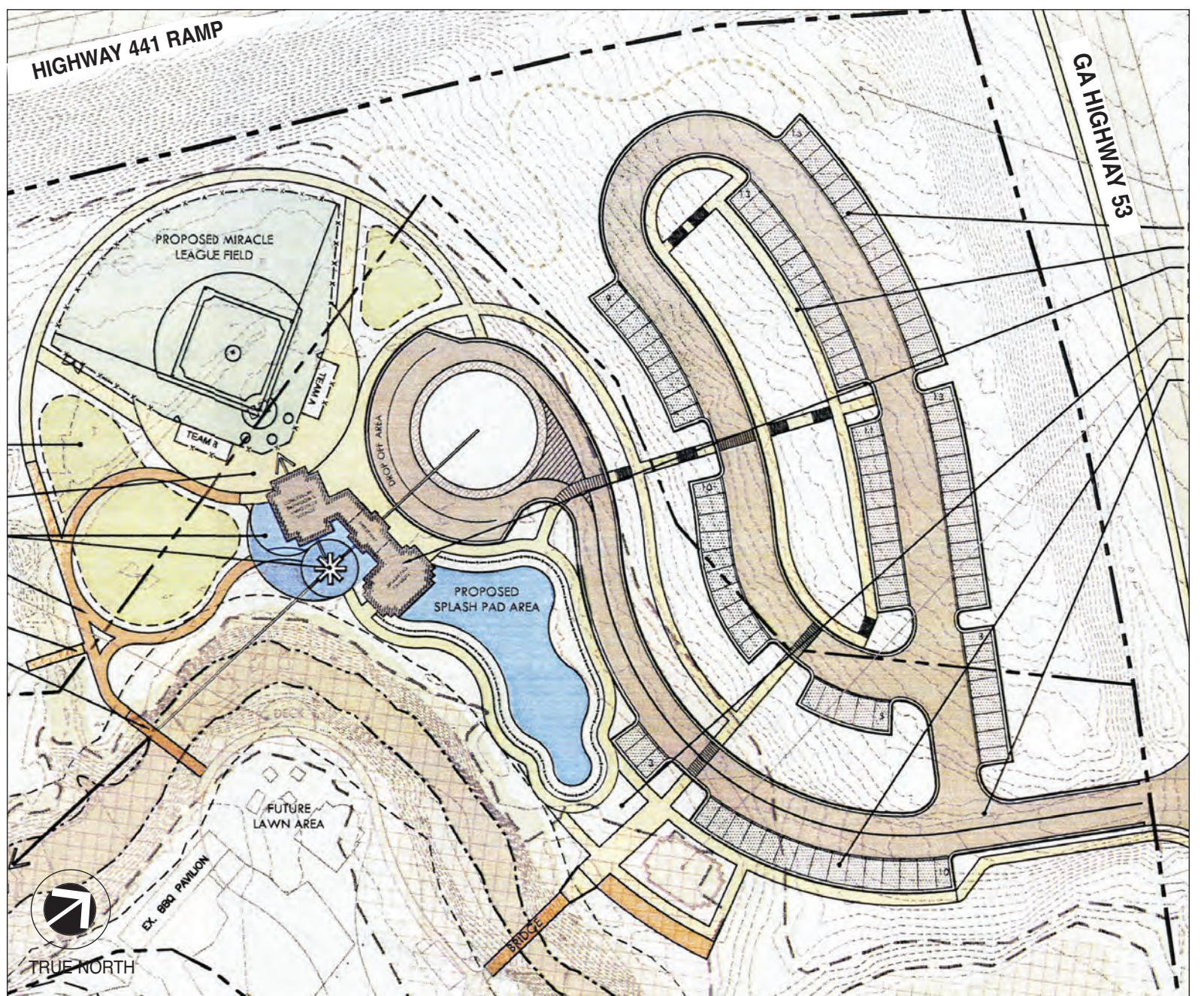
The Miracle League complex will encompass a 3.9-acre area on the northern end of the 17.5-acre park.

The Watkinsville City Council will vote at its July 17 meeting to enter into an agreement with ESP, whereby the nonprofit will carry the performance bonds and oversee the construction process.

During this time, ESP will have exclusive use of the area through a lease agreement.

Once construction is complete, the land rights will go back to the city, and the city will take responsibility of the property, including insurance.

City Administrator Sharyn Dickerson said the city is still working out details of the arrangement, such as the cost of maintaining equipment and facilities.



The Miracle League Sports Complex would offer recreational opportunities to children with disabilities. [Renderings by Carter Engineering Consultants]

"We will have some infrastructure we have to take on," said Dickerson.

Mayor Dave Shearon said that the Miracle League complex will

be a "real enhancement to that space," and explained that the city will overhaul the existing playground, too.

Councilwoman Marci Campbell

described the new recreational components as "a real asset" and Councilman Brian Brodrick called it "transformative for Watkinsville."

The first Miracle League field opened in Conyers in April 2000. Now, there are more than 300 across the country, said ESP Director Laura Whitaker.

At 90, Costa finds joy in radio friendships worldwide



Costa has his trusty 3-year-old beagle Cooper by his side when he talks to others on his ham radio. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

Pet beagle loves ham radio too



BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

With his beagle Cooper by his side, 90-year-old Ralph J. Costa sits down with a microphone in hand as he slowly turns the knob of his transmitter radio until he reaches a crystal-clear frequency coming from a small town in South Carolina.

Throughout his day, Costa is in communication with residents of Florida, Alabama, North Carolina and Georgia.

On occasion, he'll refer to a list of frequencies around the world. In fact, he has tuned in to the airwaves of 260 countries.

Like him, they all broadcast from their living rooms using a

ham radio. Some of the Georgia amateur radio operators get together every so often at the Blue Willow Inn in Social Circle.

"It's a good, clean hobby," he said. "You can sit here hours at a time. We talk about any and everything, like a coffee club."

Costa added, "You just have to spend a lot of money."

Ham radio operators can spend up to \$5,000 on equipment, which includes the transmitter, amplifier and antenna.

Costa obtained his radio license in 1953 when it was required for users to learn Morse code.

Drafted into the U.S. Army in October 1952, Costa was deployed to Germany, where the rubble of towns was an ever-present reminder of the horrors of World War II.

"We were stationed in an area where SS barracks had over seven and a half miles of tunnels so that they could escape," he said. "The U.S. found the tunnels and sealed them off."

Costa was too young to fight in World War II, but he had some uncles and cousins who were there on D-Day. Military service, he

said, "makes a man out of a kid."

Once he returned home, Costa enjoyed family life and a career in the private sector.

He was married to Alice Elizabeth for over 60 years until she died in 2011. They have a son, Ralph, who is the district manager of Bell's Food Stores.

Costa operated a service station for over a decade before going into truck and automobile sales.

"We would call on school bus shops and sold a lot of parts that way," he recalled. "Back when I was a kid, cars were made out of heavy, good steel. Automobiles today are like tissue paper."

The last car he purchased was a '93 Honda Accord, which now has 360,000 miles on it.

Costa stayed with one company for several decades, but when they laid him off at age 62, he took his accounts with him and began work with a competitor, where he stayed for another 20 years. Eventually, that company sold out, but Costa still continued to work.

"I am not going to stay home and look at the four walls," he said. "I need to get out and meet people."

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