

# Eclipse event in planning stages

By **LORRIE ROSS**  
*Staff writer*

About eight months from now, Clay County and surrounding areas will experience just over two minutes of complete darkness. The total solar eclipse will not occur until the afternoon of Aug. 21; however, it is such an unusual event, tens of thousands of people are expected to come to the area.

The eclipse was the primary topic at the Dec. 13 Travel and Tourism meeting as well as the Eclipse Task Force meeting immediately afterwards. Travel and Tourism Chair Lee Holland said at both meetings, "Clay County is way behind on planning. Some places have been planning for this for five years." She explained Clay County has neither budget nor staff for the event so it will be co-

ordinated by volunteers and more will be needed.

Spearheaded by local resident Bob Hanson and members of the Travel and Tourism Board, the Eclipse Task Force is hoping to attract many eclipse enthusiasts, along with those who are curious. The potential tourist dollars could be a tremendous boom for Clay County, especially since many visitors will stay in the area extra days. Hanson says he believes some will visit earlier in the summer to locate viewing sights; thus, the economic impact could begin months earlier.

In addition, Travel and Tourism and the Eclipse Task Force are trying to plan for the crowds along with what they bring. These include potentially high revenue and overnight stays, but also

congested parking, traffic and a shortage of lodging and meals. To address the issues, the group has involved representatives from law enforcement, emergency management, Travel and Tourism, Clay County Transportation, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, Clay County Schools, TVA, BRMEMC, members of Historic Hayesville, Inc., along with Hayesville Mayor Harry Baughn, County Commission Chairman Clay Logan and Chamber Director Pam Roman, along with several other people.

The group discussed whether to have some kind of festival the weekend prior to the eclipse. Other ideas being researched are recommended viewing sites, food trucks, extra camping sites and a large meal in the Hayesville Square. Everyone agreed the square will not be an ideal viewing site.

Holland shared the new Travel and Tourism Web site during both meetings. The new site should go live in January and will offer site visitors a lot of information about Clay County. One item of interest will be a state map

depicting the eclipse's arc across the state. Clay County is shown as a prime viewing location. Holland encouraged everyone to share the site and like the Facebook page. Logan suggested the group add the eclipse information to his online Possum Drop page because it is getting hundreds of hits as New Year's Eve approaches. Hinton Center, some cabin and campground owners have already reported bookings around the August 2017 eclipse. Anyone with available campsites, rentals or lodging of any kind is encouraged to notify Holland so the rental information may be placed free of charge on the online links. That e-mail address is: Lee@clay-countytravelandtourism.com.

Examples of eclipse viewing sunglasses, viewing cards, T-shirts, and posters were passed around. Since the group has no funds to purchase any of the materials, they discussed how to buy them for resale. More research will be done prior to the January meeting when the group will decide if they can apply for grants and whether to obtain sponsors who may sell items at retail.

If the Chamber of Commerce accountant approves, a separate fund may be opened at the bank similar to the chamber's account for fireworks. Once an account is ready, the information will be shared for public contributions.

Residents are encouraged to begin sharing eclipse information with friends and family who may want to visit western North Carolina during the eclipse. Accommodations will be limited.

More eclipse information may be found online at several Web sites including: [www.greatamericaneclipse.com](http://www.greatamericaneclipse.com).

**CLAY COUNTY PROGRESS**

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