

## Cherokee Life

### Ball Ground's Cornett celebrates 30 years

By Tom Brooks

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Ball Ground Public Works Director J.C. Cornett serves his fellow city residents with a vigorous work ethic, according to officials.

Cornett directs the department responsible for the operations of the small North Cherokee municipality's water and sewerage systems and its roads and streets. Despite his responsibilities, however, Cornett is known for continuing to show up at all hours to the scene of infrastructure emergencies, such as a middle-of-the-night water line break crisis in any weather, said his supervisor, City Manager Eric Wilmarth.

***(BELOW: J.C. Cornett, Ball Ground public works director, was honored in August by Mayor Rick Roberts, right, as well as the Ball Ground City Council and staff members during a surprise celebration of his 30 years as a city employee.)***



"Sometimes," said his wife, Eldie, "he works all night."

For three decades, Cornett has been an exceptionally reliable employee whose job description has expanded as the city has grown, Ball Ground government staff members and elected officials say.

Cornett, 68, reached his 30th anniversary milestone as a city employee in July. Ball Ground government officials gave the Pickens County native a surprise party with his wife of 32 years and several other family members in August.

Mayor Rick Roberts called Cornett "our water czar" as he presented Cornett with the first of two resolutions recognizing his service to the city during a city council meeting.

Cornett and his wife were given free water and sewer service for as long as they are city residents and the city council voted unanimously to rename Lerol Street to Cornett Way. The mayor also presented Cornett and his wife free tickets, meals and accommodations for NASCAR's Pro Bass Shops race weekend at Atlanta Motor Speedway in late October.

During a gathering of Cornett's family and city officials at the Ball Ground Community Center immediately after the

meeting, Cornett reflected on his career for the city. "I don't think it's really sunk in yet," he said about all the surprise attention he received.

A native of the Cagletown/Refuge area of southern Pickens County, Cornett recalls delivering newspapers on a bicycle and mowing lawns in Jasper as his first jobs. Cornett grew up as the middle child in a family of seven children with three sisters and three brothers, he said. J.C. and Eldie Cornett have four children and eight grandchildren.

He worked in construction and was a heavy equipment operator for Georgia Marble Company before he was hired by the city.

His first day on the job was July 20, 1976. With limited equipment, he was a one-man department who came to know virtually the entire network of water pipes under the city. Now, he leads the department that has expanded over the years to include three employees: David Dean, Ricky Mashburn and Joey Ingram, who recently joined the staff.

Cornett was the sole city employee when Karen Jordan was hired as city clerk in the summer of 1985, nine years after Cornett, she said. Jordan is glad Cornett is receiving recognition for his work for the city.

"He's always moving and on the go," Jordan said.

State Rep. Calvin Hill, R-Woodstock, served as mayor during the mid-1990s. Hill said he came to know Cornett as a man with a positive outlook even in situations that would strain the disposition of most people, he said. Hill noted how Cornett worked in a conscious and methodical manner.

"He'd be out there and smiling," Hill said.

Cornett credits Wilmarth with being a supervisor who effectively manages the city while taking on a variety of duties. A major project was the completion of the city's sewerage system in recent years, they said.

Wilmarth said Cornett takes his job seriously while also being a friend.

"J.C. is just a super, super individual," Wilmarth said.