

Highlands Newspaper

FREE every Thursday

Volume 10, Number 50

Internet PDF Version at www.HighlandsNewspaperPDF.com

Thursday, Dec. 13, 2012

Thurs., Dec. 13

• HCP's free Christmas reading, 7:30 p.m. at the Performing Arts Center on Chestnut Street.

Fri., Dec. 14

• Christmas Bird Count: No experience needed. Binoculars available, Warm \$5 chili lunch follows count. Contact Brock Hutchins at 828-787-1387 to sign up.

Sat. Dec. 15

• At The Bascom, Family Storytime: J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, 1:30-3p.

• The Highlands School 5th Grade fundraiser at Wendy's of Cashiers, Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wendy's will be donating 15% of all proceeds from this lunch for their Charleston trip.

• This Saturday, 100% of breakfast proceeds at Mountain Fresh Grocery (not profits, but all Breakfast Sales) will be donated to the Highlands School PTO.

• American Red Cross First Aid, CPR & AED Class 2-year certification at 8 a.m. \$75. Questions and registration at the Highlands Rec Park/Civic Center. 526-3556.

Sun. Dec. 16

• The Chancel Choir of Highlands First Presbyterian Church will present Lessons and Carols during the 11 morning worship service. Accompanying the choir will be Terri Armfield, oboe; Linda Lancaster, flute; Valerie Whitcup, harp, and Angie Jenkins, organ. Everyone is invited.

• Chancel Choir Cantata at the Highlands United Methodist Church on Main Street during the 10:50 a.m. worship service. Featuring *The Christmas Cantata* by Archangelo Corelli with a string trio and pipe organ. Two soloists and a soprano duet, too. All are welcome.

Utility policy change rocks community

Citizens brace for January's 6% rate hike

The subject wasn't on the Town Board agenda last Thursday night, but it weighs heavy on the hearts and wallets of citizens, nonprofits and churches – and that is utility bills.

Hillrie Quin, representing First Presbyterian Church, spoke during the public comment period of last week's Town Board meeting to encourage commissioners to reconsider its collection policy

which is a stark departure from the past.

He came armed with a letter to the board and two emails from the pastors at the Methodist and

• See UTILITY page 11

Conditional Zoning was fodder at Town Board meeting

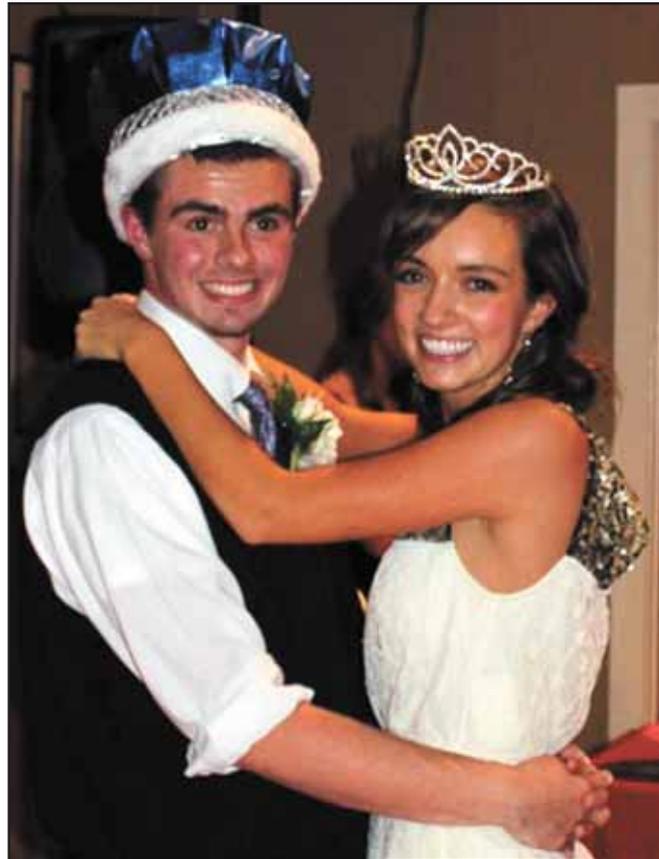
At Thursday night's Town Board meeting, commissioners reshaped what the Planning Board ruled on at its October meeting regarding two Conditional District requests – 594 Main Street and the Town Place Condominium site.

A public hearing for Old Edwards Inn's (OEI) request for a conditional district on the Main Street split-zoned parcel was heard by the Town Board Thursday night because in that case the Planning Board only made a recommendation, not a ruling. In addition, new zones always require a public hearing.

But the Town Board heard the Town Place Condominium case only because the Planning Board's unanimous decision to allow a

• See ZONING page 14

King and Queen for the night



Homecoming King and Queen, seniors Taylor Osteen and Hayden Bates. See more photos on page 14.

Photo by Lisa Osteen

• Inside •	
Letters	2
Wooldridge	4
Salzarulo	5
Swanson	6
Coach's Corner	7
Investing at 4,118 Ft.	8
Events	10
Shopping Pullout	12
Classifieds	22

Fire Chief Manley to retire this month

Things are changing at the Highlands Fire and Rescue Department. For the first time in its 60-year history, the Chief and Assistant Chief are paid employees.

At its Tuesday evening weekly meeting and annual election, last week, Fire Chief James "Popcorn" Manley announced his retirement effective Dec. 31, 2012.

He said he is just ready to move on and do other things.

Chief Manley was elected chief by department members June 2002 following the death of Chief Mike McCall. Manley will have served on the force January 1980 through Dec. 2012 with a three-year absence for military service.

Administrative Assistant Bobby Houston said Manley was the last of the six young men he recruited into the department. They were all sons of members.

Tuesday night members elected Ryan Gearhart, 35, as chief and Robbie Forrester, 39, as assistant chief each to a two-year term as dictated by the department's new by-laws that went into effect last year.

Forrester has served on the

• See CHIEF page 19

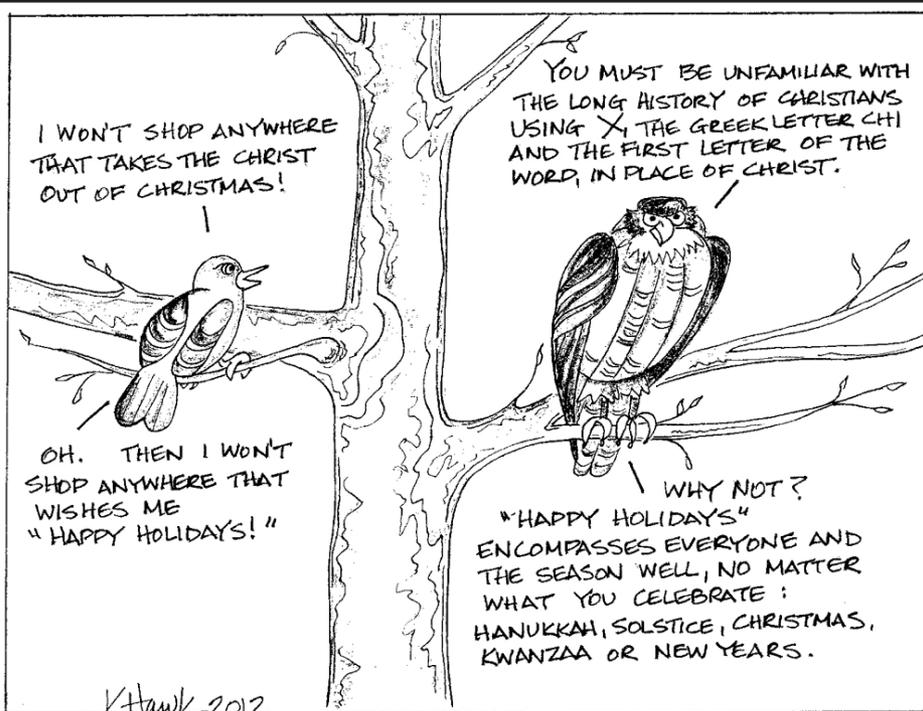
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• HAWK'S EYE VIEW •



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Email: HighlandsEditor@aol.com

Publisher/Editor - Kim Lewicki

Cartoonist - Karen Hawk; Digital Media - Jim Lewicki

Locally owned and operated Kim & Jim Lewicki

Adobe PDF version at www.HighlandsInfo.com

265 Oak St.; P.O. Box 2703, Highlands, N.C., 28741

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• OBITUARIES •

Thomas Curry Merchant, Jr.



Thomas Curry Merchant, Jr., a former newspaper owner and publisher, passed away peacefully in Highlands, NC on December 5, 2012, at the age of 96. He was a resident of Madison, FL for 82 years and of Highlands, NC for 14 years.

Survivors include his four children, Shirley Merchant Johnson (Jim), of Highlands, NC, Mae Merchant Clark (Larry Lokken), of Gainesville, FL, Thomas Curry Merchant III and Mary Anthony Merchant, Ph.D. (John Green), both of Atlanta, GA; three grandchildren, William Burton Clark V (Danielle) of Chapel Hill, NC, Corrie Elizabeth Clark, Ph.D. (Andy Turner) of Washington, D.C., and Major Christopher D. Wills, USMC (Julie); and five great-grandchildren, Gavin Thomas Clark, Selwyn Taylor Clark, Sayge Clark Turner, Olivia Taylor Wills and Thomas Christopher Wills.

Thomas Curry Merchant, Jr. was born April 2, 1916 in Madison, FL, the only child of Mae Talmadge McKeithen Merchant and Thomas Curry Merchant, Sr. In 1938, he received a B.A. in Journalism from the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Florida. At Florida, he was the manager of the band and a member of Theta Chi fraternity. He graduated from the University of Florida College of Law in 1939 and was admitted to the Florida Bar. In 1943, he graduated from the Harvard Business School with a Masters in Business Administration.

During World War II, he was stationed at various posts in the United States, including Maine, where he participated in a test of winter equipment for a possible invasion of Japan, and Greenville, SC, where he met his future wife, Shirley Anthony Merchant. They were married from 1946 until her death in 2000.

After the war, Mr. Merchant decided not to practice law and returned to Madison to work with his father at the weekly newspaper his father and uncle had purchased in 1910, the Madison Enterprise-Recorder. Later, when asked how long he'd been in the newspaper business, he'd say since age 4 - when he began helping his father around the print shop. He was always interested in political matters and served two terms in the House of Representa-

tatives of the Florida Legislature, from 1949-1952. Afterward, he would say that his best legislation while in office was bills requiring all livestock to be fenced and Klan members to be unmasked.

After his father's death in 1968, he became the primary editorial writer for the paper, expressing his thoughts in a col-

umn entitled "The Passing Parade", short for "The Old Country Editor Views the Passing Parade." This column could be humorous but was just as likely to be a biting critique of current political issues and politicians or a spotlight on misguided antics of anyone from the city commissioners to the governor. He was actively involved in civic activities such as the Lions Club and the Rotary Club and always particularly highlighted local educational accomplishments in the paper. In the early 60's, he set up a bookstore in the newspaper office to help support the then newly-established North Florida Community College.

Mr. Merchant was a faithful, life-long member of the Madison Presbyterian Church, serving as a deacon and then as an elder for most of his adult life. He remained with the church even when there was a split in the church and the majority of its members left to form a more conservative church. He was a member of the Gideons for more than sixty-five years. In Highlands, he attended Holy Family Lutheran Church.

In North Carolina, he volunteered as a tutor at the Highlands Literacy Council, as a proofreader at The Highlander newspaper, then as the Copy Editor at Highlands Newspaper. He was also a volunteer at the Fidelia Eckerd Living Center and read newspapers to its residents.

Mr. Merchant will be missed and remembered for his kind and generous spirit, loyalty to family and friends, and steadfast adherence to the principles in which he believed, even, in the case of his support for the local Health Officer, Dr. Deborah Coggins, who was dismissed from her position for holding a lunch meeting with an African American nurse in 1956, at the cost of permanent loss of some lo-

• See OBITUARIES page 3

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... OBITUARIES continued from page 2

cal advertisers and threats to his family.

The family would like to especially thank his physician, J. Scott Baker, M.D., and his staff, and his caregivers and friends at Chestnut Hill of Highlands. Their wonderful care and friendship during his final years greatly enriched his life.

A graveside service will be held at Oak Ridge Cemetery in Madison, Florida, on December 14th, at 11 a.m. Honorary pallbearers are James J. Sale III, Colin Kelly Howerton, Jack Wade, and Sandy, Jimmy and Zet Smith. Arrangements are being handled by Beggs Funeral Home in Madison.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that memorial donations be made to Four Seasons Hospice, 571 South Allen Road, Flat Rock, NC 28731, Gideons International, Att. Marvel Curtis, 46 Clover Lane, Franklin, NC 28734, or to a favorite charity.

Remembering Mr. Merchant

I first met and worked with Tom Merchant when I was working at The Highlander newspaper. When he was in Highlands during the summer and then after he moved here full-time, he would come to the paper twice a week to proofread pages before we sent them to the press – this on a volunteer basis. He would arrive after lunch with his trusty stash of Butterfinger candy bars, make himself at home at a spare desk and set to his task. He had a keen eye and rarely missed an error.

In July 2003, Jim and I started Highlands Newspaper and he asked if he could proof it for us. Of course we said yes! I wasn't ready to end our 5-year relationship which had grown over the years.

When the folks at The Highlander found out, they asked him to choose them or us. He chose us. He got a kick out of that. He chuckled often over it saying it was the first "job" he'd ever been fired from.

So each week he would drive his sedan to our office to read the pages.

When he could no longer drive, we took the pages out to him at Chestnut Hill where he lived in an apartment. For the better part of a decade, he read our pages diligently. His eye ever keen.

He loved words. His apartment was cluttered with magazines, books, periodicals ... all things written and his knowledge on subjects of all kinds was vast. We often chatted about the industry, the world and always about family.

Throughout the years, we sought his opinion on the business of publishing a newspaper. His advice was always solid

and worthwhile.

He loved his family and his life. Old age didn't hinder him a bit. He was glad to be alive as evidenced by the smile that always lingered on his face.

In fact, while preparing for death in Hospice his daughter Shirley told him it was OK to go. She said, "Mother is waiting for you and so are your parents." True to form, Mr. Merchant said, "Let them wait!"

He was ever joyful in life until the end. Jim and I will miss him.

James Oliver Sweeny

James Oliver Sweeny died December 3, 2012 at home in Highlands, NC. Born in White Plains, NY on March 15, 1917 the son of Raymond and Fannie Sweeny, he grew up in Anderson, SC where he attended Boys' High School before entering Clemson University in 1935. At Clemson he was President of Tau Beta Pi and the Senior Class and Chairman of the Senior Council, graduating in 1939 with a BS degree in Electrical Engineering.

After graduation Jim joined the General Electric Company in Pittsfield, MA where he spent most of his 40 year career. In 1941 he married Virginia "Ginny" Brown who remained his beloved wife and dearest friend until her death in 2009. Called to active duty with the Army Signal Corps in December 1941, he served in the China-Burma-India Theater during WWII and was released from active duty as a Major in 1945. Back with GE he served in a succession of increasingly responsible positions culminating as the General Manager of two GE businesses.

After retiring in 1976 Jim and Ginny moved to Highlands, NC where he became an active numismatics enthusiast, authoring and co-authoring numerous articles and several books including the prize winning two volume reference titled "Tempus in Numis". He also renewed his love affair with Clemson, becoming an active and energetic supporter of the University. In 2000 he was presented with the University's Distinguished Service Award and in 2010 was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humanities for his lifetime of devoted service.

He is survived by his children, Jim Sweeny and his wife Barbara, Robert Sweeny and Kee Howles and her husband Jeff, and four grandchildren, Heather and Kate Sweeny, and Derek and Brian Howles.

A Memorial Service is planned for sometime in the spring.

Bryant-Grant Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Online condolences may be made by visiting www.bryantgrantfuneralhome.com

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• LAUGHING AT LIFE •

All I really need to know I learned from criminals and politicians

If you haven't read that wonderful story about every thing you need to know in life you learned in kindergarten then just hold up a second....maybe two, and read this first. It's almost 2013 and the world has changed dramatically. None of that silly kindergarten stuff works anymore. You are now living in the "New America." You must know what I'm talking about; the America with no morals, lazy, no God, lots of free stuff, etc. Let me explain.

Instead of sharing everything, the new rule is to look out for yourself first because no one else is going to do it for you. Hoard what you can and remember to never give a sucker an even break. Sharing is a sign of weakness. The world is full of suckers so go for it. Remember, you're

entitled to all the free stuff you can get. For example, sometimes just casually displaying a handgun stuck in your waste band is enough for folks to generously give you their stuff. Then it's yours and it's free.

Playing fair will get you killed. Figure out what your enemy is up to and beat him at his own game. This is what our politicians do everyday. Lying, cheating and stealing are required and always remember the end justifies the means; just ask any politician. Getting free stuff is all that matters.

Putting things back where you found them is dumb. This rule would put an end to you're keeping the stuff you stole and get you nowhere. Remember, if you steal stuff, it's now yours and it's free.

Instead of cleaning up your own mess, do what the



with Fred Wooldridge
Feedback is encouraged!
askfredanything@aol.com

Occupy Wall Street thugs did and make a mess. Trash everything, poop on police car hoods, urinate in the street and attack anyone who actually works for a living. Demand more free stuff and threaten people if they don't hand it over.

Only say you're sorry when you hurt someone you actually meant to kill. And remember to never walk away from a wounded enemy 'cause he'll eventually return to kill you.

Never flush the toilet unless the cops

are banging on your door and you need to get rid of your stash. Even then, hold off flushing until you actually hear the door crash open. And remember to blow your stash a kiss goodbye as it swirls to its death.

Warm cookies and cold milk are horrible and will upset your stomach, bringing you off your high.

Live a balanced life. Sleep a little, have sex a little, shoot up a little, eat a little, steal a little, get free stuff and always remember that if you do these things you will never have to work. Work is evil.

Always take an afternoon nap after you shoot up but first hide all your free stuff from your close friends so they don't steal it when you nod off.

When you go out into the world, watch out for the cops who are constantly looking to steal your free stuff you stole from someone else. Cops never play fair.

Remember the story about the little seed planted in a cup of dirt? This is one of life's greatest lessons. If you water it and care for it, it will grow to a huge marijuana plant and you'll eventually be able to remain stoned for life at no charge.

Goldfish, hamsters, white mice and all your other stupid critters will die. Ha, so will you! Get over it but remember to give your marijuana plant to a trusted relative be-

•See WOOLDRIDGE page 5

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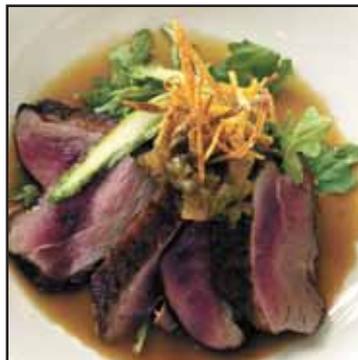
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... WOOLDRIDGE continued from page 4

fore you croak. Never mine, you don't have a trusted relative.

Do you remember the Dick and Jane books your parents forced you to read and listen to? Did you know that Dick and Jane were drug dealers who regularly did the nasty and that's how you were created? And if you

don't believe me, ask your dealer. Always trust your dealer.

And finally, if you hold hands with your dearest friends you're assured they're not stealing from you.

This concludes my tutorial on what I learned from

• THE VIEW FROM HERE •

The art of cross-breeding

Poodles seem to be the backbone of selective cross breeding. Cockapoos have been around forever. The pup is the result of mating between a cocker spaniel and a poodle. I believe poodles are great dogs, although I've never really known one. I can tell you what to expect from a lab.

I've developed a pretty good feel for huskies in the last four years. Don't leave them alone in a car. Don't expect them to come home on your schedule. Do expect to be pulled, at least for the first year or two. Huskies like everyone. I'm not sure they love anyone. And you won't find a bunch of breeders beating down your door to get your husky to visit with his English bull.

Huskies aren't really good for much except pulling sleds. They are beautiful which is the only reason you will ever see one out of harness and south of Canada. Poodles, on the other hand, must have a number of desirable traits besides not shedding.

As I said, I've never known a poodle. My knowledge is limited to rankings of the smartest. Poodles and border collies are locked in a duel for the title. One or two, that's a pretty smart dog. When I see a standard poodle, he seems well behaved, maybe a little aloof, but I'm not sure. It's a handsome breed, more aristocratic than cute.

Poodles have been crossed with various breeds, presumably with the intent to make them more like poo-



Dr. Henry Salzarulo

Feedback is encouraged.

email:

hsalzarulo@aol.com

dles. Goldendoodles and labradoodles have been around for several years, long enough that they show up in shelters from time to time.

An unimaginable number of other breeds have been crossed with poodles. A breeding site (<http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/poodlemix.html>) lists 81 breeds that have been crossed with poodles. The English Boodle might be resemble Tony Blair. Poodles have even been crossed with pit bulls. For pits, that's marrying above their station. The Doodleman Pinscher would make a fine guard dog with a taste for burgundy and Brie.

The fascination and experimentation with cross-breeding poodles stems from their intelligence, the fact they don't shed and are hypoallergenic. It seems like the trade off might be a lab whose reluctant to dive into icy water. A lhasapoo might not produce a mop of superior intellect. There is a story that Sarah Bernhardt suggested that she and George Bernard Shaw make love. Imagine the children we would have, with my looks and your brain, she said. Shaw answered, "Aha! But what if the child were born with my looks and your brain? ...".

You rarely know what you're going to get when you start mixing breeds. Apparently, in the case of a poodle, you get a cute, bright, hypoallergenic dog who doesn't shed and who never needs a bow in his hair or painted toe nails. Come to think of it, that's quite a bit.

criminals and politicians. And here's a fun little story on why I might be a little different than most.

Three men decided to share a cab at the airport and ride into the city together. One was an architect, the other a social worker and the third a cop. As they drove slowly through heavy city traffic, the architect noticed the beautifully sculptured buildings along the route and took a few notes on what he liked. The social worker noticed the homeless people begging for money and wondered how he might help them. The cop spotted a pickpocket standing close to a lady and her purse and knew he was about to steal her wallet or possibly mug her. He resisted the urge to jump from the cab. Then he noticed an attractive lady talking with a man and knew she was a hooker. He spotted two men shaking hands close to the entrance of an ally and knew it was a drug exchange. All three men saw the same city but only from their perspectives.

Now close your eyes and pretend you're me. Is that scary or what?

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• A CONSERVATIVE POV •

What's really going on?

Since the rapidly approaching fiscal cliff is dominating the news, we need to understand just what it means to our future. The head of the International Monetary Fund has

this to say. From france24.com: "IMF chief Christine Lagarde says the looming 'fiscal cliff' in the United States threatens the country's international supremacy and the fragile global recovery.

In an interview with BBC World News, Lagarde noted the US fiscal cliff, a combination of severe tax increases and spending cuts due in January, would probably wipe out growth in the world's largest economy. The real issues, in a way, are the supremacy of the United States and its leadership role in the world,' said the managing director of the International Monetary Fund.

'To make sure that that leadership endures, the uncertainty has to be removed because uncertainty fuels doubt as to that leadership.' With the deadline fast approaching, President Barack Obama and congressional Republicans remain at loggerheads in talks to find a longer-term deficit reduction plan that would avert the cliff.

'It's not purely a political issue. It's not ideological. It's broader than that. It really addresses the role of the United States in the world from a geopolitical and economic point of view,' said Lagarde. "I assume Lagarde knows what she is talking about and that



Don Swanson
Feedback is encouraged. Email swansonson@dnet.net

she's telling it straight.

The predictable finger-pointing continues. According to the hill.com: "Speaker John Boehner accused the White House of trying to 'slow-walk' the fiscal-cliff negotiations. Boehner said there was 'no

progress' in the talks just three weeks before tax hikes and spending cuts are set to kick in and expressed frustration that President Obama hasn't made a counteroffer to the GOP's proposal of \$800 billion in new tax revenue as part of a \$2.2 trillion deficit-reduction plan.

'This isn't a progress report, because there's no progress to report,' Boehner said in a brief press conference at the Capitol. He said the White House had 'wasted another week' by not responding to House Republicans. The chief sticking point remains the president's insistence that tax rates rise for the wealthy, which Republicans continue to oppose on the grounds that it will hurt job creation more than raising revenue through other means.

'Nothing is going to be possible if the president insists on his position,' Boehner said, characterizing Obama's stance as 'my way or the highway.'

There is a doubt in my mind that Obama wants to avoid the consequences that going over the cliff would produce. His dedication to American exceptionalism has always been in question, as far as I am concerned. What motivation would he have to work against job creation, to destroy our middle-class and to minimize our standing among the world's powers?

A statement of Maurice Strong, founder and first Secretary General of United Nations Environmental Programme and who has been the driving force behind the birth and imposition of Agenda 21 may shed some light on the subject.

"The concept of national sovereignty has been immutable, indeed sacred, principle of international relations. It is a principle which will yield only slowly and reluctantly to the new imperatives of global environmental cooperation. It is simply not feasible for sovereignty to be exercised unilaterally by individual nation states, however powerful. The glo-

• See SWANSON page 9



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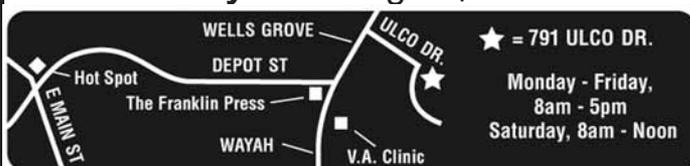
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• HIGHLANDS SCHOOL SPORTS •

Lady Highlanders drop two, rebound against Tamassee-Salem

By Ryan Potts

The Highlands Lady Highlanders dropped a pair of tough games to Blue Ridge and Andrews before bouncing back with a win over Tamassee-Salem.

The Lady Highlanders hosted the Blue Ridge Lady Bobcats in a rivalry match-up for Homecoming last Friday. Highlands came out playing well, and the game was a back and forth affair for most of the first half, with Blue Ridge taking an 11-9 lead into the break. Unfortunately for the Lady Highlanders, a quick run by the Lady Bobcats right out of halftime pushed their lead into double digits, and Highlands would get no closer than 6 points the rest of the way. Emily Gabbard and Kirstyn Lamb both scored 6 points for Highlands.

On Monday, Highlands hosted the Andrews Lady Wildcats in a Smoky Mountain Conference matchup. Highlands struggled early with the quickness of the Lady Wildcat guards, and could not capitalize once they broke the Andrews pressure. Andrews continued to push the tempo throughout, and came away with a 61-40 victory. Ann Marie Crowe scored 17 for Highlands, and Emily Shuler added 10.

Tuesday, Highlands completed a tough stretch of 3 games in 5 days by beating the Tamassee-Salem Lady Eagles in Salem by a score of 37-12. Highlands used stifling zone defense and tough man to man to hold the Lady Eagles to just 4 second half points, and Emily Gabbard provided 12 points for Highlands in the victory. The win gives the Lady Highlanders a 3-5 record with 2 more games before the Christmas holiday.

Highlanders race to best start in 7 years

The Highlands Highlander varsity basketball team won three games this week to improve to 6-2 on the season. On Friday, the Highlanders hosted archrival Blue Ridge in front of a full house at Highlands Gymnasium, and came away with a dominating 54-35 victory. Highlands used a combination of full court pressure and stingy defense to hold the Bobcats to a mere 10 points in the first half. In the second half, the lead ballooned to as many as 28 points before settling in to the final margin. Taylor Osteen led Highlands with 20 points, Kyle Gabbard added 14 and Tyler Munger 13 in the victory.

Monday, the Highlanders hosted the Andrews Wildcats in what figured to be a tough Smoky Mountain Conference bat-

tle. Andrews boasts a large frontline, and the smaller Highlanders would need to use their quickness to come away with a victory. After a back and forth first half in which the Highlanders led by 5 at the break, the Highlanders were able to blow the game open in the third quarter via a 15-4 run and come away with a 55-40 victory. Osteen and Munger both scored 15 for the Highlanders in the victory.

Tuesday, the Highlanders traveled to Salem to face the Tamassee-Salem Eagles in a non-conference matchup. Highlands defeated the Eagles handily in Highlands, but it was obvious from the opening tip that the Eagles were much improved. Highlands struggled early against the Eagles' switching defense, but were still able to push out to an 8 point halftime lead. In the second half, the Highlanders continued to pour it on-using a 12-3 run to salt the game away and walk out of Salem with their best start since the 2005-06 season. Osteen scored 24 points for Highlands, Philip Murphy added 11, and Davis Moore grabbed 14 rebounds for the Highlanders. The Highlanders will travel to Nantahala on Friday night to face the Hawks, and then will return home to host Franklin on Thursday the 20th.

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• JUST HERS •

A Cat named Weasel II



Michelle Mead-Armor
michiemead@aol.com

It was just a silly little cough at first, not something you'd think anyone would die from. We lived for years in a house with no central heating, so the cats developed thick fur coats, which I groomed daily. Weasel particularly loved this, making a silent meow or funny squeak when she saw the cat comb appear. Still, a fur ball occasionally presented itself. This distressed me at first, until I got used to it, generally calling out "incoming!" until the coughing fit disappeared. So, a first, I put the cough down to a hair ball, and thought nothing of it.

Weasel's cough didn't go away, but didn't seem to get worse or more frequent. Finally, I steeled myself to taking her to the vet – an ordeal for all of us. There's a reason why they call an impossible task "like herding cats." I got out the cat carrier – the universal signal for the battle of wits to begin. Weasel hoped to get the better of me by hiding, but she hunkered down in a place where it was easy to catch her. Before she knew what was happening, she was safely in the cat carrier, and I quickly shut the door. She wailed piteously as I carried her down the stairs, and out to the car. The performance continued through town, and down the Dillard Road. She had calmed a little by the time I hauled the cage into the Animal Wellness Clinic, and checked in with Lindsay at the front desk.

I never had the experience of taking a sick child to the doctor, so I don't have anything to compare with the vet experience. In both cases, you are dealing with the illness of someone who can't necessarily express what's wrong, or where it hurts. All you can do is describe symptoms, and the subtle changes in daily routines. "She has this cough," I said. "And when she swallows, she gulps a little." Was she still eating? Yes, but less. Any other changes? She isn't as sociable, and doesn't want to jump up on my lap as much. Dr. Brad checked her out. Weasel's neck glands were a little swollen. "I want to take her temperature," he said. "Better her than me," I thought, as he got out the rectal thermometer. Weasel's temperature was normal. Heartbeat? Hard to tell, because my sweet girl was purring so loudly, it made hearing her heartbeat almost

impossible. The final step was the X-ray, which would tell us with some certainty what was going on. I gave Dr. Brad a sad smile. "Just remember, I took a husband to the hospital, and got him home in an urn." When voicing your worst fears, you almost feel like you can keep away the devil. It was only minutes later, but it seemed like hours. The vet came back into the room. "You have to see this," he said, sadly.

There it was on the X-ray, a tumor about the size of a quarter on Weasel's lung. My heart sank. Dr. Brad shook his head. "I hate this, especially after what you said about your husband." We discussed the possibility of surgery, which wasn't particularly successful for this kind of tumor on a cat. I panicked. If Weasel was going to die, wouldn't it be better to do it here and now? I couldn't do it. If she was going to disappear from my life – and Orion's – it was going to be after a solid week of spoiling, putting away memories like stacking logs for the winter. We got Weasel back into her carrier. I picked up drops to help with the swallowing, only to try to make her more comfortable. I knew what a struggle it was going to be to get her to take the medicine. With a heavy heart, we headed home. Once the cat carrier was in the apartment and its door opened, Weasel bolted out and fled for the safety of one of her hidey holes.

Mealtime was a few hours later. I always fed Orion first, since not doing so meant he'd push Weasel out of the way and eat her food. With Orion busy, I opened a can of tuna, normally only a treat for special occasions. If my sweet

girl had only one more week to live, it was going to be tuna for every meal, and as often as she wanted. To my amazement, Weasel polished off her food, and sat cleaning her whiskers with obvious satisfaction. This was a good sign. I phoned the vet. "Do you think that catnip is the feline equivalent of medical marijuana?" I asked. "Sure, why not" he chuckled. I put a nice pinch of catnip in both the cats' bowls. How ironic! I never hit the bottle when John died, but I was going to turn my cats into a couple of stoners.

To my amazement, Weasel rallied. She ate with gusto. I switched on the gas fireplace, and she dozed contentedly in front of the fire. At times, Weasel would try to come on my lap for her usual grooming and cuddles. More often than not, though, she would jump down almost immediately, and begin that horrible, hacking cough. Every night, I'd go to bed and pray that Weasel would die in her sleep, and spare me having to put her down. But every morning, there would be that sweet fuzzy face, those huge quizzical green eyes, and that thundering purr. I was afraid to leave the house, fearing that she would die in my absence. My one week deadline came and went. Weasel wasn't sick enough to put down, at least in my opinion. You only had to see how fiercely she struggled when I tried to give her that medicine. In the end, the only way I could manage it was to wrap her up in an old towel, like a wiggling cat burrito.

"You'll know when it's time," people said, but how could I be sure? I wanted my decision to be based on Weasel's needs, not my own concerns and convenience. My friend Peachy came to visit, and commented on how my precious cat had gone downhill, how her behavior was so different from the funny, affectionate cat she had been. I knew I'd been fooling myself, engaged in magical thinking, that I could will Weasel well again. Two weeks after the original diagnosis, I cried in the shower, so I wouldn't scare the fur people. Then I took out the cat carrier, and prepared myself to do what had to be done.

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... SWANSON continued from page 6

bal community must be assured of environmental security."

So what exactly does Agenda 21 contain? It consists of 115 different and very specific programs designed to facilitate, or to force, the transition to Sustainable Development. The objective is to bring about a change in the present system of independent nations. The agenda is broken up into 8 "program areas for action:" Agriculture, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management, Education, Energy and Housing, Population, Public Health, Resources & Transportation. As you can see Agenda 21 addresses nearly every aspect of modern life.

Two sub-paragraphs from the introduction to Agenda 21 follow that help understand their "Agenda." 1.3. Agenda 21 addresses the pressing problems of today and also aims at preparing the world for the challenges of the next century (the "21st"). Its successful implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of Governments, National strategies, plans policies and processes are crucial in achieving this.

International cooperation should support and supplement such national efforts. In this context, the United Nations system has a key role to play. Other international, regional and subregional organizations are also called upon to contribute to this effort. The broadest public participation and the active involvement of the non-governmental organizations and other groups should also be encouraged.

1.4. The developmental and environmental objectives of Agenda 21 will require a substantial flow of new and additional financial resources to developing countries. Financial resources are also re-

quired for strengthening the capacity of international institutions for the implementation of Agenda 21.

So Legarde says we'll imperil our sovereignty if we go over the cliff. Obama shows no interest in avoiding it, and the UN is watching us fall into line in their one-world government plans to control our lives. To

add insult to injury, we are paying them for the privilege.

• Note: This is Don Swanson's last column at least for a while. After 300+ weekly columns, and with a load of temporary new responsibilities at church, plus trying to get in a little traveling over the holidays, he is

going on a hiatus.

"I have appreciated the chance Highlands Newspaper took on running my column and I appreciate the opportunity to do so. I wish the very best for you and yours – a blessed Christmas and good health, prosperity and success in 2013." – Don

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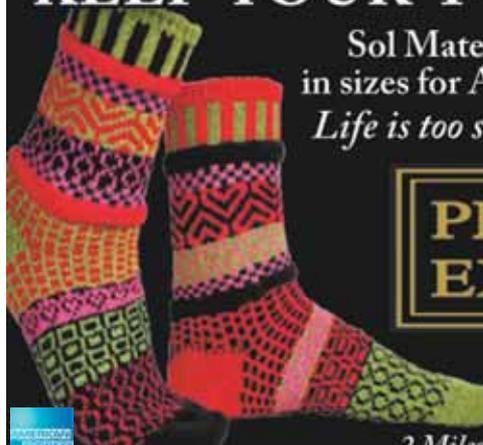
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Highlands Area Upcoming Events

Through Sun. Jan. 6

• At The Bascom, 'Tis the Season Giving Trees. Live and artificial trees will be decorated for the holidays by area nonprofits. Donation boxes will be at each tree.

Thurs., Dec. 13

• HCP's free Christmas reading, 7:30 p.m. at the Martin Lipscomb Performing Arts Center on Chestnut Street in Highlands. No reservations re-

quired. Hot cider and holiday sweets will be provided by the Highlands Chamber of Commerce and the HCP board.

Fri., Dec. 14

• Christmas Bird Count: Highlands Plateau Audubon invites you to participate in their 113th year of Christmas Bird Counting. Join them the morning of Friday. No experience needed. Binoculars available, Warm \$5.00 chili lunch follows count. Contact

Brock Hutchins at 828-787-1387 or 404-295-0663 or brockhutchins@bellsouth.net. for details and to sign up. This is a popular and fun event!

Sat. Dec. 15

• At The Bascom, Family Storytime: J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit, 1:30-3p.

• The Highlands School Fifth Grade will be holding a Charleston Trip Fundraiser at Wendy's of Cashiers (HWY 64) this Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wendy's will be donating 15% of all proceeds from this lunch to the Highlands School 5th Grade. Please stop by for a delicious lunch and support the 5th Grade!

• This Saturday, 100% of breakfast proceeds at Mountain Fresh Grocery (not profits, but all Breakfast Sales) will be donated to the Highlands School PTO. Mountain Fresh Grocery is pleased to be associated with the Highlands School PTO and is excited to be able to benefit the school children. Last year Mountain Fresh Grocery presented the Highlands School PTO with a Check for \$1100. We would like to increase this year. Mountain Fresh will also be serving a special "Highlander's Blend" coffee at the Breakfast. We want a big turn out.

• The Nantahala Hiking Club will take a 7-mile moderate-to-strenuous hike with elevation change of 1300 ft. on Bradley Fork and Smokemont Loop in the GSMNP with a side trip to Chasteen Creek Cascade. Meet at Oconaluftee Visitor Center at 9 a.m. Drive 8 miles round trip. Call leader Keith Patton, 456-8895, for reservations. Hike limited to 15 hikers. Visitors welcome but no pets please.

• American Red Cross First Aid, CPR & AED Class 2-year certification at 8 a.m. \$75. Questions and registration at the Highlands Rec Park/Civic Center. 526-3556.

• The Franklin Cross Country team will be hosting the Grayson Hall Memorial 5K race on Saturday at 10 a.m. at Tasse Park on the Little Tennessee Greenway in Franklin, NC. For more information and registration forms contact Denise Davis at 828-524-6467 or denise.davis@macon.k12.nc.us. The registration fee is \$20 and you can register online at active.com. Registration for students is \$15, but can't be done online. Register before December 7th and get a free t-shirt.

• The Nantahala Hiking Club will take a 9-mile strenuous hike with elevation change of 500 ft. following the Appalachian Trail from Deep Gap to Raven Rocks for great views of Lake Chatuge, Shooting Creek Valley and Brasstown Bald. Meet in Franklin at Westgate Plaza at 9 a.m. Drive 40 miles round trip. Call leader Don O'Neal, 586-5723, for reservations.

Sun. Dec. 16

• The Nantahala Hiking Club will take a 2-mile easy hike up an old road to Mud Creek Falls, a lovely falls despite its name, with an interesting old bridge at the trail head. Meet at Smoky Mtn. Visitors Center in Otto, 2 pm. Drive 12 miles round trip. Call leader KayCoriell, 369-6820, for reservations.

• The Chancel Choir of Highlands First Pres-

byterian Church will present Lessons and Carols during the 11 morning worship service on Sunday. The choir is directed by Dr. Michael Lancaster who serves as Director of Choral Music at Western Carolina University. Instrumentalists accompanying the choir will be Terri Armfield, oboe; Linda Lancaster, flute; Valerie Whitcup, harp, and Angie Jenkins, organ. Everyone is cordially invited to come to this service. The church is located at the corner of Main and Fifth Streets. Handicap entrances are located on Church Street and on Fifth Street.

Tuesday, Dec. 18

• The Macon County poultry club will hold its next meeting on Tuesday at 7PM. The meeting will be held at the North Carolina cooperative extension office located on Thomas Heights road and Franklin. Featured speaker will be Alan Durdan director of the cooperative extensions Macon County center. A covered dish dinner to follow the meeting. For more information contact club president Chad McConnell at 828-349-6287 or club vice president Jonathan Tallent at 828-371-1327.

Wednesday, Dec. 19

• Mah Jong will be held at the Albert Carlton Cashiers Community Library at 1pm on Wednesday.

Sat. Dec. 22

• The Nantahala Hiking Club will take a 4.4-mile easy-to-moderate hike with an elevation change of 400 ft. from Sloan Bridge to Whitewater Falls on the Overlook Trail with great winter views from ridge above the falls. Meet at Cashiers Recreation Park at 10 a.m. Drive 14 miles round trip. Call leaders Mike and Susan Kettles, 743-1079, for reservation.

Tues., Dec. 25

• Annual Christmas Day dinner at HCC's The Hudston House 11 a.m. until 5 p.m. Seating is by reservation only. The dinner is \$35 for adults; children under 12, \$15, and kids 5 and under are free. To reserve your place at the table, call 828-526-9419. Bring your family, and meet your friends for dinner on Christmas Day, and we'll do the dishes.

Sun. Dec. 30

• The Nantahala Hiking Club will take a 1.5 mile easy hike with elevation change of 250 ft. on an old Forest Service road to Black Mountain in Jones Creek area. Meet in Franklin at Westgate Plaza at 2 p.m. Drive 20 miles round trip. Call leader Kay Coriell, 369-6820, for reservations. Visitors welcome but no pets please.

Sun., Jan. 6

• A relaxed family friendly church service with a live Appalachian band. The music starts at 9 a.m., the service starts at 9:09 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall at the Highlands United Methodist Church on Main Street. There will be sausage biscuits, Danish, orange juice and coffee. All are welcome. Call Andrea Gabbard for information 828.200.6165.

Reserve now for the Highlands Annual Christmas Dinner



Martha Porter with her dessert lineup.

With less than 3 weeks left before Christmas, it is definitely time to decide "what to do?" Hmmm. Let me see. Plan, shop, chop, sweat in the kitchen for three days before Christmas. Set up the dining room, prepare a center piece. Say Grace, and 25 minutes later, it's all over but the cleanup!!!! And of course, that takes a few hours.

No, I don't think so. Not when we can get Marty, Donna, and Holly to do all the planning, shopping and cooking. Not when they are going to make a buffet dinner of turkey, dressing and gravy, ham, AND tenderloin, vegetables and salad. Not when you can have Martha make every conceivable variation of desserts, and Ricky's favorite banana pudding. No way. Of course not. Not when an all volunteer staff can fetch bread to the table, offer you coffee, tea, and other beverages. You can even purchase a glass or bottle of wine to wash down the best possible holiday meal

you can imagine. And not when you can do this all at the beautiful Hudson House of The Highlands Country Club!

And the best part, besides no dishes to wash, every penny of the dinner you have paid for goes to local nonprofits!! Not a dime of cost, not a penny from the tip jar goes anywhere but to support our local hospital. To continue to fund R.E.A.C.H., the nonprofit that is there to provide shelter and a safe place to women and children who might be victims of domestic violence. To Big Brothers Big Sisters to continue to offer a one on one mentoring program to children of Highlands to help them reach their true potential in life.

We will begin seating parties at 11am on Christmas Day and serve until 5 pm. Adults are \$35, Children under 12 are \$15, and kids 5 and under eat free. To reserve a place for you, your family and friends, call 828-526-9419, and we'll see you then!

... UTILITY continued from page 1

Episcopal churches. Father Dean from the Catholic Church who was at the meeting to speak during the Conditional District Public Hearing said he concurred with Quin and the other pastors. They all asked for leniency and a show of heart from the town.

"To me the relevant policy to a poor person in our community is not the official policy, but the policy as implemented," emailed Quin in a correspondence with Town Manager Bob Frye this week. "The net impact of this difference is that the town implemented a new much more difficult policy in November and December of 2012 instead of much earlier in the year as it intended."

For years the town has been lenient when it came to paying utility bills, specifically in the winter when work is scarce and bills are high. Though customers could technically be disconnected after 30 days after the bill was due, typically, a customer could pay what they could each month with the understanding that the account be brought up to date in the spring when work and mild weather returned.

But no more.

The new policy, which was never discussed in open session during any Town Board meetings, was, according to Town Manager Bob Frye, discussed by staff and board members as far back as November 2011 and again beginning January 2012. But the town neglected to communicate its change in "attitude" to the public.

Frye said the town's collection policy has always been disconnection after 30 days. "That has not changed," he said. "What changed is the Town Board's instruction last November to begin collecting and enforcing the policy. Anything that our former utility billing clerk did was not authorized or approved by the Town Board."

So technically, utility bills are due within 10 days of receipt but customers have 30 days to pay. After 30 days, disconnection is eminent unless arrangements are made with the town.

Arrangements include paying half the past due amount and signing a contract agreeing to pay the remaining past due amount over the next three months while agreeing to pay current bills on time.

Frye said up to the disconnect point, customers can make payment arrangements but after power is cut off, arrangements are at his discretion.

In other words, it's up to him if partial bills will be accepted, whether full payment will be demanded or if a reconnect fee of \$150 is levied before turning the

power back on.

As of Monday, Dec. 3 there were 201 customers on the disconnect list.

On Tuesday, Dec. 4, 158 customers were disconnected for non-payment and as of Monday, Dec. 10, only 39 customers remain without power.

Since Dec. 3, the town has collected \$69,896.26 of the original delinquent balance of about \$212,000; \$85,716 remains to be collected from active accounts. "The remaining \$56,389 is long-term debt collection and will be sent to the state debt collection program," said Frye.

He said a number of long-term delinquent accounts whose power has been turned off are citizens who have left town – simply moved or businesses that have closed.

The 201 customers on the original disconnect list were between 60 and 90 days past due and customers had been warned of disconnection via the red utility postcard bill which is the final warning prior to disconnection.

Many customers disregarded the "red" postcard notice because of the town's past policy of leniency, while others said they never received the cut-off notice.

However, Frye said that is not the town's problem.

"In North Carolina, failure to receive a bill is not an excuse for nonpayment," he said.

He did agree that next time – as in next month – people in arrears will receive a courtesy phone call in addition to the standard delinquent card.

"I was instructed by the Town Board to take this approach," said Frye. "Apparently, because of the past policy of being lenient, many in town feel they can ignore paying a town utility bill. The Town Board feels that this behavior needs to be modified and it is not fair to those who pay on time to let others slide as much as has occurred."

Meanwhile, people who couldn't pay and didn't make arrangements prior to disconnection pawned possessions and sought help from the Highlands Emergency Council, as well as area churches.

Pastor Paul Christy of Highlands United Methodist Church said he typically gets about 30 requests to help with utility bills during the winter months and 20 or so the rest of the year. It's likely those statistics will change with the rate increase and new payment policy.

Jennifer Creswell with the Highlands Emergency Council said they have had an increase in requests for help with electric bills, too.

"We typically don't help with electric but our mission is to prevent people from going cold or hungry, so if a client heats with electric we do what we can with funds available," she said.

In January 2012, the Town Board increased electric rates by 21.6% to offset the rate hike Duke Power imposed on the town. The town buys electricity from Duke at a wholesale price and resells it to citizens as an enterprise fund. The town's bill to Duke for electrical runs about \$225,000 per month.

Since the FY 2011-12 budget included an increase in water, sewer and garbage pick up, which are all in the monthly utility bill, increases were compounded.

There was a 15% increase in sanitation fees and a 20% increase in sewer use fees both effective July 1, 2012.

Since it now costs the town more to buy electricity from Duke than in the past, the town's profit-ratio isn't as high as before. "The fund used to be a cash cow but no more," said Frye.

According to Frye, for FY 2012-13, the town will see a profit after expenses of about \$400,000 – substantially less than in years past.

It takes \$9 million for the town to run its utility operations – water, sewer, electric – which are all enterprise funds and by law must be self-sufficient. Operation costs include crew salary and benefits, equipment, transmission, the cost of power, running treatment plants, etc.

As it turns out about 3,000 customers – full-time residents, second-home owners and businesses – shoulder the cost of operating the town's three enterprise

• See UTILITY page 21



*Highlands Annual
Christmas Day
Dinner*

Hudson House at Highlands Country Club
11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Christmas Day, December 25

Charity fundraiser to benefit
REACH of Macon County
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Highlands
Highlands-Cashiers Hospital

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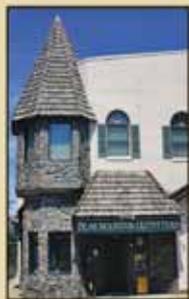
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... ZONING from page 1

site plan change was appealed by neighbor Steve Ham. Had Ham not appealed the decision, it wouldn't have been heard by the Town Board. That proceeding represents changes outlined in the Unified Development Code (UDO) which in certain cases now gives the Planning Board ruling authority to make administrative decisions concerning site plans.

594 Main Street

OEI's President and Managing Director Richard Delany explained that OEI wants to buy the 3.65-acre parcel which is split-zoned B3 and R2 to use as a small event/wedding venue. The Conditional Use District-B3 zoning for the R2 portion of the property because it will be used commercially. A Special Use Permit will also be required from the Zoning Board.

Planned on the property are small-scale events for 30-40 people with most of the attendees guests at OEI's other venues, so the 10 parking spots on the property will suffice. The house on the property will be renovated and the only new structure will be a 30' x 30' (900 sq. ft.) open-air covered pavilion.

Restrictions recommended by the Planning Board included making sure all renovations be in character with the property and the neighborhood, that only up to 40 people be allowed at an event, that the vegetative buffer on the R2 portion of the lot along Main Street and the bordering properties be kept intact, only up to four instruments be allowed with no amplification of sound, that the treetop walkway along the back of the property be eliminated and only five overnight guests are allowed at one time.

The property borders the Highlands Manor complex, the Hudson Library, the Corcoran property to the east and the Lady of the Mountain Catholic Church property.

Citizens spoke during the hearing: Luther Turner, whose great grandfather built the house said his family was thrilled that OEI was buying the property because that meant the home would be safe through perpetuity; Realtor Judy Michaud said the scenario proposed by OEI was what the town needed on the property rather than another shopping area on the B3 portion about which her firm as had inquiries; Dixie Barton who lives across the street requested that conditions be applied to the parcel; and Alice Nelson who spoke against the project saying it was a thin edge of the wedge making a residential side of town commercial.

Father Dean Cesa from the catholic church was concerned about noise, the perpetuity of the vegetative buffer on the B3 portion bordering the church's property and questioned why conditions weren't applied parcel-wide rather than just on the R2 portion.

However, early on Harry Norman real estate agent Bert Mobley said the seller didn't want the B3 portion of the property rezoned because it was worth more money that way.

In addition, Town Planner David Clabo said OEI only requested Conditional District zoning be applied to the R2 portion.

In the end, the Town Board voted unanimously to conditionally zone the R2 portion of the property CUD-B3 and to apply all conditions outlined by the Planning

• See ZONING page 16

HS Alumni Dance – Saturday, Dec. 8



Photos by Lisa Osteen



• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

How to know



Pastor Sam Forrester
Whiteside Presbyterian
Church

"If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority" (John 7:17).

Jesus gives in this verse the only way to know if you have the truth. Please understand, it is not intellect that defines spiritual truth. The only way to know if you have the truth is through obedience. To know and understand things scientifically comes through intellectual curiosity. To know and understand things spiritually comes through the teaching of Jesus Christ and obedience to that teaching. When you enter spiritual darkness, it is because there is something you don't want to do that God commands. Intellectual darkness always comes through ignorance. Spiritual darkness through willful inattention to the truth.

You will never receive a teaching from Scripture and not be quickly put to the test over it. You hear the Word and disobey. You wonder in your heart why things aren't going well for you. Jesus tells you in Matthew 5, "Therefore, If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." This really hits most people in the sweet spot. You cannot stand before God and be lackadaisical for one second. He will dress you down to the very heart of your scruple. The Holy Spirit will uncover the spirit of self-justification. He will take you and open your heart to things you have never thought of before.

When God opens his Word and your heart to its truth, please don't shirk it. To turn away from his truth will make you become lackadaisical. Be very careful about shrugging your shoulders over the words of Scripture. It is these things you ignore that will cause spiritual darkness to overwhelm you. Don't worry about the world and what it thinks. It is better to be called a fanatic, than to be lost in spiritual darkness. Listen to the words of God and obey everything God tells you. Jesus Christ came into this world to do for you everything you could not do for yourself. He lived the perfect life, died the atoning death and won the resurrection victory. John says Jesus was the light of the world. He came to be your guide and he continues to guide you through his Word. Open your ears and listen. Jesus said his sheep hear his voice and everyone who hears will know the truth and the truth will set you free from the bondage to sin and guilt. This will cause you to live in the spiritual light and know the way into eternity.

John 3:16

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

Proverbs 3:5

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Wed.: Men's Bible Study - 8:30 a.m., First Baptist Church
Thurs.: Women's Prayer Group - 10 a.m., Whiteside Presbyterian Church;
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Wednesdays – Choir – 7

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Wednesday: Prayer Service, 6:30 p.m.

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Pastor Paul Christy 526-3376
Sun: School 9:45a.; Worship 8:30 & 10:50.; Youth Group 5:30 p.
Wed: Supper; 6: 7:15 – children, youth, & adults studies; 6:15 – Adult
choir (nursery provided for Wed. p.m. activities)
Thurs: 12:30 – Women's Bible Study (nursery)

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... ZONING continued from page 14

Board upon the real estate closing.

Originally, Delany had asked that the conditions go away if it sells the property in five years. "If for some reason it went back to residential use, the conditions wouldn't make a lot of sense," he said.

However, zoning follows property so if OEL ever sells the property, the new owners would have to petition the town to change the zoning.

Town Place Condominiums

Steve Ham, whose property borders the eastern side of the Town Place Condominium parcel at Hickory, Chestnut and US 64 east, appealed the Planning Board's ruling to the Town Board because he said the change to the site plan – which involves replacing a single-family unit with a multi-family unit and placing it closer to his property line – is "substantial" rather than simply "administrative" and as such shouldn't have been heard by the Planning Board.

Back in 2006 the split-zoned parcel – B3 along US 64 and R2 along the east – was rezoned R3 Conditional Use. Though the project was never completed, four buildings housing eight units each and one smaller unit housing a single unit was planned.

Now ready for phase two, instead of duplicating the units in phase one, the new

owner — Mountain Heritage Properties, represented by Zack Shamburg — wants to change the design to a townhouse design – a design Realtor Pat Allen says will be easier to sell. "We know now what people want. They don't like the stairs, they don't like units above them and they want garages. People have told me they will buy the townhouse design," she said. This means the project will finally be finished.

The site plan changes represent an amendment to the 2006 R3-CUD plan on file and under the UDO the Planning Board now has the authority to rule on changes as long as they are administrative and not substantial.

Since a multi-family townhouse is planned for the spot on the plat where a single-family unit was previously planned, Commissioner Amy Patterson argued that the change was substantial and not administrative and suggested repealing the Planning Board's ruling.

Ham said that as part of the compromise reached in 2006 by the Town Board, the developer and the neighbors, a single-family unit would be the building closest to the residential neighborhood to the east.

"The conditional zoning reached in 2006 was a result of months of meeting between developers and citizens. The conditions reflected a careful balance of compromise to achieve harmony. The administrative adjustments to the site plan OK'd by the Planning Board upset that original harmony," he said. "At the time, the Town Board ruled that a multi-family dwelling so close to the eastern property line would adversely affect neighboring property. This is still true today. Please establish at a minimum, the spacing on the east boundary provided for in the 2006 Conditional Use plan. Zoning happens with conditions and you guys were very specific at the time; it's like this or it isn't at all. You laid out the conditions and several of the them haven't been met," he said.

Commissioner Patterson agreed. She said a condition in the UDO is that the Planning Board stick to the original site plan. "I don't think that is a minor change. This is a significant change. As per the UDO number four, "Standard's for denying or approving shall be that the change does not significantly alter the site plan" and I think this does significantly alter it," she said.

Furthermore she said according to the UDO, the change can't have a significant impact on buffering properties. "Having a single family dwelling tucked away from the property line and changing it to a multi-family unit jammed up as far as it can go

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... ZONING continued from page 16

to the buffer is a significant impact on the neighbors. And I don't think is an administrative change and it's not something a non-elected board should decide - we are elected to do these zoning things and we should be making these changes," she said.

Town Attorney Bill Coward said the administrative change made by the Planning Board wouldn't have come up unless someone appealed it so it's likely the verbiage in the UDO should be amended to clearly define the difference between an administrative and substantial change. "The way it's written is too sub-

jective," he said.

Commissioner Patterson agreed. "We never had this before, this is a new UDO thing; was it an administrative change? I would argue that this shouldn't have happened, this is way too much of a change to be considered administrative. To allow the site plan change and allow the impact on neighbors is a significant change. If you put conditions on a site, than you have to adhere to them and think about what you're doing instead of waiving a condition after five or seven years," she said.

So what signifies a significant change? Commissioner Patterson

cited the UDO as proof - "The first condition is that the site plan is followed," she said. "The other thing is, an administrative change doesn't impact anything, this does."

Realtor Pat Allen said the new plan has the same number of units as the old plan - 17 - just in a different configuration, which was Commissioner Patterson's point. "The first stipulation when considering a change to a conditional use zone is 'to follow the site plan,'" she reiterated.

Commissioner John Dotson agreed with Patterson saying the

structures were to be situated as shown on the original drawing. "I was present at the Planning Board hearing of this and based on the old plan and the new plan I had serious reservations at the time and felt the Planning Board was overstepping its bounds," he said.

Mountain Heritage Properties, represented by Zack Shamburg said they were told by the town's planning department that this was a simple site plan amendment that was respecting the original conditions.

Coward said the Town Board had to determine if these changes were significant. "If it's not significant, than this is done. But if you determine the Planning Board made the wrong decision then it has to go back through the public hearing process," he said.

In the end, Commissioner Gary Drake made the motion to uphold the Planning Board's decision. Brian Stiehler seconded it. The vote was 3-2 with Commissioners Patterson and Dotson voting no.

After the vote was taken, Commissioner Pierson asked that the board revisit the UDO and the standards set therein.

Commissioner Patterson asked him, "You don't think it's a significant change?" To which he replied, "I do think it's a significant change but I think we have to look at the verbiage in the UDO."

Mayor David Wilkes asked that Commissioner Pierson and Patterson take a look at the verbiage and get back to the board.

- Kim Lewicki



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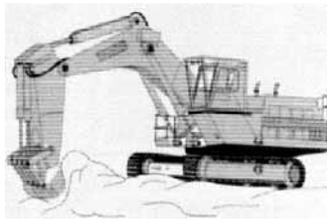
Voice for the children visiting area schools



Voice for the Children representatives, founder Marianne Malkey and organizer and publicist Jerry Ames have been visiting area schools to educate children about abductions. The organization also helps children who have been abducted find their way home. Recently they visited with Ms. McClellan's class at Highlands School. Malkey was abducted by a stranger as a teenager and escaped. Malkey said her mission is to educate the public about the causes and affects of abduction in all its forms. She uses a robot to teach children how to know the signs of abductions. For more information about the organization call 561-586-8515 or email mvoice4@aol.com. Visit the website at www.voiceforthechildren.com.

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Smokey the Bear visits Highlands School



Mr. Greg Brooks, Fire Management Officer, Nantahala Ranger District, visited Mrs. McClellan's first grade class at Highlands School on Thursday morning, November 29. He told the story of Smokey Bear and why Smokey wants everyone to prevent wildfires. He talked about good fires and bad fires and how Smokey uses a shovel to put out fires. Then Smokey Bear arrived and visited with the students. All the students hugged Smokey and had their picture taken with him. Mrs.

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... CHIEF continued from page 1



Incoming Fire & Rescue Chief Ryan Gearhart and Assistant Chief Robbie Forrester. Photo by Kim Lewicki

department for 18 years – since Jan. 3, 1995; Gearhart has been in the department since April 6, 1999 – 13 years.

Gearhart said accepting the position of chief is a big responsibility and he'll do the best he can.

As chief Gearhart is responsible for all injuries to members or citizens, including death. The chief must also keep up with all new rules and regulations concerning

fire and rescue in North Carolina, as well as answer to the town concerning the Fire Department budget which is dependent on the fire tax.

Last year, the town OK'd full-time employment of Forrester and Gearhart.

Also elected were: Captain, Matthew Wilson; 1st Lt., R.L. Wilson; 2nd Lt., Jimmy Petrone; Rescue Capt., Eric Pierson; and Rescue Lt., Jimmy Tate.

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... UTILITY from page 11

funds of which the electric is the most lucrative.

The bad news? Electric rates are increasing another 6% as of January 1, 2012 which will be reflected in the December 25-Jan. 14 bill cycle. The increase will only be added to the "January days" of the bill.

Frye said January's 6% hike is carved in stone because it's in the FY 2012-2013 budget which has already been adopted. Though municipal budgets are routinely amended, Frye said as per state law, two aspects of an adopted budget can't be changed – utility rates and tax rates.

Last budget cycle Frye recommended the Town Board let the fund build to \$2 million (from the current \$1.4 million) before resuming fund transfers to other departments and funding capital projects with the fund's surplus as in the past.

He said with the current electric rate and the upcoming Jan. 2013 6% increase the electric fund will hit the \$2 million mark within two years.

So now churches, nonprofits and the town employees wonder: Will the portion of those who managed to pay the bills reflecting the 21.6% rate hike join the recent group in arrears when another 6% is tacked on to the bill? Will more and more customers join the delinquent roles and face disconnection as winter progresses?

If so, Frye said it's his job to collect what's due the town. "People have to realize this is a service the town provides – it's a bill customers can't ignore and if they do, their power will be cut and they are on their own."

Obviously, the town can't milk its 3,000 customers forever or expect the Electric Fund to continue to be as lucrative as in the past. New avenues of revenue must be considered. Frye said there are options.

Cutting residential trash pickup to one day a week instead of two is one avenue, and that could happen quickly.

Another option that could be part of the FY 2013-2014 budget – which Frye begins working on in January — is a tax hike. A penny and half hike could bring in about \$400,000.

Other suggestions?

Annexing the three country clubs along the US 64 east corridor. Highlands Country Club was annexed years ago. But Frye said annexation is out of the question right now because the North Carolina General Assembly has instated a moratorium on annexation.

Others have suggested turning off the Christmas lights, installing parking meters and not giving certain customers special treatment.

At the November Town Board meeting, commissioners voted to allow the Chamber of Commerce to forego

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making utility payments for one year to offset the money it has to spend to move into and renovate the old Nick's restaurant on the corner of Main and 1st streets – the new Chamber and Visitor Center. The building is owned by the town and rent is \$1 a year – which is a substantial decrease in overhead for the Chamber.

Mayor David Wilkes suggested the board OK the Chamber's request on the grounds that it hasn't rescinded its offer to help fund the town's Wayfinding Signage project to the tune of \$10,000 even with new expenses on the horizon due to the move.

Meanwhile, Frye said one good thing is it looks like Duke isn't going to raise Highlands' wholesale rates for FY 2013-14 so it's likely after the upcoming January 2013 6% hike, the town won't budget to raise utility rates for fiscal year 2013-14.

– Kim Lewicki



Sixth Street Closing

The Town of Highlands would like to advise the public Sixth Street will be closed the week of Monday, December 17, 2012 through Friday, December 21, 2012. This closing will occur between Horse Cove Rd. and Chestnut St. The Town will be replacing storm drain.



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• POLICE/FIRE DEPT.

Highlands PD log entries from Nov. 22. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor, or public officials have been used.

Nov. 22

- At 11:55 a.m., officers reported a 21-year-old male driver on NC 106 driving recklessly, speeding to elude arrest and carrying drug equipment and paraphernalia.

Dec. 1

- At 4 a.m., the dept. responded to a single-vehicle accident on Horse Cove Road.

- At 10 a.m., vandalism to property was reported on Bowery Road where a road mirror valued at \$99 was damaged.

- At 10 a.m., vandalism to property was reported at Bowery and Biscuit Rock roads where road name sign was damaged.

Dec. 3

- A little past midnight, officers responded to a call about an assault with a deadly weapon where a knife was held to a person's head in a home on N. 4th Street.

Dec. 7

- At 8:30 p.m., vandalism at a residence on Laurelwood Lane was reported where an outdoor light valued at \$50 was damaged.

Dec. 8

- At a little after midnight, Enrique Contreras Gaona, 32 of Highlands was arrested for driving without a license.

- At 11 a.m., larceny of a wrought iron bar stool valued at \$400 was reported at Highlands Fine Consignment on Carolina Way.

- During this timeframe, officers issued 17 citations (warnings, ordinance violations and citations)

Highlands Fire & Rescue Dept. log entries from Dec. 5

Dec. 5

- At 7:07 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Cullasaja Drive. It was false.

Dec. 6

- At 10:41 a.m., the dept. responded to a single vehicle accident on Horse Cover Road.

- At 5:12 p.m., the dept. responded to a call about a woman's vehicle stuck in the road.

Dec. 7

- At 1:57 p.m., the dept. responded to an alarm at a residence on Whiteside Mountain Road. It was set off by workers.

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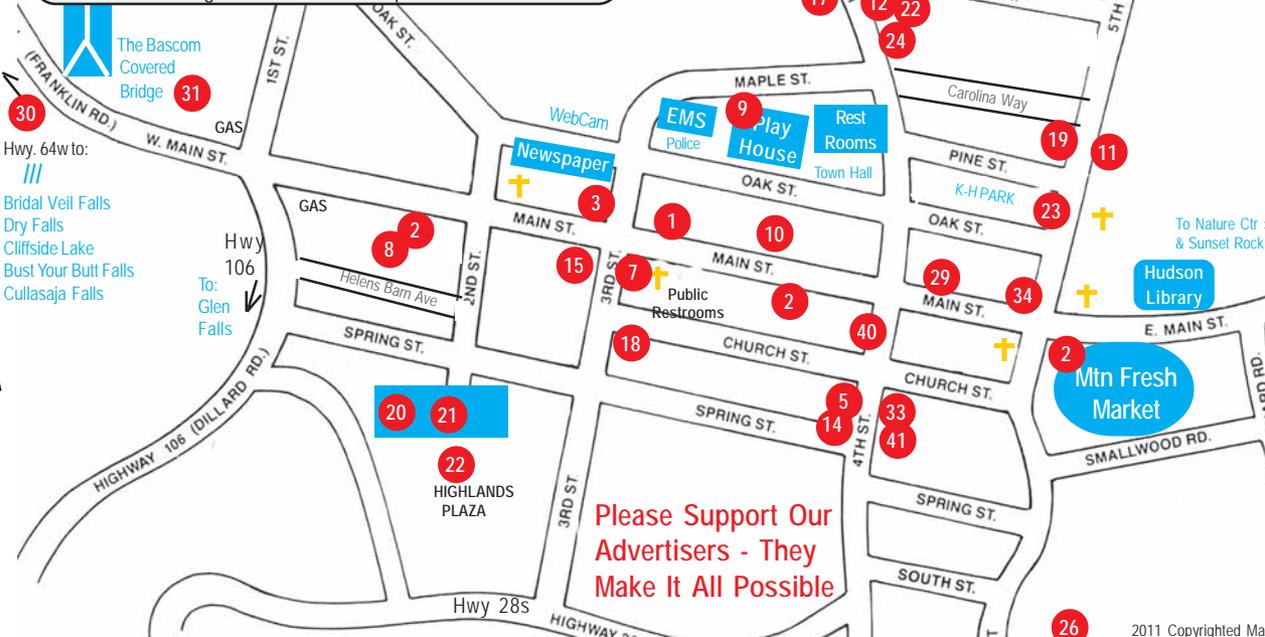
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 • The Highlands School 5th Grade fundraiser at Wendy's of Cashiers, Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
 • This Saturday, 100% of breakfast proceeds at Mountain Fresh Grocery donated to the Highlands School PTO.
 Sun. Dec. 16
 • The Chancel Choir of Highlands First Presbyterian Church will present Lessons and Carols during the 11 morning worship service.
 • Chancel Choir Cantata at the Highlands United Methodist Church on Main Street during the 10:50 a.m. worship service.



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