

Highlands Newspaper

FREE Every Thursday

Volume 17, Number 51

Real-Time News, Weather & WebCams: HighlandsInfo.com

Thurs., Dec. 17, 2020

Comprehensive Plan survey still 'hot'

If you want a 'say' in the future of Highlands, fill it out

Since the state requires municipalities with zoning to have a Comprehensive Plan and to update their Unified Development Ordinance by July 1, 2022, over the past couple months the town has been working on fulfilling that requirement.

A few months back, the town hired Stewart, Inc., to oversee the process of putting a comprehensive plan together.

• See SURVEY page 10

Highlands School to go virtual week of Jan. 4

By Brittney Lofthouse

At Monday night's Board of Education meeting, the board OK'd Highlands School Principal Brian Jetter's request to make the week after Christmas break virtual.

The first day back in January is Monday, Jan. 4 – a teacher workday which means no students were to be in school.

Tuesday, Jan 5, Wednesday, Jan 6, and Thursday, Jan 7, were supposed to be in-person student days and Friday, Jan 8, a remote day like usual.

"I requested to change the school calendar to make those three days of in-person school remote days. That means the whole first week in January would be remote, like we did after Labor Day," said Jetter.

With this change Mon, Jan 11,

• See VIRTUAL page 17



Each year, Highlands Boy Scout troop helps distribute wreaths and flags to veterans' gravesites in Highlands Memorial Park. — Photo by Brian O'Shea

Annual 'Wreaths Across America' to be virtual

Like a lot of other traditions and events this year, there will be no public "Wreaths Across America Ceremony" on Saturday, December 19th.

A video of the ceremony will be made available via the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/WAAHighlandsNC>)

the week of December 20th.

Anyone wishing to volunteer to help place wreaths can arrive at Highlands Cemetery between 12:30-2pm on Saturday, December 19th.

• See WREATH page 15

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Mission could get vaccine dosages by end of week

The US Food and Drug Administration granted emergency use authorization to Pfizer and BioNTech's vaccine last Friday, and it's widely expected to grant EUA to Moderna's similar vaccine next week. Vaccinations began rolling out Monday.

According to Nancy Lindell, director of public and media relations HCA Healthcare/Mission, the vaccine is scheduled to arrive at Mission by the end of this week.

"However, that schedule has already changed once, so it may change again," she said.

"Mission" could mean several locations across the state, but Lindell said Mission Hospital in Asheville is the receiving location for the vaccine that will be distributed to the five regional locations associated with HCA, Mission's parent company.

"This first week, we are re-

• See VACCINE page 15

COVID closes Rec pool to afternoon/evening swimming

The Highlands Pool Complex has experienced an exposure from someone who has tested positive for Covid-19.

Staff has been in contact with the Macon County Public Health Department and is following its recommendations.

Therefore, the pool was closed Monday, December 14th for proper sanitation and cleaning.

Due to the exposure of the lifeguard staff on duty at the time of the exposure, public swim will be closed until further notice.

However, morning lap swim, morning adult swim and morning water aerobics can continue.

According to Rec Park Director Lester Norris, the person on duty in the morning wasn't

• See POOL page 15

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

•MAYOR ON DUTY•

Hotwire contract, COVID and more

Tonight is the December Town Board Meeting by way of Zoom. It will begin with public comment at 7pm. If someone wants to make a public comment call Town Hall at (828) 526-2118 before 4:30. Please give your name and a phone number or email address that can identify you at the Zoom meeting. Or, email comments to me at mayor@highlandsnc.org, and I will read the comment to the other commissioners. The Zoom information is on the town website.



**Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor**

I had hoped that we would be back to in person meetings by now, but with the continuing spread of COVID, I think it will be sometime toward the spring before in person meetings resume.

In a related matter, I was on a Zoom meeting Tuesday morning hosted by county emergency services concerning the COVID vaccine distribution. The county's procedures follow a four phase administration plan developed by federal and state governments. Phase 1 will get underway next

week with the vaccination of frontline medical personnel and first responders, followed by folks in nursing homes and those who are very vulnerable to COVID-19. Phase 2 will focus on frontline workers such as teachers and police. People 65 and over will be included in this phase. Phase 3 will be focused on students, K-12 through college. Phase 4 will be for the remaining population. The county will be setting up a vaccination program similar to the existing testing program that they already administer. More information will be released as soon as possible.

On tonight's agenda is a public hearing to refinance the Fiber Construction Loan. The refinancing is required because our potential contract with Hotwire may result in the town making a profit over the 25-year lease period, which impacts the tax status of the loan. Again, if someone wants to make a public comment, call Town Hall or email me.

The board will also be reviewing a set of change orders for the construction of the network. The changes will not increase the cost of the project for the town, but they need to be made as soon as possible.

The board will also go into closed session to discuss with our attorneys several issues related to the development of the contract with Hotwire. The attorneys and staff are seeking board direction on several items.

Also on the agenda is a discussion of the Laurel Street Alley that connects Laurel to Spruce Street. For years the alley had been incorrectly located on the old funeral home property. In a survey by potential buyers of property, it was revealed that the alley should be relocated on existing town property between the funeral home and Mountain Findings. The board will decide whether to relocate the alley or close it to public traffic.

I want to send out Happy Hanukkah wishes. This Festival of Lights ends Friday. Whether we are celebrating Hanukkah or Christmas, we all need an abundance of light in our lives as we move toward what may be a dark winter.

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Letter Policy:

We reserve the right to reject or edit letters-to-the-editor. No anonymous letters will be accepted. Views expressed are not necessarily those of Highlands Newspaper.

•HIC'S VIEW•



•WEATHER•

Thu, 17-Dec	Fri, 18-Dec	Sat, 19-Dec	Sun, 20-Dec
40°F 20°F	49°F 23°F	50°F 34°F	52°F 26°F
Sunshine and some clouds RealFeel® High: 42° Low: 26°	Mostly sunny and milder RealFeel® High: 56° Low: 18°	Times of clouds and sun RealFeel® High: 51° Low: 24°	A couple of showers possible RealFeel® High: 54° Low: 39°

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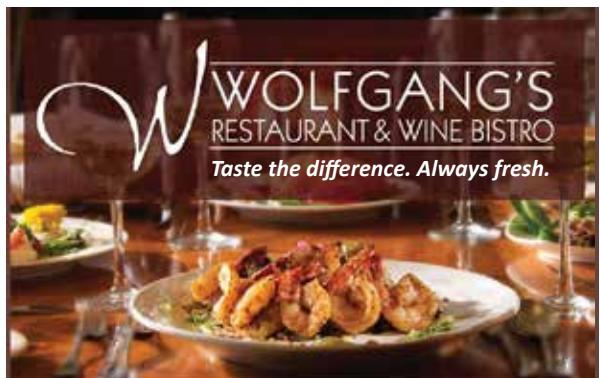
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• OBITUARIES •

Michael Alan 'Whitey' Crane

Michael Alan Crane "Whitey", 70 of Highlands, passed away Monday, December 7, 2020. He was born October 1, 1950 in Rabun County, GA to the late James Crane and Estelle Talley Crane. Michael enjoyed spending time with his beloved family of nurses and staff members at the Fidelia Eckerd Living Center where he loved to sing, play Bingo and greet visitors. His smile and laugh served as a fixture there that will be greatly missed. He was known for his Buck Dancing and won many contests in his younger days. He was a veteran of the US Army and was of the Baptist faith.

Michael is survived by two sisters; Sandra Baty of Highlands and Marie Bowie of Liberty, SC, two brothers John Crane of Easley, SC and Tom Crane of Pickens, SC.



In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by two brothers; Jim Crane and Bill Crane.

A funeral service will be held at 2:00pm Wednesday, December 9, 2020 at the Chapel of Bryant-Grant Funeral Home with the Rev. Ralph Campbell officiating. Family will receive friends from 1:00pm-2:00pm prior to the service. Burial will follow in Scaly Mountain Methodist Church Cemetery.

Pallbearers will be Jimmy Baty, Gerald Hedden, Wesley Hedden, Jimmy Ferreyra, Roger Baty, Henry Bowie and Timothy Hughes

Bryant-Grant Funeral Home and Crematory is serving the Crane family. Online condolences can be made at www.bryantgrantfuneralhome.com

Homer Wayne Bryson

Homer Wayne Bryson, 92, of Franklin, passed away on Thursday, December 3, 2020.

A native of Macon County, he was the son of the late Lawrence and Lazelle Talley Bryson. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his wife of 63 years, Evelyn Eloise Barnes Bryson in 2019; two brothers, Wymer Bryson and Wendell Bryson; and a sister, Lois Hawkins. Homer was a lifelong resident of Macon County and attended Community Baptist Church. He loved gardening, farming and could often be seen riding his John Deere.

Homer is survived by a son Denver Bryson (Penny) of Franklin; four sisters, Opal McCall of Highlands, Doris Hicks of Highlands, Gail Henry of Liberty, SC and Mae Ivester (Dennis) of Clayton, GA. He is also survived by four grandchildren, Daniel Bryson (Nao-



mi), David Bryson (Robyn), Kristen Brown (Noland) and Taylor Lottes (Mickey); and nine great grandchildren, Eli, Andy, Colin, Ava, Samuel, Olivia, McLain, Lillie, and Jensen. Several nieces, nephews and cousins also survive.

Due to the Covid pandemic, the family will have a Celebration of Life at a later date. There will be a private graveside service held at the Addington Community Cemetery.

Memorials can be made to the Hospice House Foundation of WNC, PO Box 815, Franklin, NC 28744.

Online condolences can be made at www.maconfuneralhome.com

Macon Funeral Home is in charge of the arrangements.

• LETTERS •

Columnist Ready brings up some good points but ...

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to Past & Present columnist Milton Ready's piece in the Dec. 3 edition entitled "Who speaks for the poor?"

Mr. Ready's position is that the folks at the bottom economically are forgotten by all. This is partly true. Partly false. He concluded that "we should all speak for the poor." Biblical justice calls us all to help the poor. I am not sure that it calls for us to "speak for the poor." Maybe God is more interested in what we do than he is interested in what we say.

The truth: life is busy with lots of concerns and most of us press ahead daily with items on our own lists of "to do's."

We pay our taxes. We give to our churches. And we donate to worthy non-profits that directly help the poor and downtrodden in our communities and across the globe. This is our concrete response to a call for what Christians call "biblical justice."

Our national government at last count had some 185 different "poverty programs," states have many, as do counties and cities and towns across the country. We have thousands of not-for-profit organizations that specifically help

...LETTERS continued from page 5

the poor. So we have layers and layers of government and private programs to help the poor.

So, I conclude from the evidence described above that Mr. Ready's wholesale indictment of our collective failure to look out for the poor is partly false. Compared to other times and places we Americans give a lot to the poor.

To keep this letter-to-the-editor of Highlands Newspaper short, I will submit a second letter suggesting some ways we might better help the poor.

Mr. Ready's column "Who speaks for the poor?" is a good call to all of us. I thank him for writing it.

**David Sweatt
Highlands**

Let's not 'erase' what brought us here in the first place

Dear Editor,

This letter is in support of the opinion stated by Alice Nelson in her letter entitled "Temps Perdu" in the Dec. 10 edition of Highlands Newspaper.

Don't get me wrong, I have not been in Highlands as long as Alice. Her parents brought her up here as a child and she was raised by her family to give back to the community. Alice Monroe Nelson's generosity is legendary. As a long-time member of the Highlands community she has seen a lot more changes than I have — and actually most of us have. Her reminder of what has happened to our beautiful town is a wake-up call.

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Not everything is bad of course, In every situation the good and bad have to be weighed against each other. There are a lot more jobs now than there used to be. There are tree protection laws that were non-existent decades ago. People are more mindful of safe habitats for our native creatures; and our town has had good leadership which has brought us warmth, improved communication and comfort.

The downside to all the improvements to me is the "Erase It" mentality.

That that beautiful area of native Oak trees, erase the oaks, plant some fast growing bush, then name the area Oak Forest.

Take what serves traffic as a two lane road, shave off the shoulders, widen it, pave it and call it Laurel Path.

Draw up plans for a development, make the drawings full of those beautiful green circles to

represent trees (circles of hope). The developer's plans look so attractive that all the planning board members agree—this isn't bad at all. It will look so lovely.

What does the finished project look like? Where are all those trees? Why didn't the miles of asphalt parking lot and roads show on all those drawings? Why does the finished project look like a skinned chicken?

I am one of the signers of the petition to keep the mammoth multiuse development out of Cashiers. I know it will bring jobs — mostly temporary — but is it worth it to trade peace for chaos?

I cannot even imagine where all the residents' and shoppers' cars are going to be day after day. Probably all the curves on 64 will have to be straightened. Those who have houses sitting back off the road will now be looking at traffic of all kinds 24/7.

And another thought — the

developer—what is his history? Can we look at some of his previous projects to see his track record? Maybe I am not giving this project the credit it deserves. What are the upsides of a finished multiuse project? I really want to know how something of that magnitude fits into our plateau community.

I know change is inevitable. People like to move, like to change their locations and design places to fit their personalities.

Just one thought about that.

When you move to the mountains you move here because it is cooler, quieter, more private and more peaceful than city life. Why on earth would you want to erase it? Why would anyone want to make the mountains more like the city they abandoned? It does not make sense. Why pave paradise?

**Glenda Bell
Highlands**

Future issues to consider

Dear Editor

Free paper map, Myrtle Beach and Gatlinburg

I have two suggestions to offer concerning the future of Highlands.

First suggestion is expansion of zoning control.

I don't want the government telling me what to do with my property. However, I sure as heck do want government to tell my neighbors not to build an ugly chain store or an asphalt plant!

Zoning seems very important in exerting some control over the future growth of the Highlands area. We can't wait for Macon County to implement zoning restrictions. I recall that when zoning was last put to the vote in Macon County it was rejected by a large margin.

I propose that our Mayor and Town Board reconsider the extension of Highlands zoning one mile beyond the city limits as permitted by our state. It once had been adopted until a person got on the board long enough to "protect" one piece of property.

At least we could keep the barbarians a little further out of our gates.

This may not appeal to some but should be a benefit for the majority of Highlands' citizens and visitors. The impending nearby construction of a Dollar Store may influence this topic.

Second suggestion, (rather lengthier) don't mess with Main!

Two current topics about the future of Highlands are trying to plan and control the eminent growth and the paving of Main Street (if the money doesn't disappear again).

If dear reader has gotten this far, she or he may be wondering what this has to do with the free map, etc. aforementioned.

Those of you as old as I may well remember when you pulled into a filling station to get leaded gas, a swarm of men would surround your vehicle, ask how many gallons, check the engine oil level, check tire pressure, clean the windshield and take your payment of about 50 cents for each gallon. One would even get you a free pa-

per road map if asked.

These tightly folded paper maps (way pre-GPS) were the bane of your navigator riding shotgun. I suspect harsh words were exchanged when it came to getting to and correctly reading (top side up) the right part of these maps which were about six-foot square and impossible to refold to the original configuration.

If you had one of these maps now that included Myrtle Beach, SC and Gatlinburg, TN and drew a line between these two "interesting" towns, that line would come very close to our wonderful Highlands.

Now, both Myrtle Beach and Gatlinburg appeal to many fine people, but I don't care to have Highlands look like either.

Still with me?

My point is that the current downtown Highlands is unique and should not be changed to look like any other city or town - no matter how cute that city or town may be with bunches of

• See LETTERS page 7

...LETTERS continued from page 6

trees and cement barriers in the middle of the main street.

Our drive-through parking spaces are good for the shopper who may like to spend money in the shops on both the north and south sides of Main.

Another advantage of the current Main Street parking configuration is the very small number of parallel parking spaces. Also, especially when traffic on Main is less speedy than a driver wants, the drive-through space offers an expedient way to go in the opposite direction.

Please, if the repaving actually happens, just do the paving, repaint the lines as they are now, and make no other changes if not required by the state.

More trees on Main, how many, where located, and who decides? That was a topic, finally tabled after the paving funds evaporated last year.

Now, I did a little research since then.

Not surprisingly, I discovered as many readers of this wonderful free newspaper may have, that there are five paved ways to get to Highlands from the nearby flatlands. NC 28 from Walhalla, 1603 from Salem via 107/130, US 64 from Cashiers, NC 106 from Dillard, and NC 28/64 from Franklin.

I noticed that on each of these roads that one had the opportunity to see quite a few trees.

How many trees one could see before arriving at Main Street is unknown (at least to me). The so-called Gorge Road aka Highway 64, I travel frequently.

On one trip on US 64 east, I tried to count all the trees from the Buck Creek intersection to the very attractive Highlands town limit sign. I discovered two things. I was unable to count all the trees I saw and that there are many different sounding horns on other vehicles on that road.

Maybe, if I try the count again, I should do it when I am not the driver.

Anyway, why should we obstruct the very restricted and limited store signage on Main with more trees since all can see so many trees just getting to Highlands?

If someone(s) wants more trees on Main, I propose a method that may answer questions raised last year.

Who decides if more trees should be planted and where located? I believe the people with the most vested interest are the businesses fronting directly on Main and the citizens who have lived in Highlands the longest.

I suggest 10 votes for each business whose main entrance fronts directly on Main. Monetary value of the business should not be a consideration. Each live citizen who was born in Highlands will be awarded 25 votes. Each citizen who has lived here year-round for over 25 years gets 15 votes. Any of the above citizens more than 85 years old will have an extra 10 votes but must bring their mother (in person) for verification.

The votes will be cast to answer two questions -- More trees planted on Main -- yes or no? Between 1 and 10 more trees, pick a number. If the majority vote is yes, more trees.

The location of the trees will be determined as follows: All the names of the businesses voting in favor will put in a hat. If the number of trees is six, then six business names will be picked from the hat and trees will be planted in the sidewalk directly in front of the entrance of each of the six lucky businesses.

This seems pretty democratic (small "d") and fair to me.

Larry Brannan
Highlands

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ALL ABOUT BOOKS

• INK PENN •

A hodgepodge of books

I've begun posting book reviews to BookBub and suddenly thought, "Why not share them with my Highlands readers?" That said, here's a selection of books I've read and reviewed. If I couldn't give it a five-star review, I didn't rate a book. I was afraid I might invite the slings and arrows of angry authors via a vis my books and didn't want to take that chance.

Writers and Lovers (Lily King)

As a writer, I was, of course, attracted to the title and the description about the travails of a struggling author. The story has humor and sad moments mixed together,

much like real life. Casey, the main character, is witty and quick with a comeback and doesn't have all the answers, though she's trying to find them--trying to make good choices and stay afloat while enduring tremendous amounts of stress. You'll find yourself rooting for her.

A Divided Loyalty (Charles Todd)

The mother-son authors never disappoint. In this latest installment in the Inspector Rutledge series, the main character's integrity and persistence once again pay off as he pursues a killer even at the risk of his reputation at Scotland Yard.

Set in post-WWI England, this series reflects not only on the trauma of those who served and survived the war but also the struggle to cope with its after-effects. The mystery of two dead women found in two different villages depicts village life in ways that stay with the reader.

Rutledge must first find out the identities of the women and then unmask the killer or is it killers? I highly recommend this book.

The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo (Taylor Jenkins Reid)

I couldn't put this book down and stayed up way too late several nights wanting to know how Evelyn's tale would end. Yes, it's a fictional Hollywood Tell-All, but more than that, it's the story of what one woman does to get ahead--from her escape from Hell's Kitchen to starting out in Hollywood in the 50s. Is she simply cold-hearted and calculating? Does she have a heart? Does she make sacrifices? Does she use people and get used too?

It may be the story of a star, but it has



Kathy Manos Penn

some parallels for what women endure no matter the industry. No, I didn't witness quite this drama in my corporate career, but I certainly witnessed some women throwing others under the bus!!

The Monogram Murders (Sophie Hannah)

The author does an excellent job of extending the Hercule Poirot narrative. She nailed his demeanor and his dialogue.

It makes me want to go back and read more Agatha Christie, and I will look for the author's other Hercule Poirot books. Suffice it to say I had a difficult time turning out my bedside lamp each night while engrossed in this book.

The Guest Book (Sarah Blake)

Though I'm a British mystery addict, I do read other genres from time to time. This was one of my forays into a family saga. I could not put it down.

The more I read the more I learned about the consequences of poor decisions made by well-intentioned people--perhaps it would be better to say decisions they thought were well-intentioned.

In so many ways, we are products of our upbringing, and shaking off old prejudices is a challenge--never more so than in the lives of the characters portrayed in this book. This is a book that stayed with me--I thought about it for weeks. I highly recommend it.

Perhaps one or more of these will resonate with you. Happy reading!

• Award-winning author Kathy Manos Penn is a Georgia resident. Find her cozy mysteries locally at Books Unlimited in Franklin and on Amazon. Contact her at inkpenn119@gmail.com, and follow her on Facebook, www.facebook.com/inkpenn119.

Remember when?

On Friday, Dec. 18 from 6:30-7:30 p.m., folks are invited to gather at the “original” town Christmas Tree behind Town Hall to reminisce, enjoy fellowship, drink coffee, sing carols and remember how the Christmas season used to be rolled out.

Let's remember what used to be!

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with Kenny Youmans

Ann Landers' definition of success

"He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has enjoyed the trust of pure women, the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who has left the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem or a rescued soul; who has never lacked appreciation for Earth's beauty or failed to express it; who has always looked for the best in others and given them the best he had; whose life was an inspiration; whose memory was a benediction."

My Great Grandmother's definition of success

My great grandmother, Amanda Kirby, was born in 1870 in a one-room cabin in Jasper, GA. The cabin is now in historic downtown Jasper maintained by Pickens County.

At age 16 she married John Kennemur, who was 20 years her senior. Even though I spent a lot of my youth with my great grandmother, I never knew my great grandfather. He died before I was born. My great grandmother always referred to him as Mr. Kennemur. I could tell she loved and admired him dearly. I don't know much about him but I do know he fought in the Civil War for the North.

While at the University of Georgia in 1962 a few months before she died, I was interviewing her for a paper I was writing for a psychology course. She had a very interesting history. One question I asked was what did she think was a "life of success?" She looked at me and thought a few seconds and then said, "I think when you look back on your memories and they make you smile."

I know when I look back on my memories of my times in Highlands, NC, I not only smile, I also feel blessed indeed.

Highlands Community Plan Public Survey

The Town of Highlands is updating the Highlands Community Plan, which will help guide development and town priorities into the future. We want to hear from all residents, workers, visitors, and lovers of Highlands about your priorities for the future in and around town. A public survey is open now where you can give feedback on issues such as housing, transportation, recreation, and more.

TO ACCESS THE
SURVEY, GO HERE

<https://tinyurl.com/2020HCP>

OR SCAN THIS



with your phone's
camera



Disponible
en Español

Realice la encuesta publica en español. Háganos saber que valora de Highlands y cuáles son sus prioridades para el futuro del pueblo.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HighlandsEspanol>

More information available at
www.highlandscommunityplan.com

Fundraiser Sale at Rhodes Superette through Dec 24

The Rhodes Superette, also known as Dusty's, on NC 106 is selling locally crafted, beaded Christmas ornaments. All proceeds will benefit the Highlands Food Pantry.

Join us in a small but important way to help make those in need have a Christmas devoid of hunger.

The suggested price for each ornament is \$10 but any contribution is welcome.

The Rhodes Superette has volunteered to match donations up to \$1,500.



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...SURVEY continued from page 1

sive plan for Highlands together. The project entails incorporating plans already in place as well as eliciting input from stakeholders in the community as well as citizens.

For several weeks now, everyone has been encouraged to fill out the Highlands Community Plan survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/HighlandsCommunityPlan.

"The plan is not meant to be regulatory; it is a policy document so it doesn't change zoning, or ordinances, or laws, but it can inform regulatory changes," said Stewart's Project Manager Jake Petrosky. "In the end, we might make recommendations to the town and suggest looking at some ordinances or zoning regulations; perhaps make some adjustments to be more in line with the overall vision."

That vision is coming directly from survey results as well as discussions with stakeholders and citizens.

As of Dec. 11, there have been 849 responses to the Highlands Community Plan survey, which according to Town Manager Josh Ward "is a pretty good response."

Surveys will be accepted through early January.

Petrosky said he and his staff are processing survey results received thus far, but there are some themes that will likely remain even if quite a few more surveys are received.

"Some of those themes and key findings that people value about Highlands are the importance of a sense of community, small town character, and natural beauty; but environmental preservation is a leading concern of respondents by a good margin," he said. "Additional concerns include infrastructure (water, sewer, internet), maintaining a vibrant downtown, controlling short-term rentals and historic preservation."

The survey includes a number of questions about development and housing preferences, downtown priorities, transportation issues and recreation needs, but Petrosky said they are still analyzing those results.

The makeup of the respondents to the survey thus far span the spectrum.

So far, there is an even amount of year-round residents and part-time residents (45% and 46% respectively). There is also a good amount of respondents who work in town (12%) and others that own property or are frequent or long-term tourists.

"The majority of responses are from folks over 55," he said. "If there was one demographic we needed to hear more from it's folks under age 44 who live or work in Highlands."

Once the survey process is over, the results will be summarized and analyzed by the Stewart staff and the consultant team. Findings from the survey will be presented to the Highlands Community Plan Steering Committee at its meeting scheduled for January 13th.

"The results will directly impact the content of the Community Plan," said Petrosky. "The answers to the open-ended questions will help to shape the vision and goals in the plan. The more specific feedback related to land use preferences, downtown priorities and transportation and recreation needs will influence the content of the policies and recommendations in the plan. It is likely that the plan will spend more time on topics that are a big concern for folks based on survey results."

The next step will be to develop options on how the town can address some of the big concerns, priorities and preferences from the survey. There will be more opportunity for public review and comment on draft recommendations in the spring.

Though as of July 2019 comprehensive plans are required by law for municipalities to have zoning regulations, it's not something that has to be enacted, though the hope is it will be and according to Town Manager Josh Ward the development of the Highlands Community Plan is very important for the future of Highlands.

"The comprehensive plan will serve as the guide for all future decisions pertaining to each aspect of the Town of Highlands for the next 10 to 20 years. The preservation of the character of Highlands as well as the direction of growth, redevelopment and services provided will be described within the document" he said.

Petrosky said this comprehensive plan exercise is a whole lot more involved than just checking a box required by the state.

"Ideally the comprehensive plan, or the Highlands Community Plan as we are calling it, can be a strategic plan for the town," he said. "It can document a community conversation starting this year and provide recommendations and short-term and long-term things that the town and its public and private sector partners can do to address the most pressing needs and improve the quality of life for town residents and other stakeholders."

To fill out the relatively short, easy to navigate survey go www.surveymonkey.com/r/HighlandsCommunityPlan

- Kim Lewicki

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The Year of Discontent

The situation the world is in simply doesn't seem real. The pandemic that made for good movie watching in years past suddenly stepped out of the big screen and into our lives. Some are still in disbelief and we wake up every day wondering if we will be safe until tomorrow comes. For over 300,000 people in the United States alone tomorrow didn't come. I think we all have known friends or relatives who lost someone to Covid-19 and life will never be the same.

When the virus started its quest to infect us in March, real estate brokers were stunned and felt that buyers would go dormant. Nothing could have prepared us for the buying frenzy we have encountered. People feel safer in a small town with lower density and now that men and women have been required to work from home they realize that their home office can be anywhere. Our home sales are up 68.87% from last year through November with more to come in December! Lots and lands have almost doubled!

As a result of a buying "frenzy," it is all we can do to keep up! Home inspectors are difficult to get in a timely manner, surveyors are almost impossible to find, appraisers are in overload, and attorneys are inundated and have never seen anything like this!

Almost 80% of our buyers previously paid cash which eliminated mounds of paperwork and having to deal with a bank appointed appraiser (who may or may not know our area).

With interest rates so low now, 80-90% want to get a loan. The mortgage lenders are working from home and there is such a disconnect trying to get information in a timely manner. Closings are getting delayed because you can't close without an appraisal and then you still have underwriting to deal with. We desperately need more appraisers in this area so if you have children or grandchildren there is a job waiting!

Now that we are in a sellers' market, with many homes going under contract the day of listing and multiple offers forcing the prices up, I'm not sure how appraisers can adjust their numbers when a home that should sell for market value of \$300-\$350 a square foot are at \$500 plus which some are paying.



Pat Allen
Broker-in-charge
Cell: 828-200-9179
Pat Allen Realty Group

I'm reminded of 2008 when the market readjusted and those who bought before 2008 overpaid and lost money when trying to sell. This could possibly happen again with the frenzy going on now. Make sure to use a good broker when buying who will help you negotiate to protect your investment and advise you accordingly.

As Christmas nears, we all will experience it differently this year. No large gatherings with family and friends, restricted travel, and a true sense of loss.

There are families who can't afford to buy food or Christmas presents for their children through no fault of their own. Jobs are lost, small businesses shut down, and non-profits are taking a hit as well.

I encourage all of us who are able to over-tip if you're fortunate enough to go out for a meal, donate to the food banks near you, donate coats and boots to the emergency council on Poplar Street, send cards to shut-ins, donate to our non-profits including the Humane Society. Pay for someone's food in the grocery check-out line, get names from churches who know people who are really suffering financially, buy a heater and blankets for someone living in a cold house, or give a tree to someone who can't afford one this year so children can decorate with smiles. Any act of kindness is appreciated now more than ever.

Christmas is love and Covid-19 can't take that from us. Praying that next Christmas will be filled with comfort and joy. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays from me to you.

We will all be home for Christmas...if only in our dreams.

• *Pat Allen is owner of Pat Allen Realty Group and a Certified Luxury Home Marketing Specialist and is certified in Resort and Second home properties. She chooses to remain an independent firm which was recently selected as a Leading Real Estate Company of the World. She is consistently a top producer and award-winning broker on the plateau. Visit her on the web at Pat Allen Realty Group.com, call 828-526-8784, or 828-200-9179. The office is conveniently located at 295 Dillard Road with a second location at 5121 Cashiers Road at the entrance to Wildcat Cliffs Country Club with Julie Osborn as broker-in-charge.*

...POOL continued from page 1

exposed; it was just the afternoon/evening lifeguard staff associated with Highlands Hurricanes swim team.

He said now sanitized, he believes the facility is safe but is erring on the side of

caution for afternoon and weekend public swimming.

He believes the pool will reopen to all – morning and afternoon swimmers Monday, Dec. 21.

...WREATHS continued from page 1

Please follow parking and wreath placement directions by our docents. Some items to be aware of before you arrive:

1) Please do not arrive at the cemetery before 12:30pm. Please consider arriving closer to 1pm to allow for staggering of volunteer vehicles parked at the cemetery.

2) Please wear a mask at all times.

3) Please wear some type of gloves (work gloves are best) to handle wreaths.

Any changes due to weather will be announced on our Facebook page.

For more information, please contact Phil Potts at ppotts63@frontier.com or 828-200-9753.

– submitted

...VACCINE continued from page 1

ceiving 2,925 doses to allocate across the system. As you can imagine there are many moving parts,” she said.

There are lots of questions yet unanswered though it’s believed that front line workers, healthcare workers and residents in skilled nursing centers like Highlands’ Eckerd Living Center will receive the vaccine first.

The question is once the Eckerd Living

Center residents get the vaccine, will their families be able to “physically” see them? Visit, touch?

Will they be allowed out of the facility for home visits, etc.?

Lindell said she will have concrete answers to questions soon.

“Once I have the particulars, I will let you know,” she said.

– Kim Lewicki

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Moss sentenced for embezzlement

A would-be lawyer found herself in handcuffs and headed to prison Thursday after pleading guilty in Jackson County Superior Court to pocketing money earmarked for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Assistant District Attorney Christina Matheson said Cheryl Moss, 41, a former Coward, Hicks and Siler employee in Cashiers, pleaded guilty to five felony counts of embezzlement.

Moss bypassed multiple law-firm safeguards and siphoned off \$41,465 from a \$2.9 million trust, said Matheson, a prosecutor for District Attorney Ashley Hornsby Welch, who oversees the 43rd Prosecutorial District.

Matheson told Superior Court Judge Steve Warren that Moss used the money to buy a Harley-Davidson motorcycle and a 2016 BMW sport utility vehicle. Moss also paid credit-card debt with her ill-gotten gains.

She borrowed money from



Cheryl Moss apologizes Thursday in Jackson County Superior Court to her former law-firm colleagues.

family members to repay the law firm, according to court testimony.

The trust funds are now with St. Jude's. The nonprofit hospital is located in Memphis, TN, treating serious, life-threatening children's diseases, particularly leukemia and other cancers. Families are not billed for their children's care.

Judge Warren ordered Moss serve 120 days in the N.C.

Department of Corrections, overriding her attorney's request she be spared active time.

Attorney Christopher Fialko of Charlotte then requested the judge delay activating Moss' sentence until May or June, minimizing her possible exposure to COVID-19 while in prison.

Matheson responded that Moss should be treated like every other person sentenced in Jackson County's courts. The judge agreed, saying, "That's what we are going to do."

In addition to active time, Judge Warren consolidated for sentencing the five criminal counts into two judgements. He handed down two, six- to seven-month sentences, to be served consecutively, suspended.

Moss will be on 24 months supervised probation once released from prison. She also must perform 100 hours of community service.

In court, Moss told her former boss and two co-workers she regrets stealing the money.

"I embarrassed myself, my family and ruined my reputation," she said.

Moss started working for Coward, Hicks and Siler in November 2015 after failing to pass the bar exam, a fundamental requirement to receiving a law license.

She received personal mentoring from Kim Coward and a promise of financial help to pay for a bar-review course.

Coward told the judge she had hopes Moss would pass the bar, obtain her license and perhaps, one day, join the law firm.

Moss launched her embezzlement scheme in February 2018, altering a wire transfer of the trust funds. She then forged Coward's signature on checks and changed other legal documents and ledger entries. The scheme unraveled when Moss failed in May 2019 to delete an entry, and a co-worker noticed a discrepancy in the bank balance.

Coward said Moss "methodically and systematically" abused the trust placed in her at Coward, Hicks and Siler.



Our Lady of the Mountains

Catholic Church

Christmas Eve Vigil Mass

3:00 pm

Christmas Day Mass

11:00 am

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website: olmhightlands.com

We are following all recommended COVID precautions

...VIRTUAL continued from page 1

will be the first in-person day.

"The calendar change means the school population will be 11 days away from New Year's Eve gatherings and 17 days from Christmas gatherings," said Jetter. "I think it is prudent to keep students and teachers (adults) separated long enough to get through the family gathering 'potential' quarantined days, especially after what seems to be happening with the Thanksgiving surge in the USA right now according to the CDC."

On Monday, Jan 11, the plan is to resume the present schedule of Monday through Thursday in-person, and Friday remote.

"I'm trying to distance in-person learning from the predicted (by the CDC) surge from Christmas family gatherings and New Year's gatherings to protect both employees and students," said Jetter.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday, Highlands School's 9th COVID case was reported.

With COVID19 cases on the rise in Macon County, COVID was discussed at length at the Monday night's Board of Education meeting.

According to MCS Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin, just on Monday, the Macon County School system had a total of 10 students who tested positive for COVID19.

Seven of the two were Franklin High School students, one at Highlands School, and two at Macon Middle School. In addition to the 10 students who tested positive, another 85 students are currently quarantined due to possible exposure. Since November 16, a total of 30 students have tested positive for COVID19 and a total of 206 have needed to quarantine.

There are currently seven staff members positive for the virus; three at Cartoogechaye, one at East Franklin Elementary, one at Franklin High School, and two at Macon Middle School. There are a total of 19 staff quarantined throughout the district. Since November 16, there have been a total of 23 staff members who have tested positive and 53 who have had to quarantine.

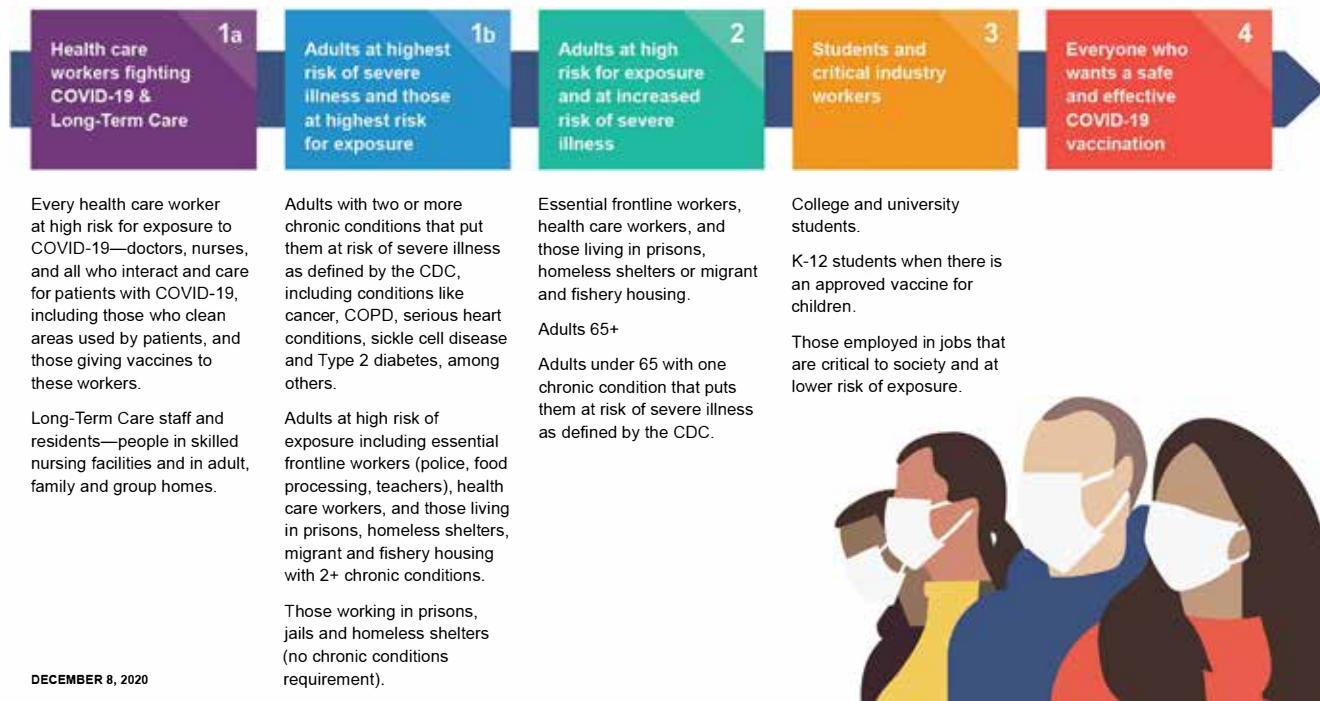
Those totals include Tuesday's count when MC Schools was notified that positive cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed at Franklin High School-2, Macon Middle School-1, South Macon Elementary School-1, and Highlands School-2.

Dr. Baldwin noted that while COVID19 cases within the school system

COVID-19 Vaccinations: Those most at risk get it first.



A tested, safe and effective vaccine will be available to all who want it, but supplies will be limited at first. Independent state and federal public health advisory committees have determined that the best way to fight COVID-19 is to start first with vaccinations for those most at risk, reaching more people as the vaccine supply increases from January to June. Keep practicing the 3W's—wear a mask, wait six feet apart, wash your hands—until everyone has a chance to vaccinate.



With COVID on the rise, but the vaccine in sight, the MC Board of Ed sent out this graphic.

have improved since the board met last week, the total number of cases for Macon County increased considerably over the weekend.

From Friday at 4 p.m. to Monday at 4 p.m., Macon County Schools reported 45 new COVID19 cases, bringing the total active number of positive cases to 123. HCA Public Relations Director Nancy Lindell reported that as of Tuesday morning, Angel Medical Center has four individuals hospitalized due to COVID19.

"We are seeing an uptick in positive cases throughout the community and I have expressed some concerns with school being in session face-to-face right now," Macon County Public Health Director Kathy McGaha said Monday night during the Board of Education meeting. "Though most of the transmissions we are seeing in the community is not in the schools, we are seeing an increase in the positivity rate. We

have come to the conclusion that we are going to take this on a day-by-day basis to see if we need to go virtual."

On December 7, Dr. Baldwin said that he did not anticipate any changes for students for the Spring semester other than changes to virtual learning at Franklin High School and the Highlands School request, however, due to concerns about rapidly increasing case numbers, Dr. Baldwin said the board may need to consider beginning the next semester with virtual learning. Any changes will be announced.

McGaha noted that with 45 new cases on Monday, that is the largest single-day increase the health department has seen. "I have some serious concerns and so does the county's medical director Dr. Dewhurst who is here with me."

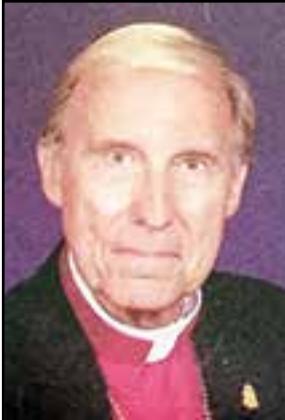
Macon Middle School spent half of last week in virtual learning due to a lack of staff

and exposure at the school and this week, Cartoogechaye Elementary is virtual for the same reason.

"We will not hesitate to close one or more schools depending on the number of cases at any of our school locations," said Dr. Baldwin. "In addition to Highlands being approved to conduct remote instruction the first week of school after the Christmas break, we will stay in contact with the health department and should we see an increase in cases over Christmas break, I hope that parents will understand that we may open schools on January 5 as a district in remote instruction."

Dr. Baldwin said school districts across the state are considering the same option due to a rise in cases following the Thanksgiving holiday, which is anticipated to only worsen after Christmas.



SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING

The REAL night before Christmas

**Written by:
Archbishop
John Erbelding**

'Twas the night before Christmas
and as Bethlehem sleeps
we shepherds on hillsides
were tending our sheep.

Our staffs on tree branches
were hung there with care
in hopes that in darkness
no wolves would be there.

Our sons were nestled
all snug in hay beds
while visions of festivals
danced in their heads.

Saul in his tunic
and I in my wrap
had just settled in
for a much needed nap.

When out of the heavens
there rose such a noise
we ran to the hilltop
awaking the boys.

The moon on the crest
of wind-driven sand
cast eerie, long shadows
on this sleepy band.

When what to our wondering
eyes should appear
but a sky full of angels
all singing good cheer.

More rapid than eagles
the angels they came
with singing and praising
and I heard them by name:

There was Michael and Gabriel,
Thomas and Paul,
Peter and Philip,
Andrew and Saul.

•See SPIRITUALLY page 19

Proverbs 3:5**PLACES TO WORSHIP****John 3:16****BLUE VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH**

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Sun.: Worship 10:45 am; Sun.: Bible Study 9:30 am

Wed.: Men's Bible Study 8:30 am; Choir 5p; Prayer Mtg 6:15p

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Sun.: Worship 8:30a Adult Ed.: 9:30a.m.; Worship 11 a.m.

Mondays: Men's Prayer Group & Breakfast 8 a.m.

Wed: Choir:6p

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Wed. Kidsquest 6p.; Worship 7p.

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Sundays: Worship: 11

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670 N. 4th Street (next to the Highlands Civic Center)

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Wednesday: Prayer Service, 6:30 p.

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Wed: Bible Study and Youth Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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Rev. Marty Kilby

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Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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Wednesdays: Prayer & Bible Study: 6 p.m.

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WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers

Sunday School: 10 am, Worship Service: 11 am

...SPIRITUALLY continued from page 18

To the top of the rock,
to the top of the wall,
we all heard their singing,
we all heard their call.

As dry leaves that before
a wild sandstorm fly
when met with a fig tree
would mount to the sky.

So up to the heavens
the angels they flew
singing of Jesus,
how His birthday was due.

"Go into the town,
seek a small manger stall."
They gave us this message
for men, one and all.

As I lowered my head
and was turning around,
down to the stable,
run, and a baby found.

He was dressed all in cloths
from His head to His toes,
and laid in a manger,
where cattle feed goes.

A bundle of joy,
this most lovely thing.
He looked like a baby,
but one day a king.

His eyes, how they twinkled,
His smile, oh how merry,
the stable was cold.
His nose looked like a berry.

There were horses and cattle,
and a mule with big teeth.
They encircled the stable.
It looked like a wreath.

There stood tired Joseph,
to keep eyes open was hard,
but he stood beside Jesus.
He stood like a guard.

There also was Mary,
a crown of light round her head,
and with love in her eyes,
I had nothing to dread.

They spoke not a word
but went quick to their tasks.
Strangers were coming,
and questions they'd ask.

The angels stood round,
the Messiah they knew,
but on a beam of a star,
back to Heaven they flew.

But we heard them exclaim,
as they went from our sight,
"Rejoice and be glad
for God's Son came this night."

COVID concerns cause court proceedings to be decreased

Chief Justice Cheri Beasley announced Friday that only essential, in-person court proceedings would take place for 30 days, beginning Monday.

The decision comes as the number of confirmed positive COVID-19 cases in the Judicial Branch hits 291 statewide; additionally, 11 counties in the state (including Graham and Swain) were forced last week to close after coronavirus exposure.

District Attorney Ashley Hornsby Welch said COVID-19 continues to be a serious concern though there are safety measures in place, such as requiring face masks and practicing social distancing.

Welch and her 42 staff members work across the state's seven westernmost counties, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Cherokee, Clay, Graham and Swain.

"A few of employees in the 43rd Prosecutorial District have contracted CO-

VID-19, though not necessarily through the court system," she said. "Others have experienced firsthand exposure."

Beasley halted jury trials in March. It resumed on a limited basis in October, in five of the 43rd Prosecutorial District's counties: Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Cherokee and Clay.

Swain and Graham are scheduled to resume jury trials in the new year, the weeks of Jan. 11 and March 1, respectively.

Beasley made her decision, she said, "out of concern for the safety of court personnel and the public."

"Throughout the pandemic, we have moved an unprecedented amount of court work online, including hearings. Those efforts will allow us to limit in-person proceedings for the next few weeks while making sure our courts stay available to serve the

•See CASES page 22

•POLICE & FIRE REPORTS•

Highlands Police entries from Dec. 3. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

Dec. 3

- At 11:40 a.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident on US 64 east and Carolina Way.

Dec. 5

- At 2:30 p.m., Robert Newman Baty, 33, of Highlands, was arrested for Failure to Appear. He was issued a \$250 secured bond. His trial date is Jan. 7, 2021.

Dec. 6

- At 3 p.m., officers responded to a report of shoplifting of a pair of \$200 sunglasses from Potpourri Eyewear on Main Street.

Dec. 7

- At 7:51 p.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident on NC 106 and Buttermilk Lane.

Dec. 11

- At noon, officers responded to a call of theft of jewelry valued at \$2,250 from a residence on Cobb Road.

- At 2:50 p.m., Clarence James McCall, 27, of Highlands, was arrested for larceny from a construction site. He was

issued a \$2,000 unsecured bond. His trial date is Feb. 11, 2021

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Dec. 11

Dec. 11

- At 9:15 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Ridge Lane.

- At 10:44 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on N. 5th Street.

- At 2:57 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Church Street.

- At 6:51 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Worley Road.

Dec. 12

- At 11:29 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on NC 28 south.

Dec. 13

- At 5:18 a.m., the dept. provided mutual aid to the Cashiers FD.

- At 11:53 a.m., the dept. responded to a Co2 alarm at a residence on Split Rail Road.

- At 12:56 p.m., the dept. was called on a rescue mission on Jones Knob, where a hiker with an injured leg had to be carried off the trail.

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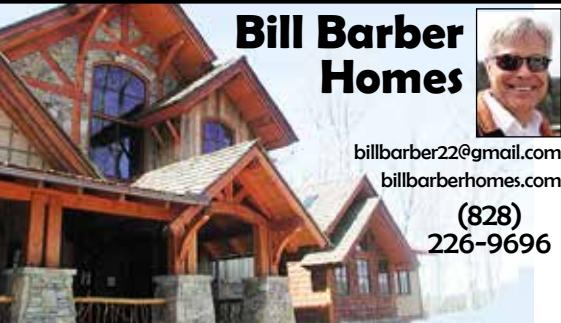
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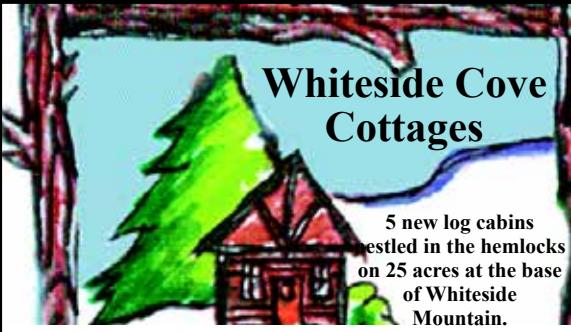
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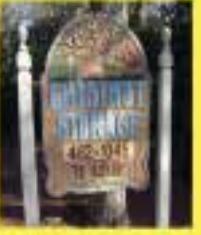
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...CASES continued from page 19

public."

Some traffic tickets and other infractions or citations can be handled online, as can some court filings, at online services.nccourts.org. Only North Carolina residents, not out-of-state residents, can use the service at this time.

Though operations will scale back, essential judicial functions continue, including emergency hearings to ensure protections for victims of domestic violence and certain hearings for in-jail defendants.

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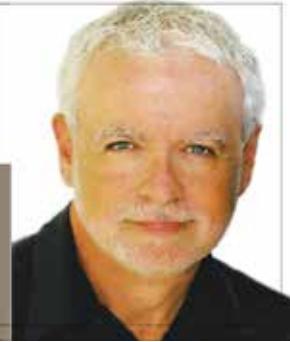
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