

Highlands Newspaper

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School employees to get hazard pay

By Brittney Lofthouse
As the Macon County School System enters the final weeks of hybrid learning during the unprecedented COVID19 pandemic, the board of educa-

tion voted unanimously to provide school staff with hazard pay for working during the last year. On a motion made by Carol Arnold and seconded by Tommy Cabe, the Board approved by a 5-0

vote for hazard pay to be given to all employees. An estimated 800 employees will receive the bonus — with the majority of employees receiving \$750, which is com-
• See HAZARD page 19

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HPD says beware of social media scams

Investigators at the Highlands Police Department have been made aware of several fake social media accounts which have been created, by people claiming to be members of the Highlands community.

In some of these cases, an account is created using the name and pictures from the victim's legitimate account.

The fake account then finds friends and connections of the victim and contacts them using messaging apps.

In many of the cases the Police Department has investigated, the fake account sends messages requesting sexual activities or images.

The fake account may also publish images that appear to
• See SCAMS page 19

Music, food and fun was the theme at Bear Shadow last weekend



The Young family from left: Wes and Anna, whose family owns Winfield Farm, and Wes's parents Alice and Robby hosted the Bear Shadow Music Festival that took place during the evenings Thursday-Sunday, April 22-25.

See photos on page 16

MCS to ask county for \$1.9mm for personnel

By Brittney Lofthouse
Macon County Schools Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin proposed submitting a 2021-2022 draft budget to county commissioners that remained at \$8.2 million, the same as the current year budget, however, after much discussion and on a motion made by Tommy Cabe and seconded by Hilary Wilkes, the Board approved to amend the 2021-2022 Draft Budget to include an additional 1.9 million to cover various positions.

Prior to COVID19, the Macon County Board of Education requested the nearly \$2 million to add more than two dozen employees across the school system, however with uncertainties sur-
• See PERSONNEL page 8



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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Budgeting for infrastructure

The second budget planning workshop for the town is scheduled for Thursday, May 6 at 3 pm at the Highlands Conference Center. At this meeting, the Town Manager will present a draft of his proposed budget. This proposed budget is driven by department projected needs and from the feedback of commissioners.



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

A large portion of the budget will be for infrastructure needs such as water and sewer upgrades. Based on presentations and discussions at the town retreat in March, again the town has major needs in the water and sewer areas that will require funding this budget year, as well as in the future. We cannot fall behind in these critical areas.

Maintaining water and sewer assets isn't only a Highlands issue, it is a critical problem across the state. I recently reviewed a report where the state is providing assistance to towns and counties to upgrade water and sewer systems. Several towns in Western Carolina are getting state support from this special fund intended for

underfunded systems with critical problems.

Highlands doesn't qualify for this support. It is analogous to the tier ranking systems of counties. Recently Macon county moved up to a top tier ranking of 3. That rating indicates the county is prosperous and in a strong economic position. Highlands strong economy was a significant factor in Macon County getting this top rating. The flip side to the Tier 3 designation is that it

places the county in a lower priority when seeking state and federal grant support.

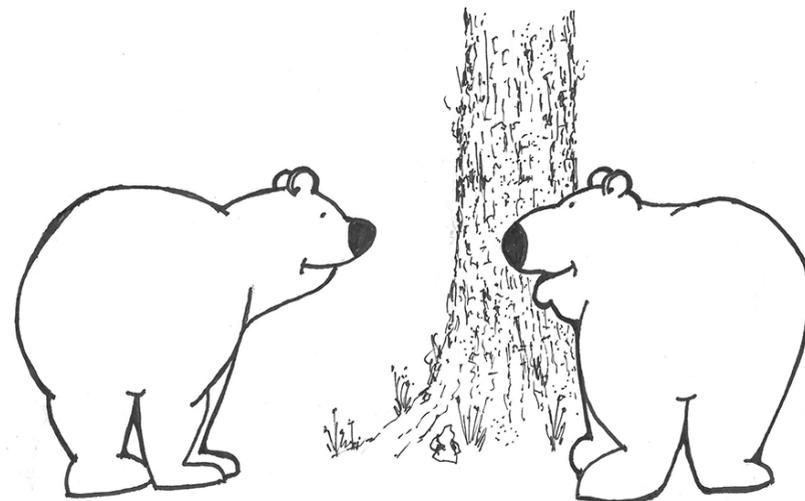
So, Highlands has a relatively strong water and sewer system when compared to some surrounding systems that are a carrying high debt loads and have failing systems. Highlands simply doesn't rank high for this state support. We really have no major debt and our water and sewer systems are functioning well. For instance, we replaced the old, aging Buck Horn water tank several years ago with a new one that also doubled the capacity. The 1.2 million dollar project was financed over a two-year period with existing town funds. In other words, we did a "pay as you go" model.

This "pay as you go" approach will probably continue in the coming years when we address such things as water line replacements and water plant equipment upgrades. Also, we will continue to look for grant opportunities, especially at the federal level. We are working with an engineering firm to identify funding sources. Engineered plans have been developed to be ready if grant opportunities become available.

There is always the option for the town going to a long-term borrowing strategy to aggressively address these future infrastructure needs. Many communities have adopted this approach and carry rather heavy debt service loads. Relying on bond initiatives that exceed town reserves has never been a Highlands strategy.

The budget workshop on May 6 is open to the public for those who would like to hear the discussion. A public hearing for the proposed budget will be held at the June Highlands Town Board meeting.

• HIC'S VIEW •



whiseven@yahoo.com

HIC

"Well it's Spring. Another hiking season. This year just for fun lets do catch and release."

• WEATHER •

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Mostly cloudy	Some brightening	Plenty of sunshine	Sun and areas of high clouds
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High: 77° Low: 61°	High: 74° Low: 48°	High: 75° Low: 46°	High: 74° Low: 56°

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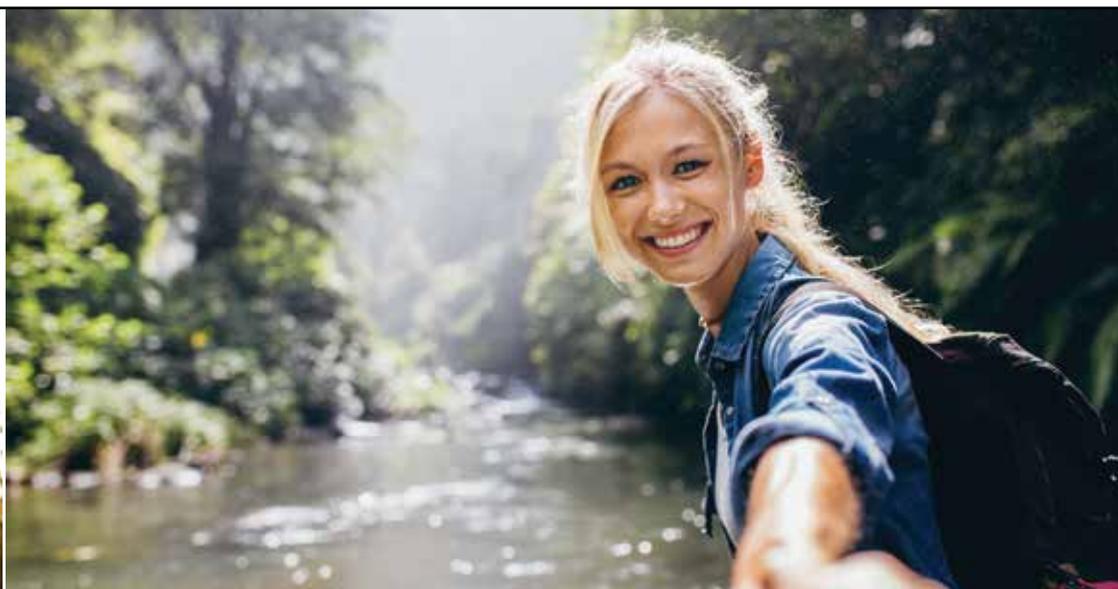
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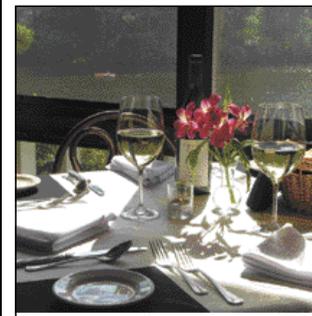
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• BIZ/ORG NEWS •

Mountain Findings VP awarded Clemson Alumni Association's Distinguished Service Award

CLEMSON, S.C. – Nationally respected student financial aid leader Marvin G. Carmichael of Seneca will receive the Clemson Alumni Association's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award.

Carmichael, a Dillon, S.C., native, earned two degrees from Clemson University in 1971 and 1976 respectively. He started working at Clemson as a student in 1967, began working as a full-time employee of the university in 1971 and joined the Office of Student Financial Aid in 1973. Over the next four decades, he became a driving force in shaping state and national student financial aid policy, legislation and funding.

He was instrumental in crafting legislation and regulations for the South Carolina LIFE Scholarship, serving as an advisor to the South Carolina General Assembly. He held various leadership roles in the financial aid field, including chair of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. He also served as a trustee for the South Carolina Student Loan Corporation. He volunteered in various roles with the National Collegiate Athletic Association, including chairing the Committee on Financial Aid and Amateurism.

In addition to his student financial aid responsibilities at Clemson, in 2000 Carmichael became Assistant to the President and liaison to the University's Board of Visitors and President's Advisory Board. In 2005 he was appointed Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff, the post he held until his retirement in 2016.

Carmichael's numerous community roles have ranged from volunteer firefighter to being a South Carolina State Constable. He has been an active volunteer for



Marvin Carmichael

various organizations including, but not limited to: the Anderson Area Chamber of Commerce; the Oconee Economic Development Board; the Clemson Area Chamber of Commerce; the Greenville Urban League; the Clemson Fellowship Club; and the Rotary Club of Clemson.

He currently volunteers with and serves as vice president of Mountain Findings, which supports multiple charities in the Highlands, N.C., area. He also serves as president of the Apple Mountain Homeowners Association in Highlands.

He and his wife, Felicia, who graduated from Clemson in 1973 and 1976, have two children: Their daughter, Ashlee Carmichael Moses, is a 2001 Clemson graduate, and their son, Brooks Butler Carmichael, is 2006 Clemson graduate.

The Clemson Alumni Distinguished Service Award is based on three main criteria: personal and professional accomplishments; dedication and service to Clemson University; and devotion to community and public service. Members of the Clemson family nominate potential honorees, who are then selected by the Clemson Alumni Association as outstanding alumni, public servants and examples to others. The 2021 award presentation will occur during the fall.

The Clemson Alumni Association is an open-membership, nonprofit organization that exists to connect alumni with their alma mater. Through a variety of programs and services, the Alumni Association works with alumni around the world to ensure they have a Clemson Experience every day.

• LETTERS •

New doctors and subsidies

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the front-page article in your April 15th edition regarding two new doctors coming to town. In the article the author reports that "Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation" will provide initial funding and subsidies" for their practices. Having two additional doctors to care for our people is great, and I applaud the Foundation for this effort.

Subsidies are apparently necessary to get new doctors here. But it seems to me there is a fairness issue that should be addressed. We have two faithful family doctors who have been practicing here for years, Dr. Patti Wheeler and Dr. Scott Baker, with no subsidies. They have been with us through the good times and the bad. Should not they be subsidized too? The Foundation will be financing and subsidizing their "competition."

Is that fair?

W. Stell Huie
Highlands

Columnist is over the top

Dear Editor,

Last week's Spiritually Speaking column by Reverend Forrester is over the top in myopic and misinformed speech. Encouraging people not to wear masks and claiming a government conspiracy is like yelling fire in a crowded theater.

Sadly, there will be weak-minded people who believe this nonsense and are harmed by it. I encourage you to vet what is submitted to you for publication. This crosses a red line from freedom of speech to causing injury.

David Stearns
Otto, NC

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• HOSPITAL NEWS •

The single step you can take to reverse the toll of COVID-19 on the plateau: taking the vaccine

Note:

This column regards vaccine safety and efficacy and was written while the J&J vaccine was temporarily suspended.

From a public health perspective, there is no more important step that the residents of the Highlands and Cashiers Plateau could take now than to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

This simple act, along with continuing to practice the “3 Ws,” — washing hands frequently, wearing a mask, and waiting six feet apart — is proving to be pivotal in reversing the course of the pandemic and regaining a sense of normality.

Imagine having a small group of vaccinated people in your home who are from outside your immediate household, attending a performance, eating out, or simply hugging a vaccinated friend or family member again. This is an accurate picture of the future if the United States reaches a state of herd immunity, or when such a great number of citizens are vaccinated that the spread of the virus is prevented to a large extent.

I am so passionate about our community members receiving the COVID-19 vaccine that I volunteered to lead the Highlands Cashiers Plateau Vaccine Initiative, an effort that offers support to our local health departments as they take on the task of vaccinating our neighbors here on the Plateau.

I've been greatly enriched by working with this highly dedicated group of more than 250 volunteers. Though many of them have no background in clinical work, they nevertheless wanted to be instrumental in making our community safe again from this virus, which has robbed our country of more than 560,000 lives.

That said, I am concerned



Tom Neal
CFO, CNO

Highlands-Cashiers Hospital

about the hesitancy that I and the other volunteers have encountered when discussing the vaccine with people. It is to be expected that individuals will wonder about any new vaccine's development, safety, and efficacy, and I have had a great many conversations with Plateau residents about this very topic.

I am emphatic about letting people know that the vaccine is safe. Some whom I've talked to wonder if there were safety short-cuts taken in any way due to the speed at which the vaccines were developed and rolled out.

Development was sped up because we are in a true and pressing public health emergency. Though two vaccines — the Pfizer and Moderna versions — were developed and rolled out in record time, the scientific protocols behind them have been being perfected for 25 years.

All of the vaccines have gone through full clinical trials, and the Moderna and Pfizer combined clinical trials involved about 70,000 people, which is significant. It can take upwards of 15 years or more typically, for a vaccine to gain approval, but for the COVID-19 vaccines, instead of certain steps being performed one after the other, time was saved by executing them simultaneously. In other words, no steps were skipped, just done alongside

each other to achieve the same outcome: having two revolutionary new vaccines ready that are safe to take. These vaccines have received emergency use authorization (EUA) by the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA), a step the agency takes when there is an urgent public health issue present.

I also encourage everyone I speak with not to delay getting their vaccine because they think one is preferable to the other. Their efficacy is so similar, and each is nearly 100% effective at preventing you from having serious enough COVID symptoms that would land you here at the hospital, and in turn possibly having a fatal outcome, the two most frightening possibilities.

It's especially important for older people, Black, Native American, and Latinx community members to be vaccinated, as the virus has hurt these populations disproportionately. Each vaccine requires two shots spaced several weeks apart, and both are free of charge.

As for side effects, most people experience injection site soreness for a day or two after the first dose, and the second dose is frequently accompanied by some flu-like symptoms, such as fatigue, body aches, and low-grade fever.

Though you may not experience symptoms, if you do, your immune system is behaving as it should — learning to recognize and combat the virus (though if you don't have symptoms, it doesn't mean that your immune system isn't working properly).

When we received our first vaccine shipment and had our initial vaccination event at the hospital back in late December, we vaccinated Highlands-Cashiers Hospital (HCH) and Eckerd Living Center (ELC) team members, as well as ELC

• See HOSPITAL page 7

• INVESTING AT 4,118 FT. •

Mayberrys of America

Home sales in 2020 will be analyzed for generations as the most unexpected outcome resulting from the pandemic debacle.

Being told to “stay home” redefined the definition of home forever. No longer just a place to sleep after long days in the office or shuffling a harried social schedule, an abode became the center of the universe where one worked, cooked, exercised, communicated via internet, socialized, entertained and educated children.

After months of being forced to “stay home,” priorities shifted not only for the specific criteria of a home, but also the awareness where one wanted to be while being home. Suddenly, vacation or second-home resort communities became a coveted destination for longer stays or even year-round living.

Nowhere did this trend materialize more than on the Highlands/Cashiers Plateau in western North Carolina.

In this sparsely populated mountain resort area affectionately known as “Aspen of the East,” social distancing was practiced long before it became mandatory. This pristine and unique area has established itself among the most desirable in America’s mountain country.

For over a century, wealthy easterners, including America’s nobility such as the Vanderbilts and the Rockefellers, flocked to this area to enjoy the cool summers.

However, resort towns such as Highlands are no longer reserved for summer



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trips. Just as Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, whose home was ripped from its foundation and landed in utopia, the current tornadic circulation of buyers are also seeking their own idyllic place.

The global reassessment of lifestyle choices has impacted these resort housing markets in a dramatic fashion. The ability to work and connect from home has upended predictable real estate choices for the foreseeable future.

The fact that people can work from second home markets has accelerated home purchases resulting in drying up inventory and driving up prices like many markets in the country. The desire to live in less populated areas with a strong sense of privacy and security, to be able to enjoy nature but still have access to culture and entertainment, are turning seasonal markets into year-round destinations.

Highlands is a microcosm of what is happening in the popular smaller resort areas of the world. In the United States, the “Mayberrys” of America are inevitable targets for this fundamental shift in future lifestyle choices.

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...HOSPITAL continued from page 6

residents. Because each vial of vaccine is precious, the hospitals, health departments, and federally qualified health centers (FQHC) that have been given vaccine allotments must prove that they can properly store their supplies, as they require refrigeration and one must be stored at extremely low temperatures. Mission Health is part of the Western North Carolina Vaccine Acceleration Consortium, which ensures that vaccine supplies are equitably distributed throughout our region. After our staff was vaccinated, we shared our

supply with the local health departments, and later to the local pharmacies. We continue to share our weekly supply.

If you know someone who is questioning getting vaccinated, or if you yourself are hesitant, please reconsider. Every person who gets the vaccine is actually responsible for saving lives. The easiest way to find a location for your vaccine is to visit the NCDHHS website: <https://takemyspot.nc.gov/>.

The following are other vaccine providers:

• See HOSPITAL page 19

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..PERSONNEL continued from page 1

rounding COVID19, the board of education voted to not request that funding from the county last school year.

Now, with a clear picture of the county and state financial situation, the board decided to ask the county for the \$2 million budget increase to include funding the following school system staff:

- STEM Teacher, EC TA (2-positions) @ IVE
- PE, STEM & one extra month for clerical @ SM

- 2 extra months custodians @ MVI
- Guidance Counselor, Art Teacher, Music Teacher @ MMS
- Foreign Language Teacher @ Highlands
- English Teacher @ FHS
- Art/Music/CTE Teacher, Day Treatment Assistant @ UA
- \$50,000 Maintenance Contract for MCS
- 10 additional mental health professionals to cover K-12
- 5 additional full time school nurses

to cover K-12

- 4 full-time art positions to cover K-12
- 4 full time music positions to cover K-12

The proposed positions were part of the Principal's wish lists in February 2020 early on in the budget planning process, however before submitting the final budget, members of the board of education elected to not include the increases.

With the uncertainty of COVID19 in mind, Macon County Manager Derek Roland left the school system's operational budget flat while reducing the district's capital outlay budget by \$275,000 – a decrease that was later reversed during the county's mid-year review.

The Macon County Board of Education discussed budget challenges during May's school board meeting at which point Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin told board members that CARES Act funding – federal funding budgeted for relief efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic – would help the school system continue operating soundly over the next two years.

Dr. Baldwin noted that the planning allotment for the federal funds – which are being distributed by the state – is more than \$1 million and will be used over the next two years.

Since May, additional COVID19 funding has been approved and will be allocated to the county in the future, aiding the school system even further.

Congress set aside approximately \$13.2 billion of the \$30.75 billion allotted to the Education Stabilization Fund through the CARES Act for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER Fund).

The Department will award these grants to State educational agencies (SEAs) for the purpose of providing local educational agencies (LEAs), including charter schools that are LEAs, with emergency re-

lief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on elementary and secondary schools across the Nation.

Despite millions of dollars available to the school system in the form of COVID19 relief, those funds are not recurring, therefore the school system wouldn't use them to fund positions that would add to the county's budget on a recurring basis.

In addition to the nearly \$2 million budget increase request to county commissioners, the Macon County Board of Education discussed how to spend the substantial amount of ESSR grant funds that will soon become available.

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA), was signed into law on December 27, 2020 and provides an additional \$54.3 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II Fund).

Macon County Schools will likely see about \$1.5 million from ESSER II Funds.

Macon County Schools Program Coordinator Jennifer Love informed members of the board of education that both students and parents, as well as community leaders have been involved in sharing their views on how the second round of ESSER funds should be spent in Macon County and with overwhelming support, students wanted to see funding allowed to address the loss of curriculum surrounding the Arts such as art education. By law, 20 percent of the funding Macon County receives will have to be spent to address learning loss due to COVID19, however how the funding is spent under those guidelines is left up to the discretion of the local board.

Love noted that the grant applications had to be submitted by May 15, outlining how the funding would be spent locally, however there is flexibility to change and redirect the funding after the deadline.

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• PAST & PRESENT •

It's time to call a truce in our culture wars

After such a seemingly eternal year living with the coronavirus, there appears to be some hope for normalcy in the future, and with that, let's call a truce in our endless culture wars.

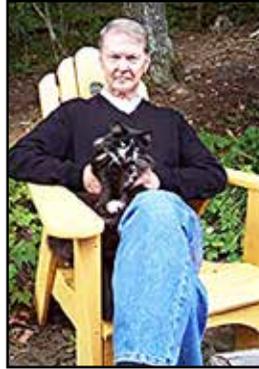
No sooner had my best clothes been donned, dress shoes polished, and first small gathering attended than, improbably identified as a liberal professor, I found myself attacked on currently fashionable issues like transgender rights, Black Lives Matter, cancel culture, and white replacement theory, all before I had settled in with a proper adult beverage and a few peanuts.

I also discovered that, somehow unbeknownst to my friends and family in small town Texas where I grew up, I had achieved elite status. It appears that, locked down with smaller family units for months, Americans turned to the Clinton News Network, fake Foxy anchors, Maxed-OutNews, OtherAmericaNews, Friendly Facebook pages, TweetMeToo accounts, e-petitions, and other digital networks for information. Now they were unleashed.

I had hoped for more substantial and meaningful conversations on subjects like the potential deleterious effects of robotics and AI on workers, on the quiet shift to solar and electric in energy and transportation, on whether the current education system aligns with its purpose, and in my case, on the social, economic, and policy implications of an aging population on our future.

Then too, there's that thing about ballooning indebtedness, the environment, fiscal conservatism, and our endless wars in the Middle East. Even talk about overachieving grandchildren or the weather, favorites of the elderly, would have been welcomed.

Gosh, it's much more fun, even sexier to talk about Dr. Seuss, the Muppet Show, Merry Christmas-less greetings, Super Bowl Halftime shows, Confederate statues, school



Milton Ready

mascots, kneeling at NFL games, and our fake "woke" sensitivity to social injustices.

Currently, almost any discussion inevitably leads to immigration. Oh, yes. Did you know that on the last three pages of my latest history of North Carolina I quoted Dr. Seuss's banned "On Beyond Zebra"? Agh!

As a historian, I'm well aware that, as Andrew Hartman maintained in his book, "A War for the Soul of America," as well as in James Davison's succinct earlier "Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America" that America is engaged in an epic struggle for the dominance of values, beliefs, customs, and practices between social groups, currently mostly white evangelicals who want to make America great again and looming hordes of multicultural "others" who think it already is.

Yet it began long before Pat Buchanan uttered his memorable 1992 speech, even as early as the evolution controversy of the 1920s. That battle now is politicized and polarized, and, as such, intensified and unending.

Years before the Clintons, Bushes, and Trumps came to prominence, my mother, the good Texas Baptist that she was, warned me about the moral decay and rot that faced America, things like Elvis, Godless Communism, watching too much TV, especially football games on Sundays, and embracing rebellious icons like James Dean and Marlon Brando.

If I did these things, Mom warned, then America would lose its sense of destiny, become less patriotic and religious, the Commies would win, there would be a nuclear holocaust, and then aliens from outer space would invade a weakened world and snatch up all our bodies, including mine.

While a lot hasn't changed since, I think the body snatchers might be getting closer.



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• BIZ/ORG NEWS •

Democratic Party Awards 2020/2021 Liston B. Ramsey Awards

The Macon County Democratic Party is pleased to announce the recipients of the Liston B. Ramsey Awards.

This award has been given for many years annually within the District to honor volunteers who have made significant contributions to the work of the County Party.

Due to the COVID pandemic, the Ramsey award was not given in 2020.

Therefore, both the 2020 and 2021 recipients were announced at the Democratic County Convention held on Saturday, April 10, 2021.

Bobby Koppers was honored with the 2020 award for his long history of dedication to the Macon County Democratic Party including his service as a County Commissioner.

Bobby served 25 years in the



Bobby Koppers



Jean Wright

military, 18 years as a teacher, and 15 years as a coach. Current county commissioner, Ronnie Beale expressed his personal appreciation to Bobby for his contributions to the party and the county.

Jean Wright, President of the Democratic Women of Macon County is the recipient for the 2021 award. She was recognized for her many contributions to the Party including facilitating virtual meetings, generating data presentations, and creating billboards and signs for party messages.

According to Gary St. Arnauld, Chair of the Macon County Democratic Party, Liston Ramsey, from Madison County, represented small and rural counties in the North Carolina House of Repre-

sentative for nearly four decades. Today, his legacy can be found on the campus of Western Carolina University Activity Center, the North Carolina Arboretum and Mars Hill College Center for Regional Studies.

Also at the Democratic County Convention, new officers were elected for 2021-2022: Gary St. Arnauld, Chair; Cindy Solesbee, First Vice Chair; Lou Vitale, Second Vice Chair; Susannah Koppers, Third Vice Chair; Ellen Shope, Secretary; and Debbie Tallent, Treasurer.

Additional information about the Macon County Democratic Party can be found at www.macondems.org

Get BearWise!

Are You BearWise? NC Wildlife Resources Commission will present a program on safely coexisting with bears. Discussion will also include the new BearWise initiative and efforts Highlands is making to prevent problems. Mayor Pat Taylor and the B.E.A.R. Task Force will participate. The virtual program will be on Zoom or phone only, Sunday, May 2 at 5 p.m. Call 1 (929) 205-6099 and enter 943 9820 0305, then the password Highlands to watch and participate in the Q & A session. Contact Ashley Hobbs at ashley.hobbs@ncwildlife.org for more info.

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from April 16. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

April 16

• Officers reported a case from October involving cyber stalking where an individual claiming to be a different person sent nude photos to another.

April 20

• At 8:53 p.m., officers responded to a one-vehicle accident on Bowery Road.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from April 19.

April 19

At 10:56 a.m., the dept. provided public assistance on Watkins Road.

April 22

• At 8:05 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Spring Street.

• At 7:08 p.m., the dept. provided mutual aid to the Cashiers FD.

April 24

• At 11:23 a.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on Buck Creek Road.

• At 6:57 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a residence on Chestnut Cove.

• At 8:17 p.m., the dept. provided mutual aid on a search in Jackson County.

April 25

• At 10:05 a.m., the dept. was first-responders at a residence on Buck Creek Road.

April 26

• A little past midnight, the dept. responded to a fire alarm on Main Street.

• At 6:01 a.m., the dept. responded to a structure fire at a residence on Cheyenne Drive.

• At 5:03 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Main Street.

• At 7:09 p.m., the dept. investigated the source of smoke on Horse Cove Road.



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Spring Home Improvement -2021

Should you move or should you build out or build up?

Are you thinking about expanding your existing home versus moving to a new larger home? If you love your neighbor-

hood, the schools and venues, you may not be eager to move.

Plus, in today's Post COVID real estate market,

staying where you are might make more money-sense.

Instead, you may be considering expanding your home's first floor or building up to create a second floor.

Reasons to Expand Your Existing Home

- You love your neighborhood, its location and the venues, shopping and food choices.

- Your family has or will increase either due to more children or aging parents moving in.

- Your home no longer meets your needs due to expanding hobbies or work requirements.

- You have enough space on your property to build out.

- Your home is structurally durable enough to build up.

- Every other home has performed renovations, additions and/or upgrades, and you're not over-improving for your area.

- You have a generous renovation budget or can get a home equity loan to cover the costs of an expansion.

Move or Improve

Your decision to move to a new home or improve your existing home by increasing the square footage will primarily depend

on how well you like your current area. If the neighborhood is in an inconvenient location to shopping, dining and schools or the safety has decreased over the last few years, your best option may be to move in order to find a better area. However, if you are happy in your neighborhood there may be few reasons to uproot and leave.

Another factor is cost to move versus cost to stay. It is estimated that it can take up to seven years to recoup the money when you move. If you don't plan to stay in your new home for at least seven years, you may want to consider building onto your existing home rather than moving. After all, you can build any room you desire or you can bump out existing exterior walls to create more space in your rooms. Common reasons to bump out the rear wall of a home include adding more kitchen and dining room space or increasing the size of a family room.

Determining the Types of Rooms You Need

Before you begin the design-build process and determine your budget for your additions and renovation, you need to determine the type or types of rooms

you need. The room's purpose will help you determine whether you need to build up or out.

Typical Ground Level Additions

- California room or sunroom

- Family or living room
- Garage additions

- In-Law suite, Usually with a private entrance

- Kitchen expansion, Usually with new patio doors to the backyard

- New laundry room next to the kitchen, Usually with an additional exit to the yard and a mud room area.

Existing Home Layout and Footprint

Whether you build up or out may depend on the size, shape, existing footprint of your home and your available yard space. If you plan on adding a rear addition, how big is your yard and what are your future plans for your backyard? While a small yard may offer the space needed for an expansion, it may not leave adequate room for a new in-ground or above-ground pool, greenhouse and/or garden or outdoor entertaining space with an outdoor kitchen, fire pit and dining area.

If you have more plans for your small backyard than expanding the square footage of your home, you may want to consider building up or adding a room at the side or front of your home.

Side additions are typically possible when you have a cottage home or a significant amount of space in a side yard that you do not use. Common rooms added to the sides of

homes include bedrooms and bathrooms and in-law suites. You can also relocate kitchens and dining rooms to a side addition or add an attached garage.

Front additions involve moving the front wall forward. You'd want to perform this type of home renovation if you have a large front yard and a smaller backyard. Front of the house additions are typically used to expand living rooms, family rooms and bedrooms that are located at the front of the house.

Building Up or Out: What Each Involves

When it comes to expanding the square footage of your home, you can expand your home's ground floor footprint. You can add a full or partial second story, and you can even add a full or partial third floor onto your two story home. However, it's important to understand what's involved when performing vertical and horizontal additions.

Vertical Additions

Vertical additions mean you are building up instead of out. This means that all or part of your home's existing roof will be removed. Once the roof is off, you may want to consider staying in a hotel or with family members for the rest of the renovation due to the inability to heat or cool the home and use services like water supply, which may need to be turned off during the renovation process.

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Spring Home Improvement -2021

will involve the addition of a staircase, which will occupy a portion of the first floor, thus reducing the amount of available square footage. If your first floor has enough space in front of the front door, you can put a staircase near the front door. If the foyer area of your home is already crowded, you can work with architects and designers to find a convenient location to put your new staircase.

Horizontal Additions

Horizontally expanding your home subtracts from the available space in your yard. However, if you don't utilize your backyard often, this may be a great option when you consider you'll have less grass and

landscaping to maintain. Not to mention, horizontal additions aren't as disruptive as second and third floor additions because they typically occur outside of the home's main rooms.

In order to build a horizontal addition, a foundation must be poured. Then, the walls are framed and any needed plumbing and air ducts are added and a roof is installed over the new addition. It is important that horizontal additions be placed and designed so that they flow with your existing floor plan, and the exterior siding or brick as well as the roof must be built so that it matches the existing exterior. Failure to match the existing home with the new

ground level addition can result in a visual and functional disconnect between the old and new portions of the home.

Costs of Building Up vs. Building Out

When it comes to budgeting for your home renovation, it's important to understand the range of costs involved in building up versus building out. Building out is significantly less expensive than building up. Depending on where you live and the area's housing market, the average, it costs between \$140 to \$180 to expand your home's footprint outwards - but it can be a lot more.

When you build a second or third floor onto your home, you can expect



Foundation for ground floor addition.

— Photo credit: David Cedrone

• See BUILDING UP OR OUT continued on page 14

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...BUILDING UP OR OUT continued from page 13



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the costs to range from \$180 to \$500 per square foot. This means that if you want to build a 400 square foot family room on your ground floor, which is a 20 by 20 expansion, you can expect it to cost between \$56,000 and \$200,000, depending on the types of finishes and features you choose. If you were to build that same addition as a second story master suite, you could expect to pay between \$72,000 and \$100,000.

Costs Associated with Building Up

Second and third story additions typically cost more because the existing roof must be completely removed and replaced and the first floor may need to have additional support structures installed in order to ensure the second story is solidly supported and connected to the first floor. Potential costs include:

- Addition of a staircase
- Additional structural supports, including footings
- Architect and structural engineer
- Plumbing, new HVAC
- Building permits
- Cost of rent or a hotel while the addition is being built
- Removing and storing your personal items
- Repairs to the first floor

Costs Associated with Building Out

- Adding additional plumbing work
 - Loss of yard space
 - Permit fees
 - Pouring a new foundation
 - Upgrading HVAC
- Cheaper Additions**

Certain additions are less expensive than others. If you want to perform a cheaper addition that won't strain your budget while still giving you extra square feet consider one of the following:

- Attic conversion

– \$25,000 to \$60,000, or more.

- Over-garage addition – \$50,000 to \$86,000 or more.

- Basement conversion (just to finish) – \$6,500 to \$18,500 or more.

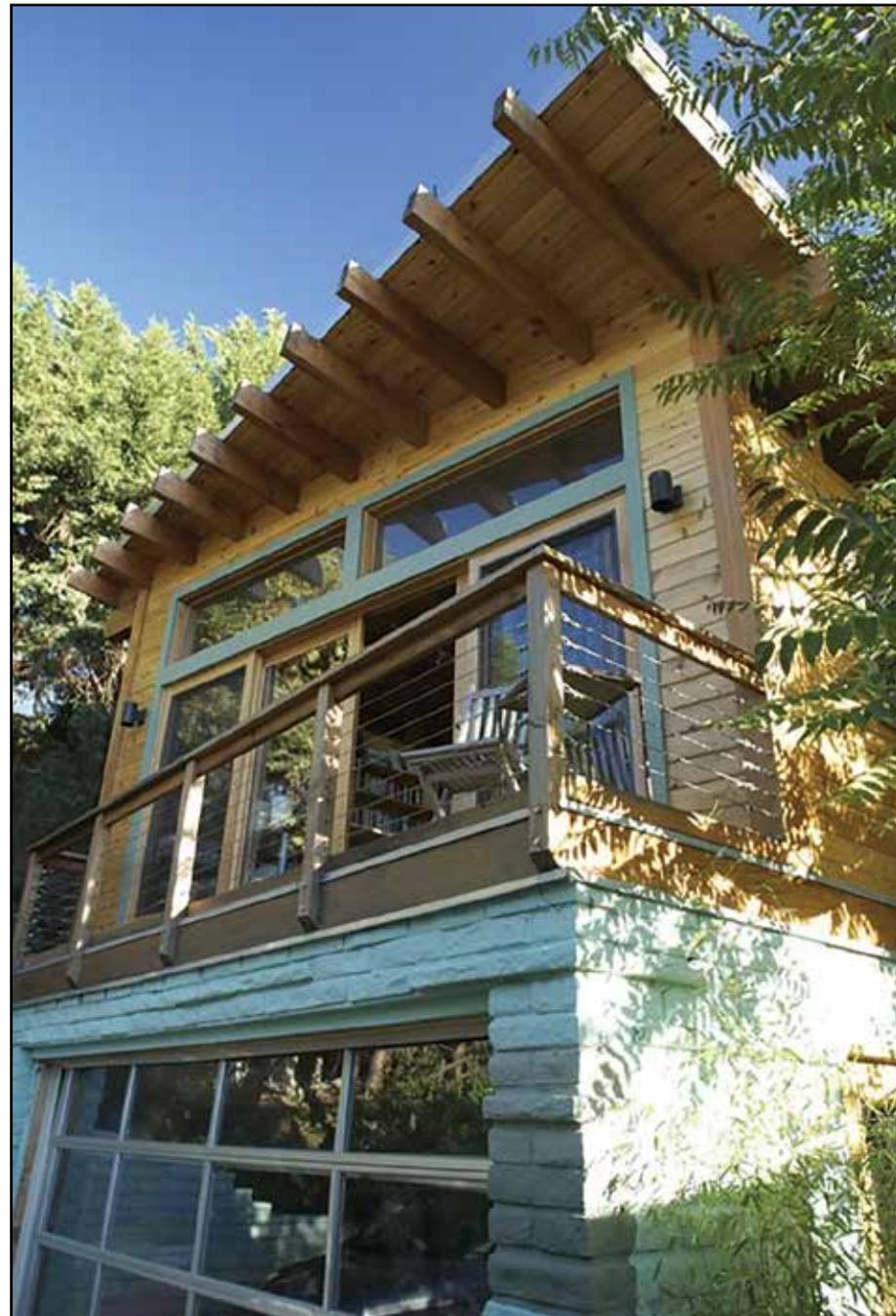
- Bump out – \$10,000

to \$30,000 or more.

- Garage conversion – \$11,000 to \$20,000 or more.

- Small bathroom or half-bath – \$10,000 to \$25,000 or more.

- Sunroom – \$16,000 to \$40,000 or more.



Cabin built over a garage.

Photo credit: Jeremy Levine

Spring Home Improvement -2021

Zoning Laws

Adding onto your home legally means adhering to all applicable city and neighborhood zoning laws and/or neighborhood requirements and bylaws if you have a Homeowners Association (HOA). For example, you may not be able to extend your home to the property line because there are requirements stipulating how close structures can be to the edge of the property. If you plan to build an office to start a home business, you'll want to make sure that your neighborhood is zoned appropriately and that it's legal to have a home business. If your neighborhood has an HOA, you'll want to read

the covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs) to make sure your planned addition isn't prohibited. For example, you may not be able to change the style of a fence or build your house upward beyond a certain number of feet.

Making a Decision on Building Up vs. Building Out

Making the decision to build horizontally or vertically will depend on your property size, your neighborhood's zoning laws and HOA requirements, the condition of your home, your specific needs and your budget.

The good news is Realtors, contractors and architects can help you determine what is best for you.



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The sights of Bear Shadow at Winfield Farm



During Bear Shadow, which was produced by Eleven Events and Highlands Festivals, from 5:30p to 10:30p each night, April 22-25, patrons enjoyed tunes from a myriad of performers.

Above right, is Drew Holcomb.
Right, Devon Gilfillian.

– Photos by Brian O'Shea and Marjorie Christiansen

• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

Ongoing

• The Bookworm at 555 Main Street is now open Thursday-Saturday 11a to 3p. For more information, call 828-526-3031.

• Mountain Findings Thrift Store at 432 Spruce Street is open Friday and Saturday from 10a to 1p.

• Highlands/Cashiers Alcoholics Anonymous "Open Meetings" are for anyone who thinks they may have a drinking problem or for anyone interested in the A.A. recovery program. In person meetings have resumed and are held at 12 Noon Wednesday And Friday at 1st Presbyterian Church Library, 471 Main St., Highlands. On line meeting information can be found @ www.aawnc80.org or to speak with a member of A.A. call (828) 349-4357.

Every Saturday

• Highlands Marketplace in K-H Park on Pine Street. 8a to 12:30p.

Mon.-Fri., thru April 30

• This year the Annual White Goods Pickup will be the week Please, contract Town Hall at (828) 526-2118 to be placed on the pickup list.

Fri.-Sun., April 30-May 2

• Join us as we welcome the month of May to Half-Mile Farm at 214 Half Mile Dr., with the award-winning artisanal cheeses of Sweet Grass Dairy. Owners Jessica and Jeremy Little will join us to charm guests with the story of their family farm, sustainable agriculture, and all things cheese. Twenty years ago, this young couple took a leap of faith and started making cheese with milk from her family's cows and goats. Some 30 national and international awards later, they are still going strong with the addition of a cheese shop and a restaurant recently in their hometown of Thomasville, Georgia. Guests of Half-Mile Farm will enjoy cheese samples, and recipes prepared with specialty Sweet Grass cheeses throughout the weekend along with an in-depth tasting on Saturday where guests will examine flavor profiles and learn about how different milks make different cheeses. \$185 per person, plus tax and gratuity.

Sunday, May 2

• Are You BearWise? NC Wildlife Resources Commission will present a program on safely coexisting with bears. Discussion will also include the new BearWise initiative and efforts Highlands is making to prevent problems. Mayor

Pat Taylor and the B.E.A.R. Task Force will participate. The virtual program will be on Zoom or phone only, Sunday, at 5 p.m. Call 1 (929) 205-6099 and enter 943 9820 0305, then the password Highlands to watch and participate in the Q & A session. Contact Ashley Hobbs at ashley.hobbs.ncwildlife.org for more info.

Wed. & Thurs., May 5-6

• Le Grande Jewelry Trunk Show at The Spa Boutique at Old Edwards, 16 Church Street. 10a to 6p.

Sunday, May 9

• Chamber event: Highlands is Blooming.

Mon., May 10

• High Mountain Squares are happy to invite you to a series of 12 classes of instruction in Social Square Dancing beginning Monday, May 10, at 6:30 P.M. At the Environmental Resource Building. Vaccines are required to participate. Call 828-787-2324, 727-599-1440, 706-746-5426 or 828-332-0001 for more information.

Tues. May 11

• Highlands High School Academic and Athletic Awards and Scholarships in the new gym at 10 a.m.

Tues., May 18

• Highlands School Grades K, 1, 2 Award Assembly in the new gym at 9 a.m.

• Highlands School Grades 3, 4, 5 Awards Assembly. New gym at 10 a.m.

Wed. May 19

• Highlands School Middle School Academic Awards in the MS courtyard or old gym at 10 a.m.

• Highlands School Middle School graduation at 5 p.m. courtyard or old gym.

Fri. & Sat., May 21-Oct. 31

• Chamber event: Outdoor music 6 to 8:30 p.m.

Fri., May 21

• Friday Night Live in Town Square: 6-8:30p. Silly Ridge Roundup

Sat., May 22

• Highlands School graduation at 10a on the track or in the new gym. TBA.

• Chamber event: Meander in May.

• Saturdays on Pine: 6-8:30p. The Caribbean Cowboys

Fri., May 28

• Friday Night Live Concert. 6-8:30p. Trudition

Sat. May 29

• Saturdays on Pine: 6-8:30p. Ashley Heath & Her Heathens

Fri., June 4

• Friday Night Live: 6-8:30p. Byrds & Crow

Sat., June 5

• Saturdays on Pine. 6-8:30p. Peggy Ratusz

Saturday, June 13

• Highlands Motoring Festival. Cars in the Park. (Pine Street) 10a to 4p

Fri. June 11

• Friday Night Live in Town Square: 6-8:30p. Frank & Allie

Sat. June 12

• Saturdays on Pine. 6-8:30p. Hurricane Creek

Fri. June 18

• Friday Night Live in Town Square:

6-8:30p. Johnny Webb Band

Sat. June 19

• K-H Founders Park Annual Shrimp Boil. Drive Thru. 5-7 p.m. Rain or shine.

• Saturdays on Pine. 6-8:30p. Americana Jones

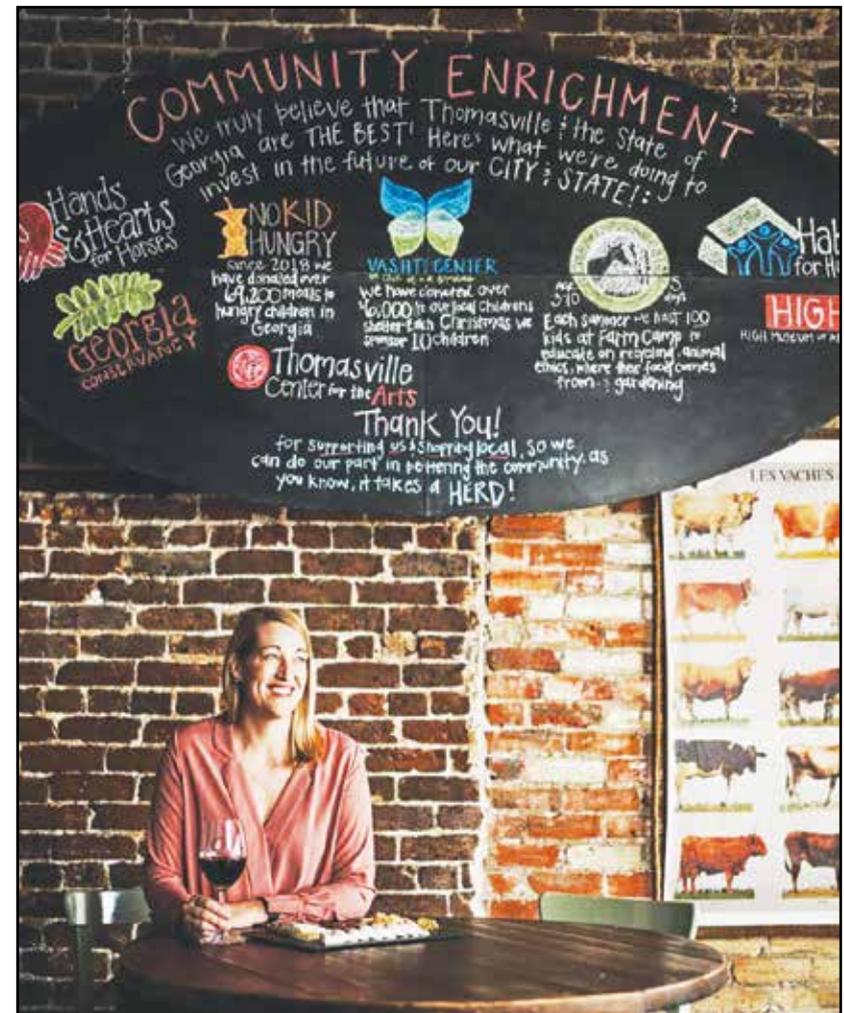
Fri. June 25

• Friday Night Live in Town Square: 6-8:30p. Trudition

Sat. & Sun., June 26 & 27

• Mountaintop Art & Craft Show (previously the Village Square Show) will be held in downtown Highlands at K-H Founders Park (Pine St.) from 10 to 5. The FREE event features regional potters, jewelers, woodworkers, fine artists, etc. plus food.

The wonderful world of cheese



Sweet Grass Dairy. Owners Jessica and Jeremy Little will be at Half-Mile Farm April 30-May 2.

• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •



**It's
morning...
Get
moving!**

Co-pastor
Curtis Fussell
First
Presbyterian Church

There's an African story that says, "Every morning, the gazelles wake up knowing it's time to outrun the fastest lions in the jungle, or else be caught and die. Every morning the lions also wake up knowing it's time to outrun the quick gazelles, or else die of hunger. Whether you are a gazelle or a lion, when the sun comes up, it's time get moving!"

The wisdom of this story is that no matter how much the gazelles might complain about the presence of the lions, the gazelles had better get moving in the morning, or else die.

Likewise, no matter how much the lions might complain about the quick gazelles, the lions had better get moving in the morning, or else die.

Both the gazelles and the lions are compelled to get moving in the face of their dilemma. Blaming and accusing the other, moaning and having pity parties, provide no solutions to their troubles.

For us humans, in the face of life's trials, the solution is likewise to get up and do something that moves us forward to stay alive. But what motivates us? Is it merely to stay alive -- or more personal?

A woman one day asked her friend about her spiritual life. She asked her, "Have you ever heard God speak to you?"

She said, "No, I can't say that I have."

Her friend asked her, "Well, I know you pray and read the Bible. Does God speak to you?"

She replied, "No, I never literally heard God speak to me. But then, I can't ever remember when God wasn't with me. I have always believed that God was with me no matter what life handed me. So, I have this sense that everything that happens to me, God is with me."

This woman gives us a spiritual principle for living. It is a spirit of looking forward and taking positive actions, based on the awareness of God's presence. Rather than grieving the past and finding fault with others, or even with life itself, this woman sees God with her.

With that vision of God with her, she moves in a life-giving direction. When the sun comes up, she's gets moving, because she is aware of that spiritual wisdom that guided the Apostle Paul: "I forget what lies behind, and strain forward for what lies ahead; I press on toward the prize of God's upward call."

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

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Wednesday night Dinner and Service 5:30

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Sundays: 10 a.m.: Worship

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9:30am Sunday School; 11:30am Worship Service; 6pm Mon.

CHRIST CHURCH OF THE VALLEY, CASHIERS

Pastor Brent Metcalf • 743-5470

Sun. 10:45am, S.S. 9:30am. Wed. 6pm supper and teaching.

Tues. Guys study 8am, Gals 10am.

CLEAR CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Jim Kinard

Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11 a.m.

1st & 3rd Sunday night Service: 7 p.m.

Wednesdays – Supper at 6 p.m.

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH

www.cbchighlands.com • 526-4685

3645 Cashiers Rd, Highlands, NC • Sr. Pastor Gary Hewins

Sundays: 9:30am - Adult Sunday School; 9:45am (masks

required) Early Worship Service; 11:15am (masks optional)

Worship Service; Sundays 10:45am-Children's Program,

Sunday Youth-4:30pm – 6:30pm Dinner provided

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH OF SKY VALLEY

706. 746.3144 • 696 Sky Valley Way #447

Pastor Steve Kerhoulas

Worship: Sun. 10:30 a.m. Holy Communion 2nd. Sunday

EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION

Rev. W. Bentley Manning • 526-2968

Sunday Services Live-Stream at 8, 9:30,* 11 a.m.,

Services with an asterisk will be live-streamed.

Attendance in the Chapel is limited. Sign up online.

Morning Prayer Weekdays on Facebook live at 8:30 a.m.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HIGHLANDS

828-526-4153 • www.fbchighlands.org

Dr. Mark Ford, Pastor • 220 Main Street, Highlands

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

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Curtis Fussell & Emily Wilmarth, pastors

526-31 • 75 • fpchighlands.org

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

GOLDMINE BAPTIST CHURCH

(Off Franklin/Highlands Rd)

Sunday School: 10 am, Worship Service: 11 am

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF CASHIERS

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www.gracecashiers.com • Pastor Steve Doerter: • 743-9814

Services: Sundays 10am - Wed. - 7pm; Dinner - Wed. 6pm

BLUEVALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Oliver Rice, Pastor (706) 782-3965

Sundays: School: 10 a.m., Worship: 11

Sunday night services every 2nd & 4th Sunday at 7

Wednesdays: Mid-week prayer meeting: 7 p.m.

BUCK CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

828-269-3546 • Rev. Jamie Passmore, Pastor

Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11

CASHIERS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Aryan Williams-Reubel, Pastor 828-743-5298

Sundays: School at 9:30 Worship 10:30

Wednesday night Dinner and Service 5:30

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Tues. Guys study 8am, Gals 10am.

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Early Worship Service; 11:15am (masks optional) Worship

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Morning Prayer Weekdays on Facebook live at 8:30 a.m.

Holy Eucharist at noon in the garden on Mon and Wed

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...HAZARD continued from page 1

parable to a similar bonus given by county commissioners earlier this year to county employees.

Any employee who worked over 20 days will receive \$750 including substitute employees such as substitute teachers, bus drivers, and food nutrition workers.

Employees who have worked at least 10 days but less than 20 days will be considered part-time and receive a \$375 bonus.

Macon County Schools Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin proposed the hazard pay after end-of-year budget planning showed the district had additional COVID-19 relief funding available. While the

relief funding had strict guidelines for how it could be spent, hazard pay for employees was one of the acceptable allocations.

Macon County Schools Finance Director said that ideally the bonuses will be distributed during the next pay cycle for employees and all currently active employees in the month of May will receive the bonus.

Each member of the Board of Education expressed their appreciation to school system staff for working over the last year, recognizing the trying times public education has faced since the beginning of the pandemic.

...SCAMS continued from page 1

be the victim in suggestive or explicit positions. These images are not legitimate but are either said to show the victim, or the images have been changed using photo editing software to show the victim's face.

Many of these social media scams have been reported to be targeting the local Hispanic community. The Department encourages anyone who has been the victim of a similar scam to tell all of their friends and connections that their account has been copied and ask them to report and block the fake account.

The Highlands Police Department advises every person to be cautious with their online activities. Here are a few recommendations to help safeguard yourself online:

When you receive a social media Friend, Follow, Chat, or Message request, make sure that you know the individual who sent the request, and take time to verify that

the correct person actually sent it.

If you receive a Friend or Follow request from an unknown account, report the request to the social media company if the account appears to be spam, or if it appears to be impersonating someone else.

Check your privacy settings on your social media pages, and make sure that anything personal that you have posted is set to "Friends Only, or a similar setting. Do the same with your "Followers" or "Friends" list. Having privacy settings turned to "Public" allows anyone, anywhere in the world to view your information.

Be cautious in answering phone calls or text messages from unknown numbers.

Following these recommendations can help increase your privacy and safety online. For more information, do a web search for Internet Safety Tips and check out online resources such as staysafeonline.org

...HOSPITAL continued from page 7

• Macon County Public Health, 1830 Lakeside Drive, Franklin, NC, 828-349-2081, <https://maconnc.org/>

• Jackson County Department of Public Health, 538 Scotts Creek Rd, Sylva, NC, 828-586-8994, <http://health.jacksonnc.org/>

• WCU Regional Vaccination Clinic, 3971 Little Savannah Rd, Health and Human Services Bldg, Room 194, Cullowhee, NC, 828-227-8222, <https://www.wcu.edu/coronavirus/vaccine-info.aspx>

• Ingles Pharmacy in Cashiers, 828-743-6312

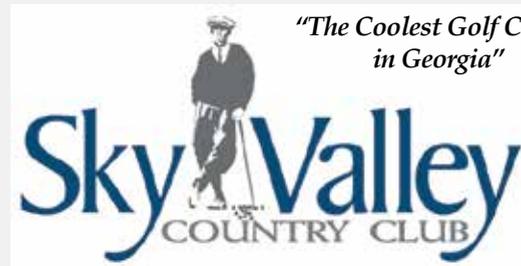
• Cashiers Valley Pharmacy, 72 Cashiers Shopping Center, Cashiers, 828-

743-3114, <https://cashiersvalleypharmacy.com/>

• Highlands Pharmacy, 195 Main St, Highlands, 828-526-2366

It's easier to get your vaccine now too, because as of April 7th, everyone 16 and older is eligible to receive one; there are no more tiers you have to track.

Getting your shot means less likelihood for viral transmission in our community, and fewer hospitalizations and deaths. You're protecting your family, coworkers, neighbors and the entire Plateau community, in addition to yourself, by stepping up and rolling up your sleeve.



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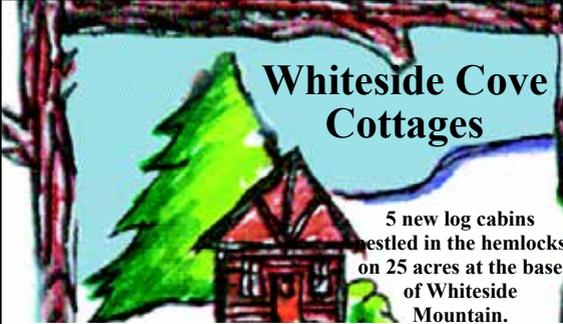


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Calling all MC authors

The Arts Council of Macon County is creating a literary publication to showcase the talents of Macon County's many published authors. It will be released this summer, free for distribution and available in print and digital form. The purpose of the publication is to promote local authors by exposing them to a wider readership, and to allow community members and visitors to sample the works of many writers in one tabloid-style publication.

The only eligibility requirements are that authors be Macon County residents aged 18 or older, and that content be appropriate for readers of all ages. To be included, submit one excerpt from your favorite published work (may be fiction or nonfiction, from a book, magazine, or newspaper), with a 500 word minimum, and approximately 1000 word maximum. Provide the work's name, publication date, and publisher. Include your name, mailing address, email address, and phone number, plus a 200 word bio. Deadline is May 15, 2021. Send hard copy submissions to The Art Council, PO Box 726, Franklin, NC 28744, and electronic submissions to arts4all@dnet.net. There is no entry fee.

The Arts Council intends this to be an ongoing publication, in the same vein as The Wayah Review, a compilation of essays, poems, and visual arts works published by the Council from 1980 until 1992, edited by Barbara McRae. While poets aren't included in the 2021 publication, future editions will focus on different art forms, from poetry to visual arts to oral history and beyond. If you have questions about this exciting project, contact the Arts Council, art4all@dnet.net or 828-524-ARTS.

**Landmark
announces new
BIC at Sapphire**



Marsha Bricker

Marsha Bricker, joins Landmark Realty Group as BIC at Sapphire office.

As a veteran real estate broker entrenched in the Sapphire area for nearly 30 years, Marsha brings her successful track record, unsurpassed knowledge, and real estate expertise to Landmark's Sapphire Office at Burlingame.

"I am delighted to bring Marsha onto the Landmark team. She adds to the continued strength of Landmark's brand and force in the Highlands-Cashiers area. Marsha's depth of knowledge in the Burlingame, Sapphire and Lake Toxaway areas solidifies Landmark as the real estate leader on the Plateau," says Carol Wilson, GM.

Marsha can be reached at 828-553-2357 (cell) 828-482-0986 (office) or Marsha@LandmarkRG.com

Landmark's Sapphire office is located at the entrance of Burlingame Community, 19387 Rosman Highway, Sapphire, NC 28774.

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AT POSH PAWS

Posh Paws Pet Spa in Highlands, NC is now hiring full-time, part-time, and seasonal dog bathers. Our business hours are Tuesday-Saturday from 9a-5p, and we will be doing open interviews Tuesday-Friday from 10a-3p. We are not open in the evenings or on holidays, so you can expect to be able to enjoy those times with loved ones.

Have you ever been interested in working with animals or trying something new but weren't sure how to get into the animal care industry? Working as a dog bather may be the job for you! This is an entry level position that requires no prior experience. Fast advancement opportunities are available through our self-paced, paid, one-on-one apprenticeship. This is a great opportunity to learn a trade skill without accumulating educational debt! All of our employees (including the owners of the business) have started their dog grooming careers as a bather.

Dog bathers must be willing to learn and take constructive criticism. We currently employ a wonderful group of people that works well as a team, so being a team player is a must. Drama will not be tolerated. A love for dogs and a high level of patience is also required. Attention to detail is a necessity as we never want to send home a dog that isn't 100% clean.

This job does require standing for long periods of time and heavy lifting with help. The bather must be able to wash, rinse, and dry up to 8 large dogs per day plus small dogs.

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Still not sure if this would be the right job for you? Please give us a call at 828-526-9581 with any additional questions about the position or come by to take a quick no-obligation tour before applying. We look forward to hearing from you!

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