

Highlands Newspaper

FREE Every Thursday

Volume 19, Number 13 Real-Time News, Weather & WebCams: HighlandsInfo.com Thurs., March 31, 2022

Macon voters to decide on 1/4 cent sales tax increase in November

By Brittney Lofthouse

A quarter cent increase to sales tax in Macon County will be left up to the voters this Novem-

ber in the form of a referendum placed on the ballot.

During the March meeting of the Macon County Board of Com-

missioners, the board unanimously voted to pass a resolution adding language to the November ballot

• See INCREASE page 10



Highlands Mayor Pat Taylor spoke at the Vietnam Veterans Day Celebration in Franklin on Saturday.

– Photo by Brittney Lofthouse

‘People everywhere just wanna be free’

Franklin Chapter 994 of Vietnam Veterans of America held a commemorative program last Saturday morning in front of the Macon County Courthouse in Franklin.

Highlands Mayor Pat Taylor joined a number of public officials – state and county representatives and more – to honor those who served in the war where 58,220

• See FREE page 10

Graffiti culprits are being sought

The Highlands Police Department is actively investigating graffiti and vandalism that was found in many places throughout Highlands. Twice in the past two weeks, officers from the Highlands Police Department have been called to the public restrooms on Pine Street for graffiti drawn inside the men’s bathroom.

• See GRAFFITI page 9

TAs may be eligible for tuition assistance

The state’s Teacher Assistants to Teachers Tuition Reimbursement Program is up and running and open to five Teacher Assistants

• See TUITION page 9

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On Tuesday, producer/director Kyle Boudeaux shoots a scene for “Reckoning” inside Highlands’ Prince House while local production assistant Jelehna McKim looks on.

– Photos by Brian O’Shea

HHS’s Prince House is scene of movie shoot

Independent filmmaker Kyler Boudreau, shot scenes for his upcoming movie “Reckoning” in the Highlands Historical Society’s Prince House this week.

Reckoning is a 30-minute sequel to “Rose and the Outlaw” which is a 15-minute “short” of Boudreau’s that won both an Honorable Mention for Independent

Shorts and the Silver Award for Independent Shorts in Los Angeles in May 2020.

Both movies were and are being shot with the iPhone 11 Pro Max with a Moment Anamorphic Lens and MOVI FreeFly

Boudreau and his crew were on location at the Prince House

• See MOVIE page 9

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

It's nice to be ahead of the curve



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

I attended the recent broadband meeting that Senator Corbin and Representative Gillespie hosted two weeks ago. There was a strong turnout of people throughout Western Carolina where broadband accessibility is a vital issue. Just in Macon County we had people from Otto and Nantahala in attendance. These communities have been working hard to improve broadband connectivity. Our representatives are to be commended for putting on this meeting.

For years, communications companies have ascertained that it's not economically feasible to run fiber lines to these rural and remote areas. Now with over a billion dollars in state and federal funds available, the prospect of acquiring service for these distant areas has changed. The head of NC Broadband spoke at the meeting about how grants will be available across the state this spring.

I am glad this critical issue has now been addressed at the federal and state level through funds coming primarily from the recently passed infrastructure bill. The goal is to have 98% of the country connected to fiber by the end of 2025.

The 2025 target date is very optimistic. From our experience with building the Highlands fiber network, it will take more like 4 to 6 years to connect everyone. Once grants are secured, network designs and specifications have to be completed before actual construction can take begin. Our fiber project experienced delays in procuring fiber optic cabling, not to mention weather and COVID work slowdowns. With this impending network construction boom, I foresee supply shortages and inflated prices causing major challenges.

A number of providers were at the meeting. All are very interested in these government grants for underserved communities. When Highlands first started our fiber project about 7 years ago, we sent out a request for information and interviewed a number of these companies. Not to be critical, but given the economics back then, some providers were not as confident as now about fiber network construction outside large service areas. It is gratifying to know many of these concerns have now been resolved.

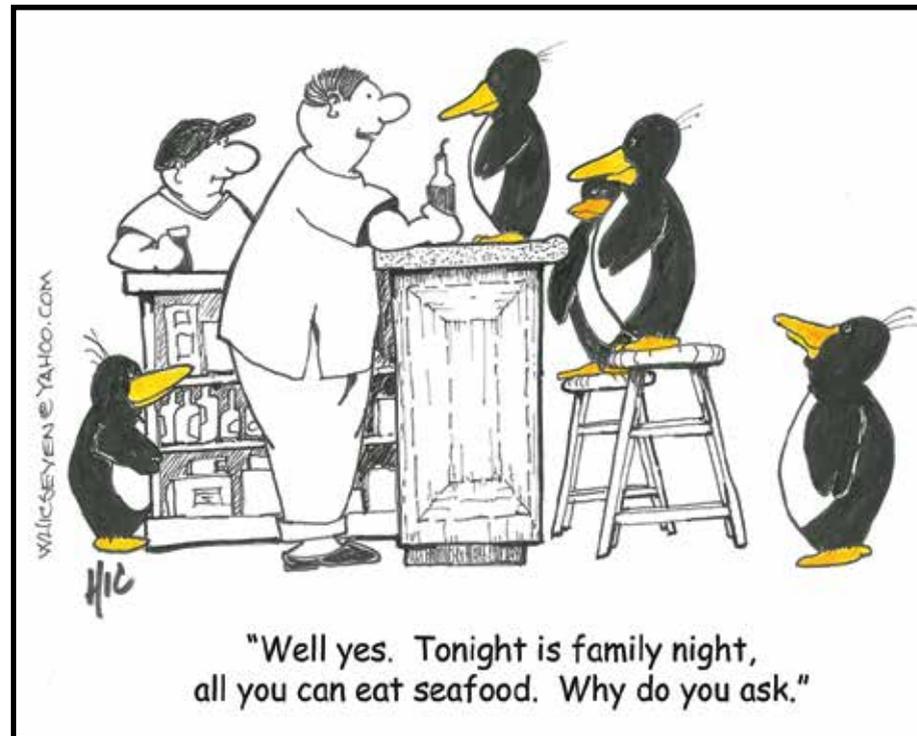
Oddly, the federal government wants fiber networks to be the standard. Wireless and satellite systems are not encouraged through these grants.

One may criticize Highlands for being too proactive by starting the fiber project 7 years ago. If only we had waited, federal and state grants may now be available. On the other hand, our network is active, and Hotwire is weeks away from initiating service.

Also, by leasing to Hotwire for 25 years for 10.2 million dollars, our construction loan of 4.6 million dollars will be recouped in 12 years. We will also be able to use lease revenue to become a Smart Digital City. Hotwire will invest several million dollars in building the underground portion of the network. In the long run, this partnership will result in no taxpayer funds being lost in our quest to be fiber optic city.

Our long road to becoming a fiber optic city has had many challenges and obstacles. And yes, the town has taken risks in making this network a reality. Many advancements in technology and services involve economic risks. There were folks in Highlands back in 1929 who thought that new-fangled hydro-electric power plant was a big risk, too.

• HIC'S VIEW •



• WEATHER •

| Thu, 31-Mar | Fri, 1-Apr | Sat, 2-Apr | Sun, 3-Apr |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | |
| 62°F 40°F | 56°F 30°F | 58°F 39°F | 60°F 35°F |
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| High: 66° Low: 48° | High: 58° Low: 38° | High: 62° Low: 37° | High: 69° Low: 39° |

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• LETTERS •

It's time for Commissioner Hehn to go

Dear Editor,

I have been a full-time resident of Highlands for the past 22 years and have tried to be a responsible citizen and voter by paying close attention to the actions of the Board of Commissioners. I have noted with increasing dismay the interaction of Commissioner Marc Hehn with the other commissioners and with town staff who work for the board.

I am aware of Commissioner Hehn's professional background. In fact, I voted for him when he ran for office in 2019. Sadly, I have now become disenchanted with his adversarial approach. It now seems that he considers himself to be the only person capable of saving the other commissioners from themselves. According to the newspaper reports his relations with the other commissioners, the mayor and with certain town employees have been contentious at best and seem to have reached a new low with his pursuit of a personal lawsuit against Josh Ward.

I agree with Mayor Taylor that Hehn's suit against a town employee for following the directives given to him by the Board of Commissioners is a dangerous precedent that creates risk to the effectiveness of governmental chain of command not to mention to employee morale. I also agree with the Board of Commissioners decision that the town pay Ward's legal fees.

Because of this increasing hostility and contentiousness I believe it is in the best interest of the town that Hehn resign his position on the Board of Commissioners.

Jack L. Sapolsky
Highlands, NC

Stop 'piling on' Marc

Dear Editor

There is a bit of "Country-Wisdom" that states: "When you throw a rock into a pack of dogs, the one yelping the loudest is probably the one you hit!" I believe Commissioner Marc Hehn, has thrown that "rock." I have never seen such piling-on to one person in all my life. My antenna immediately springs to life and shouts: "What is being hidden from the public and from the Town Board of Commissioners?"

I do not have first-hand knowledge of any of these town events; however, I DO HAVE FIRST HAND COMMON SENSE. Every citizen in this town should smell something rotten when an attorney states: "All documents have been destroyed!" I can understand not keeping documents for years; however, when spending public money within the last few weeks shouldn't wise and honest public servants keep some records?

If records had been kept and the public could peruse the documents, none of this could have happened to our town or Marc. I for one want to follow Marc's Rock. I want to pull some of the "piler-ons" off his back, I want some honesty & truthfulness exposed to our citizens.

Paul Schowalter
Highlands, NC

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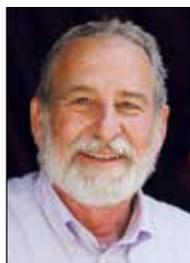
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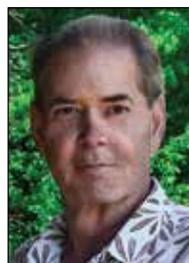
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Calling all anglophiles! Is it any wonder I wound up writing cozy mysteries set in England? I love British mysteries, and I've read all the P.D. James, Elizabeth George, and Deborah Crombie mysteries out there plus a host of others. At the moment, I have Jacqueline Winspear's latest Maisie Dobbs on hold at the library. Meanwhile, here's the selection from the past several weeks. Enjoy.



Kathy Manos Penn

my website and a few of my books.

"Agatha Award-winning author G. M. Malliet has charmed mystery lovers, cozy fans, and Agatha Christie devotees everywhere with *Wicked Autumn*, *A Fatal Winter*, and *Pagan Spring*, the critically acclaimed mysteries featuring handsome former-spy-turned-cleric Father Max Tudor."

In this 4th book in the series, charming Max Tudor is asked to investigate how a fruitcake made and sold by the Handmaids of St. Lucy of Monkbury Abbey turned out to be poisoned. Read it for the descriptions of the countryside, the bits of gentle humor that, of course, appear in daily life, and the mystery at its heart. You won't be disappointed.

"Death at Greenway" by Lori Rader-Day

'Tis the season for mysteries based somehow on Agatha Christie's life. This one is set during WWII at Greenway, Christie's summer home. The author is a presence but is seen only once or twice during the story.

I felt the book was slow at the start, but I was glad I stuck with it. The view into what life was like for children shipped off to the countryside during the blitz is fascinating and sad. This is the backdrop for the mystery, which involves yet another aspect of little-known goings-on during WWII.

Reading the author's afterword told me just how well-researched the book was, and made the tale all the more intriguing to me.

I was fortunate to visit Greenway several years ago, and the descriptions in this book brought it all back to me. Well done!

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

"The Christie Affair" by Nina de Gramont

This is another reimagining of the days in 1926 when Agatha Christie went missing. To this day, it has never been revealed where she was all that time.

Though the premise didn't appeal to me, the book is extremely well-written. When you feel as though you know the characters and can feel their pain and joy, you know you've found a good book.

The blurb drew me in: "In 1925, Miss Nan O'Dea infiltrated the wealthy, rarefied world of author Agatha Christie and her husband, Archie. In every way, she became a part of their life—first, both Christies. Then, just Archie. Soon, Nan became Archie's mistress, luring him away from his devoted wife, desperate to marry him. Nan's plot didn't begin the day she met Archie and Agatha."

Coincidentally, the 1979 Dustin Hoffman/Vanessa Redgrave movie, "Agatha," popped up on TCM right after I read this book. It too was a take on what happened during the eleven days the author was missing. My favorite book that posits what coulda/shoulda/woulda happened back then is "The Mystery of Mrs. Christie" by Marie Benedict.

"A Demon Summer" by G. M. Malliet

As the world around us seems to descend into chaos, I look for comfort reads and these books never disappoint. I read Book One several years ago and that book, *WICKED AUTUMN*, is the book club selection in my second cozy—*Pumpkins, Paws & Murder*. It was this book that inspired me to include a cast of characters in my cozies AND to add a map of Astonbury to

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...MOVIE continued from page 1



Boudreau shoots a scene for "Reckoning" where local Aniah McKim (in the mask) plays Ghost Face. — Photos by Brian O'Shea

Sunday-Tuesday of this week with locals assisting and acting. Aniah McKim played Ghost Face and Jehannah McKim was a production assistant.

The Prince House is the oldest remaining house in town and has been maintained and furnished with period-appropriate furnishings by the Historical Society which was perfect for the movie's interior shots.

Boudreau's first movie "Rose and the Outlaw" is about a 5-year old girl who loses both parents to a heartless outlaw named Ghost Face. She must decide to either stand her ground and face Ghost Face or spend the rest of her life running in fear.

The three-member cast included Boudreau, his wife Sandi Weldon Boudreau, and their daughter Journey Rose Boudreau.

The 30-minute sequel Reckoning, parts of which were shot in the Prince House, shows that "evil doesn't go down with a single bullet." It's about courage and the human struggle against problems that don't just go away because they are defeated

once.

Reckoning tells the story of the same Rose Lawson, and her fight against the most dreaded outlaw in the Appalachians.

Reckoning is set in the historic town of Little Cataloochee, NC. Little and Big Cataloochee were separated by a mountain ridge but tied together through strong family bonds. Colonel Robert Love was the original owner of the land in the early 1800s. By 1850, many people called Cataloochee home.

Today, the towns of Little Cataloochee and Big Cataloochee no longer exist but are part of the national forest. However, old buildings still stand, which along with the Prince House, were incorporated into the film.

To see more about both films go to <https://kylerboudreau.com/films/rose-and-the-outlaw/> and <https://theaterleven.com/films/reckoning/>.

— Kim Lewicki

...GRAFFITI continued from page 1

The first incident occurred on Saturday, March 19 around 9:15pm. The second incident occurred on Saturday, March 26 around 1:00am.

The Highlands Police Department is looking to identify two individuals that appear to be young males that are approximately five feet tall and thin in stature. These subjects always appear to be on foot as they move through town and they have

damaged many other surfaces as they passed by.

We are asking the community for help in identifying these individuals. Anyone with any information is asked to call the Highlands Police Department at (828) 526-9431 or email SRO Tim Broughton at tim.broughton@highlandscnc.org Anyone who provides information may remain anonymous.

...TUITION continued from page 1

employed in the Macon County School system who wish to become degreed teachers.

At Monday's March School Board meeting held in Highlands, Human Resource Director Todd Gibbs said any Teacher Assistant (TA) interested in working toward an undergraduate teaching degree would be eligible with some stipulations.

The "No Child All Left Behind" legislation of 2002 required all TAs be "highly qualified." Highly qualified means all TAs must have at least 48 credit hours toward a college degree.

Macon County Schools has 12 parttime TAs and 71 full-time TAs.

"We have 83 TAs in the Macon County School System who would be qualified for the tuition award," said Gibbs. "Some even have more than 48 hours."

Gibbs said Macon County Schools administration would determine the selection process and criteria as well as the application requirements but was first looking to get feedback from eligible TAs.

"The purpose is to financially help Teacher Assistants who want to pursue a 4-year college degree that will result in a teacher licensure," he said.

Each local board of education in the state participating in the program may select up to five teacher assistants to receive an award of up to \$4,600 per academic year for a period of up to four years to be used toward the cost of tuition and fees.

Tuition assistance awards under the program may be provided for part-time or full-time coursework but on-line university programs are not eligible. A degree must be

sought from a bricks and mortar university in North Carolina.

Each local board of education in the pilot program may grant a teacher assistant academic leave to pursue coursework if that coursework can only be taken during working hours.

As always, any student working toward a teaching degree must secure a student teaching assignment as part of the curriculum but a Teacher Assistant who receives an award can fulfill the student teaching requirements while working as a TA employed by a school and can continue to receive a salary and benefits as a TA.

Macon County School Board Attorney Dr. John Henning Jr., said when the program started in 2016-'17 there were some issues regarding Memos of Understand (MOUs) between school boards and bricks and mortar universities, but he didn't think MOUs are no longer required as part of the scenario.

The board must report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by September 1 of each year on the results of the program.

Any Teacher Assistant interested in being part of the program should talk to their principal.

"We have four traditional Teacher Assistants -- one in each Kindergarten and 1st grade class," said Highlands School Principal Brian Jetter. "I believe all of them could be considered for that program if they were interested."

— Kim Lewicki



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...FREE continued from page 1

American soldiers died.

Calling forth feelings about what the Ukrainian people are fighting for, Mayor Taylor's message to the veterans and people at the ceremony was that regardless of the controversy surrounding America's involvement in the Vietnam War, young men and women stepped forward when they were asked to serve their country.

"Despite all the controversy, I believe these GIs, now old vets, held deep in their hearts a deep belief about freedom. Like all American Veterans from Valley Forge

to those who have served in the Gulf Wars, they believed in fighting for freedom – for America and for others.

"As freedom-loving Americans we should support this cause where Ukrainian men and women are now fighting and dying for their country, as well as for the security of other European countries," he said.

He closed his remarks with stanza from the Rascals. "Hear the shoutin' from the mountains on out to the sea, no two ways about it people have to be free."

– **Kim Lewicki**




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...INCREASE continued from page 1

regarding an increase to the county's sales tax saying proceeds will be used for capital projects in the Macon County School system.

North Carolina offers individual counties the option to increase the 6.75 percent statewide sales tax to an even 7 percent, with all revenues from the extra quarter-cent going back to the county — the base 6.75 percent sales tax is shared between the county and state.

The sales tax will apply to purchases on items such as clothing, household supplies, electronics as well as prepared food and drinks (restaurant or store). There are numerous items exempt from the sales tax including prescription medication, groceries, gasoline, certain agricultural supplies and motor vehicles.

The thought behind the hike is that property taxes are assessed based on how much property you own and not all residents or businesses own property. The overall belief is keeping property taxes low helps encourage economic development and sales taxes are generated from monetary transactions. This means tourists and visitors to Macon County would also help support county services through a sales tax.

As it stands, funding for the school system, including capital outlay projects and infrastructure needs, are funded out of the county's general budget, which is funded through the county's property taxes, meaning Macon County landowners and homeowners pay the bill.

Since 2016, neighboring counties like Jackson County, and Rabun County, GA, have taken a different approach to funding school needs by approving an education-specific sales tax that generates revenue for infrastructure needs.

Macon County wants to follow suit.

Rather than raising property tax rates to generate additional revenue from property owners, a sales tax revenue would mean anyone shopping in Macon County and paying a sales tax, would be funding the school improvements, rather than just residents.

Macon County Manager Derek Roland estimates the sales tax referendum would

raise around \$1.7 million in additional yearly revenue and would provide funds to assist with ongoing capital improvement needs in the county school system.

From renovations at Highlands School for Pre-K, to a new Franklin High School, the district's capital outlay needs are extensive.

Macon County Commission Chairman Jim Tate noted that the needs are essentially required at this point and now it's up to the county to determine how those projects are going to be funded.

"The question is, how do you pay for it? It's not a question of whether we're going to do it – we've already decided we're going to do it," Tate said. "Would you rather pay for it with an increase of property taxes, or would you rather pay for it by letting some of our visitors who pass through this county also help pay for it through a quarter-cent sales tax increase?"

Sales tax is often rounded up to 7 percent already, and those dollars get rolled into the redistribution of sales tax across the state. Out of the 6.75 percent sales tax, less than 3 percent is currently returned to the county. An education-specific 1/4 of a penny tax would be guaranteed to Macon County each year.

In Jackson County, nearly two-thirds of Jackson County voters voted in favor of a referendum question allowing the county to increase the county's sales tax by one-fourth of a cent in 2016. The measure increased the county's sales tax from 6.75 to 7 percent and is expected to generate an additional \$1.2 million a year for the county.

The referendum will now be appearing on the ballot during the November 8 general election for voters across Macon County to decide. The form of

the ballot question for the additional 0.25% sales tax is mandated by NC General Statute 105-537(c).

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You see we Realtors are in the question-and-answer business. Here's one for you. I have the pleasure of serving on the Marketing Committee for the Highlands Chamber of Commerce. One day during a Chamber board meeting, I asked the staff "What's the #1 question people ask when they call the Chamber of Commerce?" They all laughed and told me this is one that many people ask; "Can you please tell me when the Town of Highlands turns on the waterfalls?"

Such is the life of a Realtor. Our job is to answer your questions; to help you with your "current situation" no matter what it entails; to let you know the good, the bad, and the ugly about properties; to truthfully represent all material facts about your property when you're selling; and to make sure you're making a good investment (not over-paying) when you're buying.

Meanwhile, you probably have a ton of questions. Here are a few we've heard.

"I'm considering an investment up there, when does the weather turn nice?"

Frankly, there's never been a day in Highlands that isn't "nice." Oh sure, two weeks ago we had 14 degrees, a blizzard, and 40 MPH wind out of the north, but it was the perfect day to sit by the fire and binge-watch Yellowstone or 1883!

I actually had a guy who's a big golfer tell me he's not buying in Highlands because it's in a rainforest and he won't be able to play enough golf. I told him he should con-



Pat Gleeson
Highlands Sotheby's
International Realty

sider buying in Myrtle Beach! I pray this every day; "Thank you Lord for this rainforest, which keeps us cool, green, and the rivers full of clean water."

"Why can't I just sell my home according to what Zillow says it's worth?"

Many Realtors share a love-hate relationship with Zillow. We love that it helps you do a little research, see what's on-the-market, and learn what's sold around you and for how much. We hate how inaccurate Zillow can be. Never trust an algo-

ritm, place your trust in a good Realtor. The "Zestimate" doesn't tell you the whole story (like that highway noise or that the septic tank needs to be emptied).

"Will you please email me all of your listings between \$300,000-\$450,000 that are move-in-ready, close to town, near the water, have a big view, and flat roads because we don't like steep curves (oh yeah, we'd like to rent it out from time-to-time too)?"

My answer to this question is usually something like this: "Thank you for your question Betty and you're not the first one to ask it. Please know I'm not trying to burst your bubble here but it's time we wake up and smell the coffee."

Betty needs to seek the wise counsel of a qualified Real Estate Broker (there are 318 of them up here), jump in the Mercedes and head for Highlands. With all due respect Betty, the heartbeat of the market is best represented by those of us who can show it to you instead of emailing it to you.

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How Many Doctors Have Left Mission? HCA Won't Say

Watchdog counts 223 departures since takeover in 2019

By Barbara Durr and Sally Kestin
Asheville Watchdog

Two prominent physician groups quit the Mission Health system in the first two weeks of the year, the latest in an exodus from the once highly regarded nonprofit community hospital since its sale three years ago to for-profit HCA Healthcare.

The seven doctors at Asheville Ear, Nose & Throat “decided to no longer provide medical or surgical care at Mission Hospital or Asheville Surgery Center,” as of Jan. 1, they wrote in a letter to their patients.

Also on Jan. 1, the 10 surgeons at Carolina Spine & Neurosurgery Center parted ways with Mission and joined UNC Health’s Margaret R. Pardee Memorial Hospital in Hendersonville. They retain privileges to practice at Mission.

HCA declined repeated requests for the number of doctors who have left the Mission system since it took over in February 2019 and refuses to say how many doctors are on staff today, other than that the number is “relatively the same.”

But Asheville Watchdog identified 223 doctors who appear to be no longer practicing there; their names were on the Mission Find a Doctor website as of August 2019 but had been removed as of February 2022.

Another 57 doctors still on the website are no longer listed as employed or affiliated with Mission.

Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer, who was among a group of elected officials signing a scathing public letter in February 2020 over concerns about patient care and staffing at Mission, said of Asheville Watchdog’s analysis, “It seems unavoidable that Asheville, Buncombe County and Western North Carolina will see a deterioration in healthcare as a result of Mission-HCA hemorrhaging doctors.”

State Sen. Julie Mayfield said, “The loss of these doctors represents collectively hundreds of years of experience, long-standing relationships within and outside the hospital, and consistency of and confidence in care for patients.”

“These physicians were a key part of what made Mission a world-class hospital system that prioritized patient care,” Mayfield said, “and it is truly unfortunate that HCA chose from the start to prioritize its profit over its people.”

Nancy Lindell, director of public and media relations for HCA Healthcare’s North Carolina Division, which includes Mission Hospital, said in a statement to Asheville Watchdog, “Mission Health is grateful to our team members who provide quality care to our community every day ... It is expected that the transition to HCA Healthcare, life events, effects of a global pandemic, and the increasing demand for healthcare services, etc., would lead to both some additions and departures.”

HCA refuses to give numbers

The 223 doctors no longer on Mission’s Find A Doctor site include 33 family medicine physicians, 25 surgeons, and 15 pediatricians or pediatric specialists. More than 100 doctors moved out of the state or region; others are listed as affiliated with hospitals in Hendersonville, the Charles George VA Medical Center in Asheville, or private practices, according to the North Carolina Medical Board and Internet searches.

Lindell said many of the doctors still in the region continue to practice at Mission and “are still part of our medical staff and hospital teams, making the number of physicians on medical staff relatively the same.”

She said the Find a Doctor site does not include open positions or doctors in the process of being hired and is not meant as a tool “for tracking the medical staff.” Mission has an office dedicated to medical staffing, but Lindell declined to provide even basic information about the number of doctors at Mission before and after HCA took over.

Asheville Watchdog sent Lindell the names of the doctors who are no longer on Find A Doctor or listed as employed or affiliated with Mission. She declined to comment beyond her statement and reiterated, “We continue to have approximately the same number of providers on the medical staff to serve the needs of our community.”

Providers include others besides doctors, including nurse practitioners, physician assistants, psychologists and dentists.

Doctors Frustrated

In interviews, doctors who left Mission cited concerns about declining patient care, job burnout, and frustrations with HCA’s emphasis on profits. Five of the doctors said some of their patients needing hospitalization were asking to be treated at hospitals other than Mission.

One doctor who remained in the area and spoke to Asheville Watchdog on the

condition of anonymity because he said he feared retribution from HCA said, “I get asked every day by a patient if I can treat them elsewhere than Mission.”

Dr. Martin Palmeri, an oncologist who left Mission in December 2019 to join Messino Cancer Centers, said the hospital system before HCA “was run primarily by doctors and nurses and now it’s being run by businessmen.”

“Bedside care is knowing what patients and families are suffering,” Palmeri said. “Patient suffering is off their (HCA management’s) radar.”

He said the hospital needs more doctors in leadership. “We need the right balance between bedside care and corporate benchmarks and revenue,” said Palmeri, who was recently elected president of the North Carolina Oncology Association.

Dr. Ben Aiken, a primary care physician employed by Mission until January 2020, said many patients are skeptical “that HCA has their best interests in mind as a for-profit company.”

Aiken, who piloted a subscription fee direct primary care practice under Mission’s former leadership, said Mission used to employ more primary care doctors even though that specialty is less profitable. HCA shuttered two primary care practices in 2020, in Biltmore Park and Candler, and sold Aiken’s pilot program, now called Lantern Health, to him.

“Primary care generally is not an emphasis in HCA,” Aiken said.

At least 30 primary care or family medicine doctors and 10 internists have left Mission’s employment, Asheville Watchdog found in its analysis of the Find A Doctor website.

“Exact same doctors,” then-CEO pledged

Aiken said Mission long was able to recruit high-quality physicians to Asheville, considered a desirable place to live and practice. But he said, “The type of physicians that were attracted to Mission may not be attracted to HCA. The business approach is very different.”



Dr. Martin Palmeri

An emergency room doctor, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Mission before HCA “could be choosy” about the doctors it brought on staff because so many wanted to work there. “Now they just fill the gaps.”

The doctor said that nurses in the emergency room are caring for more patients while management concentrates on meeting minimum standards and “metrics” such as how long a patient

waits to be seen.

“When HCA came in, there were so many emails on metrics,” he said. “We’ve gone from providing amazing care to mediocre care.”

Aiken said he wants to see a high-quality hospital in Asheville but believes Pardee UNC Health and AdventHealth, both in Hendersonville, are likely to expand if skepticism about Mission continues.

Lindell said Mission patients “continue to receive outstanding care at our hospitals by our clinical teams and board-certified physicians.” She said Mission recently passed a state inspection with no deficiencies, and a national accreditation review measuring 1,600 points of care did not produce “a single finding that required corrective action or a repeat visit.”

She said hospitals nationwide are struggling to hire and retain doctors, a shortage exacerbated by the pandemic, but that the Mission system in western North Carolina “welcomed almost 60 new physicians to our staff in 2021.”

In May 2018, before the sale of the hospital system, Dr. Ronald A. Paulus, then president and chief executive officer of Mission Health, told a local business group that Mission Health under HCA would still have “the exact same people and exact same doctors and exact same nurses” and provide similar or even superior care.

Paulus received a multimillion-dollar payout from Mission and joined HCA as a strategic advisor just days after the sale was concluded.

...DOCTORS continued from 12

Staffing is key concern

A common complaint among doctors, nurses and patients is that Mission under HCA has skimmed on staffing, among the largest costs for hospitals. In 2018, the year before the sale, Mission Health System reported more than 12,000 staff. The website now lists 10,500. Lindell said some employees formerly included under Mission, such as those working in billing and “our supply chain team,” are now counted under different entities.

But doctors and other employees told Asheville Watchdog there are fewer people in direct patient care, including certified nursing assistants (CNAs), health unit secretaries and mental health professionals, as well as support positions such as housekeeping, dietary services, and the morgue.

A source of many complaints about care, patients told Asheville Watchdog, is Mission’s emergency room.

HCA contracts with TeamHealth, a national physician staffing company owned by the private equity group Blackstone, to staff its emergency rooms.

Dr. Mitchell Li, an emergency medical specialist and the founder of Take Back Medicine, an organization that raises awareness about the dangers of the corporatization of medicine, told Asheville Watchdog that such staffing companies often replace ER physicians with nurse practitioners and physician assistants, a practice he observed first-hand while a resident at a Detroit area hospital staffed by TeamHealth. Li did not work at Mission or HCA.

“HCA and corporate ER staffing groups figure [they] can get away with a minimum of physicians,” said Li, who now operates a private, direct primary care practice serving Asheville, Black Mountain and nearby communities.

Asked whether emergency room doctors have been replaced with lesser trained staff such as nurse practitioners, Lindell said, “Most hospitals throughout the nation contract with ER provider groups ... We also augment their care with other staff in addition to these ER physicians when further care providers are needed.”



Dr. Ben Aiken

Patients in “excruciating pain”

In interviews, doctors said staffing turnover and reductions have affected nurse-to-patient ratios and quality of care at Mission.

Palmeri said he was “horrified” to find on more than one occasion his patients at Mission in “excruciating pain” because nurses responsible for seven to eight patients each could not administer pain medications on time.

Dr. Ken Zamkoff, a retired hematologist in Asheville, said, “When a patient is lying in a bed, it’s not just the doctor, it’s the whole team that cares for the patient. If you don’t have nurses, CNAs, and the whole ancillary staff, you can’t do it properly. When you decimate the team, the patient suffers.”

Another former Mission doctor, who still has privileges there, said the reduced staffing places a burden on those still practicing at Mission and leads to an “erosion in quality.”

Before HCA, he said the staff included many longtime employees who had worked together for years, but “now there’s no consistency.”

Vote of no confidence

In their letter to patients, the doctors at Asheville Ear, Nose & Throat did not specify a reason for their departure from Mission but said, “All of our doctors will continue to provide medical and surgical care for our patients at both Pardee Hospital and Park Ridge Hospital (now known as AdventHealth Hendersonville). We also now offer outpatient surgical care at Western Carolina Surgery Center.”

The surgeons at Carolina Spine & Neurosurgery Center declined requests for comment. Phil Bridges, spokesman for UNC Health, confirmed that the doctors have affiliated with UNC Pardee, and said current and new patients can expect a seamless transition.

Some doctors have cited pay and management issues in their decisions to depart Mission, including attempts by HCA to cut some physicians’ compensation by as much as 25 percent, according to interviews and published reports. Lindell said that Mission

Health compensates physicians in accordance with fair market rules.

But HCA’s approach to healthcare has led many to depart.

Palmeri, the oncologist, said he concluded that HCA’s approach to cancer treatment was, in his opinion, “focused on return on investment.”

“There’s a lot of aspects of oncology that are not that profitable,” Palmeri said, such as cancer care in small communities.” He said he saw “HCA pulling away from that.”

Palmeri said he wanted to ensure access to cancer care throughout the region. His practice, Messino Cancer Centers, has six locations, including Asheville. “I grew up here in Western North Carolina. It was critical for me to do that for our community,” he said.

Lindell said that Mission Health recently partnered with the Susan Cannon Cancer Institute of HCA Healthcare, known for its research, to expand its services across Western North Carolina.

The doctor who asked not to be named, and who said patients ask every day about alternatives to Mission, told Asheville Watchdog he left after being asked to take a salary cut, and seeing that “the patient experience was declining.”

“Concern for the community” at Mission, he said, “turned into care for the shareholder.”

A hematologist, who was on the medical staff at Mission and requested anonymity, said that the Mission oncologists last year were increasingly hearing from patients that they were “resistant to going to Mission.”

In June, the oncology team, troubled by quality of care and other concerns, took a no confidence vote in HCA management, he told Asheville Watchdog. “We brought up the issues again and again,” the doctor said, but little changed. Shortly after, he said he concluded that Mission “was more business oriented, not patient oriented,” and left.

Asked about the no confidence vote, Lindell said, “We have full confidence in our management team. We regularly gather feedback from physicians, nurses, patients and the community ... The feedback raised at these meetings has been addressed.”



Dr. William Hathaway

But two current oncology providers, who asked not to be named, told Asheville Watchdog that patient care concerns continue. They said nurse-to-patient ratios remain inadequate to provide needed care for the sickest patients, including providing pain medications on time; there are too few certified nurses for chemo treatments, which forces delays in administering the needed drugs; and there are too few CNAs.

While some patients may be seeking care elsewhere, Lindell said, “We continue to see patients choosing to come to our hospitals.”

Doctors have also left HCA-owned hospitals in other states for similar reasons. In Rochester, N.H., for example, 12 of the 14 primary care doctors at Frisbie Memorial left within 15 months after HCA acquired the local nonprofit community hospital in 2020. Some of them cited a lack of support for medical staff and a focus on profits rather than patients.

Top doctor departs

Mission’s highest-ranking doctor, Chief Medical Officer Dr. William Hathaway, announced on Jan. 6 that he, too, was leaving to become chief executive at MAHEC, the Mountain Area Health Education Center in Asheville, where he has been chairman of the board.

Hathaway told Asheville Watchdog that “my acceptance of the job was purely in relation to the retirement” of MAHEC’s CEO, Dr. Jeff Heck, which was announced last summer. Hathaway started as chief medical officer under nonprofit Mission and was the most senior of the previous Mission leaders under HCA.

In an interview with Asheville Watchdog, Hathaway acknowledged that his departure created an additional strain on the hospital. At the time, the Mission system was experiencing record COVID-19 cases and admissions, staffing shortages, a pending lawsuit over alleged price gouging, and an untold number of patient complaints.

But Hathaway, a cardiologist and third-generation physician, said he was excited to

...DOCTORS continued from page 13

start at MAHEC, an organization he described as having a tremendous reputation. "It's all about care for the patients," he said.

HCA profits soar

North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein reviewed and approved the sale of Mission to HCA, requiring 15 conditions, of which the most significant are restrictions on closing or selling facilities, continuing to provide certain services, and continuing Mission Hospital's charity care policy. Separately, HCA made certain capital expenditure commitments.

Quality of care and staffing levels were not among the 15

stipulations added by Stein. Stein, however, is "extremely concerned about healthcare in western North Carolina," said Laura Brewer, Stein's deputy chief of staff.

"Healthcare facilities must be adequately staffed to ensure patients get the treatment they need," Brewer said. "While the pandemic has exacerbated healthcare shortages all over the nation, reports of acute shortages at HCA are concerning."

She added that the Attorney General will "continue to ask questions about HCA's policies and commitments."

An independent monitor, Gibbins Advisors, is responsible

for ensuring HCA lives up to the Mission asset purchase agreement and the additional 15 conditions.

In April, Ronald Winters, a principal at Gibbins Advisors, said in a virtual public forum that it would examine the issue of physician departures. "To the extent those departures impact services at hospitals, that's certainly something we're going to look at and inquire about," Winters said.

Winters told Asheville Watchdog last month that the evaluation is ongoing but declined further comment.

Mission has become a valuable asset in the portfolio of HCA, the largest hospital corporation in the nation. In January, the company reported a near doubling of profits during the full pandemic year of 2021, from \$3.75 billion in 2020 to \$6.96 billion in 2021.

Just months after the consummation of the sale of Mission Health, HCA raised prices across the Mission system by an average of 10 percent. By the end of the first year, net patient revenue increased \$548 million compared to the 12-month period before the

sale, Greg Lowe, president of the North Carolina Division of HCA Healthcare, wrote in a letter to Attorney General Stein on April 30, 2020. The letter was obtained by Asheville Watchdog under a public records request.

With annual net patient revenue exceeding \$1 billion, Mission Hospital ranked No. 2 among more than 180 HCA hospitals in both 2020 and 2021, according to the consulting firm Definitive Healthcare.

"Healthcare should be the least transactional business in the world," said the doctor who was asked to take a salary cut, but HCA's "approach is very transactional."

He said the upshot at Mission, where he said collegiality and community commitment were once hallmarks, is "the pride is gone. It's just sad."

• Peter H. Lewis contributed to this report.

Coming next, **Part Two: Mission nurses are stretched and stressed.**

* Asheville Watchdog is a non-profit news team producing stories that

matter to Asheville and Buncombe County. Barbara Durr is a former correspondent for The Financial Times of London. Contact her at bdurr@anv-watchdog.org. Sally Kestin is a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter. Email skestin@anvwatchdog.org. Peter H. Lewis is a former senior writer and editor at The New York Times. Email plewis@anvwatchdog.org.

Asheville Watchdog Policy on Unnamed Sources

This story includes unnamed and confidential sources.

Asheville Watchdog believes that the use of anonymous or unnamed sources compromises the credibility of our stories. At the same time, confidential sources can alert us to stories or situations that we can then investigate and verify independently. Some sources have legitimate reasons for wishing to remain unnamed and provide information that we could not obtain elsewhere. We will protect their confidentiality. We require additional corroboration if a story is based on a confidential source, and all such stories are subject to extra review.

• BIZ/ORG NEWS •

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Visit Highlands NC announces grant recipients



From left is Mary Adair Trumbly with the Martin Lipscomb Performing Arts Center and Scott Daniel executive director of The Playhouse.

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• BIZ/ORG NEWS •

R.E.A.C.H. of Macon County combats abuse and helps rebuild lives

It's a common misperception that bad things don't happen in our little corner of paradise. But statistics don't lie and "just because you don't see abuse doesn't mean it isn't happening" Jennifer Turner-Lynn, Assistant Director of R.E.A.C.H. of Macon County reminded Rotarians last week.

R.E.A.C.H. of Macon County provides a host of resources for people in Macon and Jackson counties who experience domestic violence, sexual abuse and human trafficking. These resources include emergency shelter, education, legal assistance, therapeutic and vocational counseling and help finding long-term housing. When the nation shut down and Covid pressures rose, the need for R.E.A.C.H. services surged. From July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 the organization saw a 100% increase in shelter nights, and a 150% increase in hotline calls.

Fortunately, R.E.A.C.H. had opened a new state-of-the-art emergency shelter and in 2020-'21



From left: Cindy Trevathan, R.E.A.C.H. Board Member, Jennifer Turner-Lynn Assistant Director, R.E.A.C.H. of Macon County and Tom Graham, President, Rotary Club of Highlands.

the VanDrake Shelter was able to provide 3,514 shelter nights, helping 131 victims and children with shelter and safety. With assistance from the Highlands Church of the Incarnation, in 2019 an animal kennel was built to house pets of clients at the shelter.

Regrettably, funding from the federal Victims of Crime Act Crime Victims Fund, also known as VOCA, has decreased nearly 80% during the same time period, so annual

operational funding continues to be a challenge. Turner-Lynn encouraged Rotarians to shop at or contribute items to the Reach for Bargains Thrift Store, located at 158 Heritage Hollow Drive, Franklin (828/369-2040). Participation in the May 3 Mardi Gras Dinner Party is another way to give support.

To make a contribution or for more information, please visit www.reachofmaconcounty.org.

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Mission Health changes visitation

As of March 29, all Mission Health hospitals have reviewed and updated visitor restrictions.

As COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations continue to decrease, we are now at a Level I visitation policy. This means two (2) healthy visitors are allowed per inpatient during the regular visitor hours of 6am-8pm and one (1) guest may remain overnight.

In an effort to keep everyone safe, we will still require that all patients, visitors, and employees be masked in all public and patient care areas of Mission Health hospitals. Visitors younger than 12 will require administration permission.

Due to the limited space in some of our physician practice waiting rooms and to ensure the safety of our patients, visitors in our practices and clinics may still be limited. All visitors two years

of age and older must be masked throughout the entire visit. Visitors should review symptoms of COVID-19 and be able to attest to screening negative.

Mission Health uses established protocols to care for patients with infectious diseases and follows CDC guidelines related to COVID-19 cases, including isolating the patients and taking steps to ensure the safety of our patients, employees and visitors. As a precaution, only one (1) visitor will still be allowed for COVID-19-positive patients or with patients awaiting a COVID-19 test result. Proper PPE will be required for all visitors. Please note that electronic devices are available upon request to assist with virtual visitation.

We thank our community for observing these updated guidelines to better support the needs of our patients.

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- Lap Swim Monday-Friday 6am-10am, Monday and Thursday 11:15am-7pm and Tuesday and Wednesday 11:15am-3:30pm 6 lanes AND 3:30-7 (shared Pool) and Saturday 10-11am 6 lanes. Adult Swim Monday-Thursday 11:15am-7pm. Call ahead for Public Swim Weekend schedule due to staff shortages. 828-526-1595.

Pickle Ball

- There are three indoor Pickle Ball courts and six outdoor Court open once again. Pickle Ball will be played in the gym every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 10am-1:pm (days and times have changed).

Nature Center Spring Hours

- Friday & Saturday: 10 AM to 4 PM. Closed: Sunday - Thursday
- Mondays**
- ESL classes are held at the Presbyterian Church in Highlands from 5:30-6:30pm. No registration required – just show up and participate. Questions? Visit www.maconncliteracy.org, call 828-526 – 0863 or email info@maconncliteracy.org

Second Mondays

- The local chapter of PEO, an off-campus sorority founded in the 1800s that provides grants and loans to women who want to return to school or further their education and have a financial need, meets at 10 a.m. If interested, please call president Paula McDonald at 706-372-3004 for meeting places.

Mon-Fri

- Water Aerobics 18 years plus 10:15-11am.

Mon., Tues., Thurs.

- The Food Pantry behind the Methodist Church on Spring Street is open from 10a to 6p,

Mon. & Wed.

- Cardio Kickboxing with Crystal Corbin 5:30-6:30 p.m. A full body workout that engages every muscle in the body.

- New Mobility Class with Anna Norton It's all about movement. 5:30-6:30pm and Wednes-

day 6:45-7:45. For more information, call Anna 267-825-0716.

Mon, & Thurs

- Drive-thru flu clinics at the Public Health Center at 1830 Lakeside Dr. in Franklin from 1-4 pm \$36 for the regular dose and the \$73 for the high dose (recommended for those 65+). Insurances will be filed; please bring your insurance card with you. Questions? Call 828.349.2081.

Mon, Wed, Thurs

- Indoor and outdoor Pickle Ball 10:30 am-1 pm.

Mon, Wed, Fri

- Heart Healthy Exercise Class 8:30-9:30am. \$25 a month, The class is led by Cathy Hodgson. Contact the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more information.

- Aerobics with Tina Rogers 8-9 am.

Tues. & Thurs.

- Pilates-Strength and Stretch with Autumn Lucas

- New Zumba class with Gay Chalpin from 4:30-5:30p.

- Exercise Class with Michelle Lane at 5:30. A combination class with many different types of exercise.

1st Tuesdays

- Indivisible Highlands from 5-6:30 pm at the Hudson Library.

Tuesdays

- Strength Training 8:15-9:15am. Aim for strong, lean muscles using light weights, body weight, and high repetition to shape and tone.

Thursdays

- Kickboxing 8:15-9:15am. An exhilarating and fun mix of martial arts for a calorie-burning workout.

- Free Covid vaccination clinics – 9 am to 5pm at the Rec Park. (Closed for a half-hour lunch break) Location subject to change. please check <https://myspot.nc.gov/> for the latest location information. Walk-ins are accepted, however we encourage residents to pre-register and schedule an appointment at <https://myoptumserve.com/covid19> or by calling (877) 505-6723 if you do not have internet.

Every Fri., Sat, & Sun.

- 1st run movies at the Playhouse on Oak Street. This week: April 1-3 - The Lost City. 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. www.mountaintheatre.com

2nd Saturdays

- The Western North Carolina Woodturners Club meets in Highlands at The Bascom at 10 a.m. March and November.

3rd Saturdays

- The American Legion Post 370 meets on the 3rd Saturday of every month at the First Methodist Church at 315 Main Street in their Community Room/ 909 Chapel. We serve breakfast at 9AM and hold our monthly meeting at 10AM We invite ALL Veterans to attend. Contact Ed McCloskey, Commander for any information @828-787-1660.

Fri.-Sun., April 1-3

- Movies at The Playhouse 1 and 4p. www.mountaintheatre.com

Mon. April 4

- Garden Tour at the Highlands Nature Center from 11:30a to noon. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Thurs. April 14

- Italian Inspired Spring Fling at The Farm with Executive Chef, Craig Richards. Book online at OldEdwardsInn.com

- Winter stories will be held at the High Dive from 2-4 , a casual gathering of story swapping. Come, Tell, Listen.

Thurs., April 7

- Wildflower Walk at the Highlands Nature Center from noon to 1 p.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Sat. April 9

- Garden Tour at the Highlands Nature Center from noon to 1 p.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Sun., April 10

- DEATH CAFE, Sunday, 2-4 pm, Wayfarers Unity Chapel, 182 Wayfarer Lane, Dillard, GA DEATH CAFE is a global movement started in the UK whose only objective is: "To increase awareness of death with a view

• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

of helping people make the most of their finite lives." Join Jan Brewer, M.A., CMT, for a group-directed conversation in the welcoming space of Wayfarers Chapel about death and dying/life and living. Come talk about all things death-related with others wanting to join the discussion. For further information please contact Jan at (510) 684-5555 or visit www.deathcafe.com.

Wed., April 13

• Early Bird Stroll at the Highlands Nature Center from 9-9 a.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org.

• Hudson Library, in partnership with Vaya Health, is hosting an educational series on adult mental health, held on the second Tuesday of each month throughout 2022. This series is aimed particularly at older adults and will focus on mental health issues of particular interest to them. Wednesday held at 2 PM, is titled "Covered Up: What You Need to Know about Hoarding."

Thurs., April 14

• Wildflower Walk at the Highlands Nature Center from noon to 1 p.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Sat. April 16

• Early Bird Stroll at the Highlands Nature Center from 8-9 a.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Tues., April 19

• Nature 101: Beautiful Blooms at the Highlands Nature Center from 1-2 p.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Wed. April 20

• Early Bird Stroll at the Highlands Nature Center from 8-9 a.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Thurs., April 21

• Wildflower Walk at the Highlands Nature Center from noon to 1 p.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Fri. April 22

• The Democratic Women of Macon County will hold an Earth Day Potato Supper, Friday, at the Carpenter Community Center, 1288 Georgia Road. Supper includes a baked potato, all the fixings, a dessert and a drink for \$12 for adults and \$6 for children 12 and under. Eat in or carry out from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Democratic candidates for the US Congressional seat will be present to greet voters. Tickets may be purchased from members

of Democratic Women or by calling (678) 357-7718. Information about Earth Day and how each person can help invest in the planet also will be available.

Sat. April 23

• Early Bird Stroll at the Highlands Nature Center from 8-9 a.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

• The American Legion Post 370 April Meeting is Saturday with Breakfast @9AM and Meeting @10AM due to the family travel conflicts that arrive as a result of Easter Weekend. May meeting will resume as usual at the Methodist Church.

• The annual Plateau Pickup is scheduled for Saturday, April 23. Volunteers will tackle stretches of US 64, NC 28, NC 106 and several high traffic streets inside town limits. Volunteers will be supplied with a light breakfast to start, orange vests, gloves, garbage sticks, a boxed lunch afterwards and a thank you t-shirt. Please send an email to events@highlandschamber.org if you'd like to participate. Volunteers Needed! Mark your calendars!

Sun., April 24

• Chef Dinner at OEI's The Farm, Italian-inspired Spring Fling with chef Craig Richards. Book at OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners

Wed. April 27

• Early Bird Stroll at the Highlands Nature Center from 8-9 a.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Thurs. April 28

• Wildflower Walk at the Highlands Nature Center from noon to 1 p.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

Sat. April 30

• Early Bird Stroll at the Highlands Nature Center from 8-9 a.m. 828.526.2623 paige@highlandsbiological.org

April 29-May 1

• Bear Shadow Music Festival. For tickets go to bearshadownc.com.

Thurs., May 12

• Winter stories will be held at the High Dive from 2-4, a casual gathering of story swapping. Come, Tell, Listen.

Sun., May 15

• Chef Dinner at OEI's The Farm, May Day Celebration with Celebrity Chef, author and lifestyle expert Chadwick Boyd. Book at OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners

Fri., June 10

• Chef Dinner at OEI's The Farm, Red, White and 'Que with the Fox Brothers.

Book at OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners

Sun., July 24

• La Fete de Champagne. Book at OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners

Sat -Sun, June 25 & 26

• Highlands Mountaintop Rotary Art & Craft Show will be held in Kelsey-Hutchinson Park on Pine Street in downtown

Highlands from 10a to 5p. Now in its 17th year, this popular event showcases talent from the area and features fine art, folk art, crafts and furniture. Attendance is free, dogs are allowed, and food will be available. For info contact coordinator Cynthia Strain at (828) 318-9430 or visit: www.mountaintopshow.com



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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

Don't Be Fooled



Pastor Randy Lucas
Highlands United
Methodist Church

Before I became a pastor I was a morning radio announcer in Asheboro North Carolina. I still have fond memories from those days. One of my favorite days of the year was April 1st. On the first day of April I would broadcast live reports from our Annual "April Fools Day Parade" through the streets of downtown Asheboro.

There was no actual parade of course, but the annual April Fools Day stunt always garnered a bit of good-natured interest, with the inevitable phone calls from individuals driving around town looking for the massive floats, marching bands and the Macys' Thanksgiving Day Parade-like mammoth balloon characters dancing high above Sunset Avenue and Fayetteville Street.

I would generally invite people along the "parade route" to call in with live reports, having plenty of marching band sound effects handy as I put cooperative callers on the air describing the make-believe events unfolding in their minds.

Each year the parade grew in its expansive absurdity, with our final April Fools Day Parade including "live" reports from a local television celebrity I had invited to serve as the Grand Marshall. We had devised a grand entrance for him, having him parachute into the parade. However, our plans were unfortunately foiled by a change in wind direction, causing his parachute to get stuck on Asheboro's tallest bank building, leaving him helplessly dangling above Fayetteville Street for the duration of the parade. But being the trooper that he was, he offered many colorful reports during my show, describing the parade taking place below him!

While I recognize that some good-natured verbal sleight of hand can be fun on the first day of April, I'm also acutely aware of the problems that can be caused by unhealthy gullibility. Wisdom and discernment are certainly needed when trying to separate fact from fiction. And I always try to remember something my sociology professor said during a course on qualitative research. He said "nothing is without bias."

In her book, *Disunity in Christ - Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart*, Social Psychologist Dr. Christina Cleveland writes about the impact of "social identity theory," which speaks to how our self-esteem is closely tied to our group memberships. She points out

• See **SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING** page 19

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

BLUE VALLEY 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. Aryn 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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Sundays: 10 a.m. Worship

Holy Communion 1st & 3rd Sundays

CHRIST ANGLICAN CHURCH

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www.christanglicancashiers.com

Sun. - 9:30am Worship (no music); 10:30am Sunday

School; 10:30am Worship Service.

Mon. Night Bible Study & Dinner: 6pm. call for details.

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

Sun.: 9:30am - Adult Sunday School; Worship Service 10:45am;

10:45am Children's Program. Youth-12:15 - 2:30pm Tues:

Women's Bible Study 10am-noon

Thurs: Men's Bible Study 7:30-8:30 a.m.

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, Rector • 526-2968

5th and Main streets • www.incarnationwnc.org

Sunday Services in the Chapel: 8 am Rite I spoken, 10:30 Rite II

with Choir; Morning Prayer Mon-Thurs 8:30 am in the Chapel

Ash Wed. services March 2, 12 p.m., & 5 p.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

828-526-3175 • fpchighlands.org

Sun.: Adult Ed.: 10 a.m.; Worship 11 a.m.

Tues: Men's Group 10 a.m. Wed: Bell Choir 4 p.m.. Choir: 6p

GOLDMINE BAPTIST CHURCH

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Sunday School: 10 am. Worship Service: 11 am

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HAMBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

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Sunday: School 9:45a. Worship 11a & 7p. Bible Study 6p

Wed. Kidsquest 6p.; Worship 7p.

HIGHLANDS ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Randy Reed, Pastor 828-421-9172 • 165 S. Sixth Street

Wed. Bible Study: 6 p.m.; Sundays: Worship: 11

HIGHLANDS CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Dan Robinson • 11339 Buck Creek Road

The Highlands Central Baptist Church is temporarily

sharing the facilities of the Shortoff Baptist Church.

Sunday Worship is at 9a. Wednesday Worship is 6:30p

HIGHLANDS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Dr. Randy Lucas, Pastor 526-3376

In-Person and live-streamed Worship Services

909 Bluegrass and 10:50 Traditional

www.highlandsmethodist.org

HOLY FAMILY LUTHERAN CHURCH: ELCA

Rev. Angie Ballard • 2152 Dillard Road • 526-9741

Worship/Communion: 10:30 All are welcome.

We wear masks and social distance.

MACEDONIA BAPTIST CHURCH

8 miles south of Highlands on N.C. 28 S in Satolah

Pastor Zane Talley

Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11. Choir: 6 p.m.

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

MOUNTAIN SYNAGOGUE

Franklin • 828-634-1312

Services 2x/month May-Sept.; 1x/month Oct. -April

mountainsynagoguewnc.com.

MOUNTAIN BIBLE CHURCH

743-2583 • Independent Bible Church

Sun: 10:30 a.m. at Big Ridge Baptist Church.

4224 Big Ridge Road (4.5 miles from NC 107)

Weds: Bible Study 6:30 p.m.; Youth Group 6 p.m.

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CATHOLIC CHURCH

Rev. Fr. Jason K. Barone - 526-2418

Mass: Wed. noon (Latin); Thurs. noon; Sun. 11a

SCALY MOUNTAIN BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Marty Kilby

Sundays: School - 10 a.m.; Worship - 11 a.m. & 7

Wednesdays: Prayer & Bible Study: 7 p.m.

SCALY MOUNTAIN CHURCH OF GOD

290 Buck Knob Road; Pastor Donald G. Bates • 526-3212

Sun.: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 10:45 a.m.; Worship: 6 p.m.

SHORTOFF BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Rev. Andy Cloer

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

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

ST. JUDE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Mass: Tues. noon (Latin). Thurs. 9a.; Fri.. noon;

Sat. 5:30p; Sun. 9a

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UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP

85 Sierra Drive, Franklin • uufranklin.org

Sunday Worship - 11 a.m.

WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers

Sunday School: 10 am. Worship Service: 11 am

• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from March 21. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

March 21

• At 2 p.m., officers received a call about someone communicating threats at a construction site on Bowery Road.

March 22

• At 10:12 a.m., officers responded to a call of a breaking and entering at a residence on the Franklin Road, where someone was found in a home without prior authorization.

March 24

• At 5:25 p.m., officers were notified about larceny with a credit card and theft of a cross body sling military green bag at

the Highlander Mountain House.

March 26

• At 8 a.m., officers received a report of vandalism inside the bathroom at K-H Founders Park on Pine Street.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from March 23.

March 23

• At 11:12 a.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on NC. 106.

• At 6:23 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a residence on the Cashiers Road.

• At 10:07 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a residence on the Cashiers Road.

March 25

At 12:56 p.m., was first-responders to a location on Oak Street.

• BIZ/ORG NEWS •

National Library Week comes with perks!

April 3-9, is National Library Week, a time to highlight the essential role that libraries, librarians, and library workers play in transforming lives and strengthening communities.

In celebration of National Library Week we are happy to announce that beginning Monday, April 4th, Fontana Regional Library (FRL), including Hudson Library, will no longer charge a fee for checkout of DVDs and Blu-rays! That's right, all video checkouts will be free, though normal overdue fines still apply.

This year's National Library Week theme is "Connect with Your Library."

Libraries keep their communities connected by expanding resources and embracing inclusion in programming, resources,

and collections. FRL libraries also support local communities with services such as hotspots for check out and the Digital Seniors Chromebook loan program. Children hear stories and make music at weekly Story-times, and school-aged children enjoy a wide variety of STEM and art activities at weekly Kids Zone programs. Adult programs support a variety of interests.

This National Library Week, the public can show their appreciation and explore services by visiting Hudson Library in person or online, by following us on social media, and using the hashtag #NationalLibraryWeek

For more information, call Hudson Library at 828-526-3031 or visit the library's website at www.fontanalib.org.

Convicted sex offender sentenced for violating restrictions

A convicted sex offender who hung out at the Macon County Recreation Park learned that ignoring the law is not a persuasive legal argument, District Attorney Ashley Hornsby Welch said.

This week, a Macon County jury convicted Highlands resident Archie Picklesimer, 52, on two felony counts of registered sex offender on child premises.

He went twice on July 4, 2019, to the recreation park near Franklin on Georgia Road (U.S. 441 south).

A GPS tracking unit alerted a probation and parole officer to the violation. He, in turn, notified Macon County deputies.

Picklesimer was convicted previously, in May 2012, in Rabun County, GA on two counts child molestation. He served six years in prison, moving to Macon County in November, 2018 and registering as a sex offender with the state of North Carolina.

One of the restrictions on convicted sex offenders in North Carolina is they are not allowed on property where children frequently congregate, such as recreation



Archie Picklesimer

parks.. Picklesimer initialed his understanding of that requirement when he signed the state's offender registration form.

He also signed an additional form acknowledging Macon County has a specific local ordinance that prohibits sex offenders at the recreation park.

"There's no excuse for Mr. Picklesimer's pretense that he did not understand the law, and jury members required just 30 minutes of deliberation to render their guilty verdicts," the district

attorney said.

Chief Resident Superior Court Judge Bill Coward sentenced Picklesimer to serve in prison 8-19 months, consecutively, for each of the two counts, the maximum time allowed under the state's structured sentencing law.

Additionally, because this North Carolina conviction violates the conditions of Picklesimer's parole from prison in Georgia, he will serve the remaining 14 years of his 20-year sentence in that state.

Assistant District Attorney Jim Moore prosecuted the case.

...SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING continued from page 18

how "we all have a tendency to cling to rigid and oversimplified categories of other groups."

In other words, it's easy to categorize and label groups of people. And once labeled, we can hold fast to the generalized characteristics we perceive to be applicable to everyone in the group. Sociologists refer to this as the "outgroup homogeneity effect." While we tend to recognize the individuality of folks in our group, we see those we've categorized and labeled in the other group to be all the same.

In Think Again - The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know, Adam Grant

invites us to consider the wisdom of recognizing one's own cognitive blind spots, pointing to humility as "a crucial nutrient for the mind." If we refuse to consider the potential for fallacy in our thinking, we may gain proficiency at digging in our heels, but we will be lousy at cultivating a better world.

So, the next time you're tempted to only give credence to voices that confirm your biases and that are quick to categorize and label others, I offer a simple invitation as we enter into April.

Don't be fooled!



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Merritt Shaw
(828) 421-7593

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Merritt@HighlandsCoveRealty.com



LOST-REWARD

DRONE LOST IN THE VICINITY OF SKY VALLEY, GA. Registration number: FA3PELEPTC. If found, Call 404-542-2773. Reward. (3/31)

WANTED

RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS OWNER in search of at least two bedroom rental. Must have washer and dryer and be pet friendly. 828-482-2219

HELP WANTED

CHURCH PIANIST NEEDED IN CASHIERS, NC. A church is interested in hiring a capable pianist as worship leader, immediately. High hourly pay. Respond to Molly @ 828-507-5153 or christanglicancashiers@yahoo.com

CASHIERS COLOR CENTER is looking to hire a full-time individual to assist in the paint department. Duties will include mixing paint, assisting customers with color selections and sundry items, stocking shelves and daily cleaning. Must be able to lift 50 pounds. This individual must be dependable, self-motivated, have great customer service skills and be willing to learn. We will offer on-the-job training, so experience is not necessary. For more information, call Derek Taylor @ 828-200-9226, or stop by Cashiers Color Center to fill out an application. (6/9)

PART-TIME RETAIL SALES CLOTHING BOUTIQUE on Main St. in Highlands. Seasonal and Year round positions. Competitive pay. Retail sales experience preferred. Ideal second job, or retiree who wants to stay active. Call 407-399-0572 or email elenawood@gmail.com for interview. (st. 3/17)

HIGHLANDS EXCURSION is hiring guides/drivers. Email us at adventure4118@gmail.com. (st. 3/10)

WOLFGANGS RESTAURANT Looking for full-time hostess (great pay) dishwasher, prep cook, pantry and waitstaff. PM shift only. Call Jacque at 828.526.3807 or email wom2@me.com. (st. 2/17)

CHESTNUT HILL OF HIGHLANDS is an Upscale, Small Assisted Living Facility looking for Med Aides, CNA's, Housekeeper and Dietary Staff. You may apply in person at 24 Clubhouse Trail, by Phone at 828-526-5251 or by email to ce.chestnuthill@yahoo.com or lind-

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NEW 2 STORY HOUSE, big garage on 3,14 acres land, water, sewage, WI-Fi, AC, private paved road, mountain view. (st. 10/7)

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NEED FURNITURE MOVED OR ANYTHING HAULED AWAY? I can do it. Call or text James of Going Gone at 828-421-2655. (4/28)

CNA/EMT Dependable, knowledgeable, dedicated to my clients. Stop paying agency prices and call me. Franklin, NC 407-325-0920. (st. 1/28)

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GUTTER CLEANING, METAL ROOF & FABRICATON roof repairs, chimney flashing, debris removal, pressure washing. Call 828-371-1103. (st. 9/17/20)

HIGH COUNTRY PHOTO/KEVIN VINSON: scanning photos, slides & negatives to CD or DVD for easier viewing. Video transfer to DVD. Everything done in house. Leave message at 828-526-5208.

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\$5 for color graphic

• HIGHLANDS SCHOOL SPORTS •

Highlands takes the win against Blue Ridge Early College



Highlands Hayley Borino dodges and weaves as she makes her way towards BREC's goal.



Highlands Brandy Zagal looks to center the ball with BREC Paige McCall looking to make a stop on Monday in Cashiers.



Highlands Addie Westendorf sends the ball down the field.

By Brian O'Shea
Plateau Daily News

Highlands girls varsity soccer team took on Blue Ridge Early College on the road Monday and walked away with a solid victory ending with a final of 8-0.

The Lady Highlanders hit the road again on March 31 to play against Hayesville, game begins at 4 p.m.

The Lady Bobcats also have an away game on March 31 against Murphy, game begins at 6 p.m.



BREC Ava Davis and Highlands Abbie Doerter race for the ball. Highlands Addie Westendorf (center) looks to see how it pans out before making her next move.

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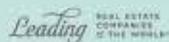


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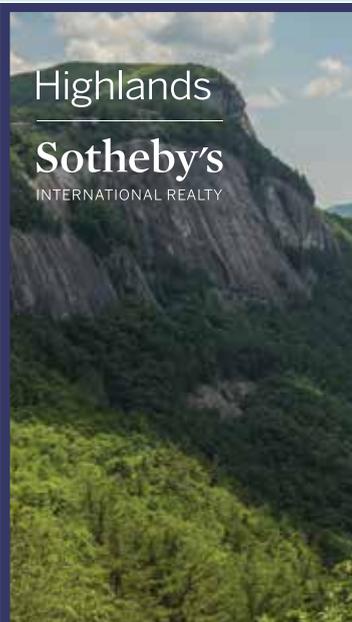
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