

Highlands Newspaper

Merry Christmas!

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Volume 20, Number 51

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Thurs., Dec. 21, 2023

Mayor encourages feedback and more

The Town Board wrapped up 2023 with its meeting on Dec. 14 which was held a week earlier than usual.

Mayor Pat Taylor opened the meeting with his report saying he

appreciated the feedback he's gotten from the business community regarding the board's and the administration's perceived attitude toward the business community.

He said after the New Year

he plans on having a forum with business members to discuss issues brought to light and encouraged people to keep the feedback coming to him via text, phone call

• See FEEDBACK page 11

H.A.N.D.S. is seeking donations for annual Christmas Dinner

H.A.N.D.S. (Highlands Area Nonprofit Donation Sharing), a local 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is seeking your support for its annual Christmas Dinner fundraiser. This special event, held at the Highlands Country Club, is a cherished tradition that brings the community together while raising funds for essential local nonprofits.

Since 2001, H.A.N.D.S. has raised over \$250,000 to support a wide range of organizations, including the Library, Fire Department, Food Pantry, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, R.E.A.C.H and more.

This year's proceeds will benefit three critical nonprofits dedicated to early childhood development and childcare in the

• See HANDS page 7



Clerk of Macon County Superior Court Shawna Lamb administered the Oath of Office for Highlands' newly elected commissioners.

- Photo by Jim Lewicki

New Town Board members were seated Dec. 14

At the December 14 Town Board meeting, the three newly elected Town Board members,

• See MEMBERS page 11

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Citizens demand apology from Commissioner Shearl

By Brittney Lofthouse

After Macon County Commissioner John Shearl called for the resignation of County Manager Derek Roland during the November board of commissioners meeting, citizens took to social media to share their disappointment in Shearl's unprofessional behavior.

With Shearl's claims littered with false information and incorrect numbers regarding county procedure and historical budget figures, citizens demanded an apology from Commissioner Shearl, who just completed his first year on the board.

Retired Macon County Sheriff Robert Holland, was one of many who signed up to speak during the public comment period at the December Commission meeting to share their stance on Shearl's uncalculated outbursts, hoping it would result in a public apology for Roland, who has spent more than a decade working for Macon County.

Despite the urging of citizens, Commissioner Shearl not only refused to offer an apology, he double-downed and reiterated his per-

sonal grievances with the county manager.

"Let me be clear that I'm not against any county employee, as the haters falsely claim," said Commissioner Shearl. "We all appreciate their work, the same as we appreciate those in the private sector. I am a retired firefighter, an emergency medical responder and a high school baseball coach. But none of us are special because of where we work. Again, I have stated I will always be grateful to county employees. If anyone says that I'm against employees, they're lying and causing division. However, I am against overstaffing. The taxpayers should not be paying for what is not needed. I fully support capital improvements that we can afford. There is a cost for everything and Macon County is forced to live within its means without burden to the taxpayer. The taxpayers are the source of income for Macon County and the county employees. Before we can allocate a single dime to any expenditure, we must first get it from the hardworking taxpayers who I

• See APOLOGY page 22

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

• HIC'S VIEW •

End of the year update

The Christmas season gives us time to slow down and reflect. I did just that after the December Town Board meeting. I realized that meeting marked the tenth anniversary of my first swearing-in as Mayor of Highlands. It continues every day to be a humble honor to serve as mayor.

I have tried over the years to communicate with Highlanders. Fifty-two weekly newspaper articles multiplied by ten equals 520 articles. The same goes for weekly radio shows. Steve Day and I were laughing, reminiscing about all those recordings last Friday.

In the last two years, I have created a personal website where I again try to keep folks updated. At AskMayorPat.com, there are now over 100 weekly updates and special report videos available on the website. Matthew Eberz works with me each week in producing the videos, whether it is an iPhone clip from my home or office or a production shoot at a Highlands location. I appreciate Matthew's support, as well as working with Kim Lewicki, Ryan Hatchett, Brian O'Shea, and Steve Day to keep the community informed.

I am aware that some may feel that my communications straddle a fine line between being informative for the community and be-



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

coming a spin exercise by Mayor Pat. Always feel free, like the press folks do, to keep me honest and forthcoming.

Now that we have completed this year's election, folks are asking me whether I will run for another term. My response is that I have two more years in this current third term. At this halfway point, I still have work to do before I make the decision whether or not to seek re-election. To paraphrase Robert Frost, I have miles to go before I decide.

In the meantime, I see several emerging projects that we can all work together to achieve. Exactly how they will come about remains to be determined.

Please drop by the lobby of the recreation center and look at the conceptual drawing of a new playground facility. It is a wonderful concept for providing children with a fantastic space for play and exploration. Other communities like Blowing Rock and Greenville have major playground spaces, and now it is time for Highlands to have one, too. I foresee a private/public partnership emerging this year to make this project a reality.

Also, I see a public and private coalition forming to build a new facility for an after-school program for children of working families. We have a critical need for childcare in Highlands, and this facility would meet one essential part of a total childcare program. I hope the town and county can partner with the Cashiers Boys and Girls Club to make this facility and program a reality. The Boys and Girls Club is the expert in delivering after-school and summer programs like the ones we need in Highlands.

As stated in my article last week, the plateau community needs to explore how the critical workforce housing shortage can be addressed. This problem is huge, and no one entity can solve the problem. It will require the community to work together.





Finally, town staff will be very busy this year implementing the major projects that were funded by the legislature. The Dog Mountain water project should get under construction late in 2024. The pre-clarifier tank project at the water plant and the Mirror Lake dredging projects will follow after all the design and planning requirements are met. Our staff is up to the task of moving these projects forward.

It could be a very interesting and exciting year, even beyond the impending elections in November.

Merry Christmas to you and your families, and a Happy New Year to Highlands.



• WEATHER •

Thu, 21-Dec	Fri, 22-Dec	Sat, 23-Dec	Sun, 24-Dec
			
55°F 32°F	51°F 29°F	52°F 36°F	54°F 38°F
Partly sunny and mild	Partly sunny	Times of sun and clouds	Variably cloudy and mild
RealFeel® High 59° Low: 30°	RealFeel® High 54° Low 35°	RealFeel® High 55° Low 35°	RealFeel® High: 55° Low 41°

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It's a Wonderful Life!

At this time of the year while we are celebrating the holidays with family and friends, it is worthwhile to reflect on our many blessings. Those of us who live on The Plateau may count the location that we call "home" as one of our deepest blessings. Listening to a podcast recently, a book was discussed called "Bowling Alone." It was published in 2000 on the thesis that healthy democracies depend on social connectedness called "social capital."

One of the central arguments of the book is that civic engagement and organizational involvement experienced marked declines during the second half of the twentieth century continuing into the twenty-first century. Church membership and attendance and philanthropic generosity continue to fall, according to the updated version of this book republished in 2020. According to the book, these declining situations deteriorate social trust in cities and communities which leads to alienation and unhappiness. Considering this theory caused me to compare our special spot on the planet to these trends across the United States. It is my opinion that our area is the opposite of the lack of social capital studied and documented by the author.

The increasing popularity of this area highlights that the Highlands/Cashiers Plateau is rich in social capital. Per the "Tax Exempt World" website there are 111 non-profits just in Highlands alone. Watching the Highlands Christmas parade this year illuminates the support of so many local citizens passionately supporting their favorite



Jody Lovell
Highlands and Cashiers
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charities. The many cultural activities in the area provide gathering places to socialize and befriend many diverse backgrounds represented in this community. The tapestry of involvement in this community establishes a golden glow of trustworthiness amongst neighbors on the Plateau. The volunteerism and financial support of these non-profit organizations is testament to the social empathy of our community.

Just as in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life" starring Jimmy Stewart in 1946, the Town of Bedford Falls rallied around their own. The Andy Griffith Show which ran 249 episodes in the 1960s was very similar to the social connectedness that we experience in this area where "everybody knows your name." Sitcoms such as Cheers, Friends and Seinfeld demonstrate that strong relationships are the foundation of happiness and joy across all communities. Not all communities have the benefit of social capital that we have in our community. Thus, this holiday season, I want to express my sincere gratitude for everyone that shares themselves and their lives with the residents of this beautiful area contributing to our deep well of social capital. Happy Holidays, dear friends!

• Jody and Wood Lovell own Highlands and Cashiers Sotheby's International Realty with three offices across the Plateau with over thirty of the top producing brokers in this area. For the last twenty-three years, they have successfully proven that they can represent you with all of your real estate needs. You can reach them at 828.526.4104.

'Community Coat Drive' is underway all over town

There are 12 locations to drop off coats, gloves and warm winter wear: 1st Presbyterian Church, the United Methodist Church, 1st Baptist Church, Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, First Bank, the Highlands Civic Center, the Performing Arts Center, Don Leon's

restaurant, Community Bible Church, and Dauntless Printers.

Winter wear can be dropped off Monday-Friday, 8a to 2p and Saturdays 9a to 1p.

Please donate work coats and coats that are new or gently worn.

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• HIGHLANDS DINING •

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• LETTERS •

The school board needs qualified thinkers not partisan robots

Dear Editor,

Based on comments and actions by the Macon County Commissioners since they took office, it is clear that the only reason the county commissioners want the school board to be partisan is they want a Republican school board that will be a rubber stamp for the actions the commissioners want to take regarding the school system.

The school board should NOT be partisan. The school board should be composed of independent and qualified thinkers and only concerned with doing what is best for the students of Macon County.

I agree 100% with the recent vote by the current school board that it should remain non-partisan.

David Christopher
Scaly Mountain

HFW is a 'positive' for Highlands

Dear Editor,

We read the recent letter-to-the editor expressing a negative view of our town's annual Highlands Food & Wine Festival, and we wanted to offer a different perspective – one that is an expression of gratitude for the positive impact the festival has on our community.

In its 7th year, this weekend-long festival has consistently provided a positive spark to the Town of Highlands. It has garnered national recognition, which in turn has bolstered retailers, increased occupancy and, most importantly, led to substantial contributions to local non-profit organizations and conservation initiatives.

We appreciate the Highlands Food & Wine Festival and its broader impact on the community, which extends well beyond the opportunity to entertain clients, friends and family in the town we cherish.

Sincerely,

Your Highlands Neighbors

Aubrey Agnew, The Highlands Hatter; Jack Austin*, David and Lori Bee, Highlands Vacation Rentals; David & Debi Bock*; David Bock Builders, Kyle & Erin Bryner, Blue Bike Café; Jay Calloway, Bardo; Leslie Cook, The Business Spot; Tricia Cox, Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Meadows Mountain Realty; Thomas Craig*, Highlands Dive; Kay Craig, The Ugly Dog Public House; Marjorie N. Deal*, The Laurel Magazine; Richard & Melissa Delany, OEI; Bill Edwards, Retired Banker; Pat Gleeson*, Christie's International Real Estate; Bryan Lewis, Highlands Smokehouse; Steve Mehder*, ABC Board; Marlene Osteen*, The Laurel Magazine; Steve Palmer*, Indigo Road Hospitality Group; Kiki Donikian and Clarissa Powell; Stubborn Seeds at Mill Creek; Rachel Price, The Secret Garden; Jason Reeves, Highlander Mountain House and The Ruffed Grouse Tavern, Mary Adair Trumbly*, Highlands Performing Arts Center, Hilary Wilkes* Highland Hiker

**Asterisk denotes Highlands Festivals, Inc. Board members*

...H.A.N.D.S. continued from page 1

Highlands area:

- Highlands Community Child Development Center (HCCDC) provides high-quality childcare and education for children ages eight weeks to five years. This Center started in the First Presbyterian Church basement before moving to its new building in 2005 and was the first and only year-round, state-licensed, 5-day per week, 10 hour per day childcare program in Highlands. In March 2023, HCCDC expanded to the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation to assist with the growing need for affordable and quality childcare on the plateau.

- The Gordon Center offers a comprehensive range of services for children ages one through five. All classes are held at the United Methodist Church.

- The Literacy and Learning Center promotes literacy and learning for children and adults through its tutoring programs and resource center. To assist with the needs of our local families that work at so many of the businesses on the mountain, LLC is adding a Pre-K Program to help with the ever growing need for quality childcare.

Through the enthusiasm of the community, the 2023 Christmas Day Dinner sold out in less than four hours! However, your donations to these childcare centers will make a direct impact on the lives of Highlands families.

Please consider making a donation to support this important cause. Your generosity will help us reach our fundraising goal and ensure that these vital nonprofits can continue their vital work. All donations go directly to these organizations.

Send a check payable to H.A.N.D.S., PO Box 2834, Highlands, NC 28741

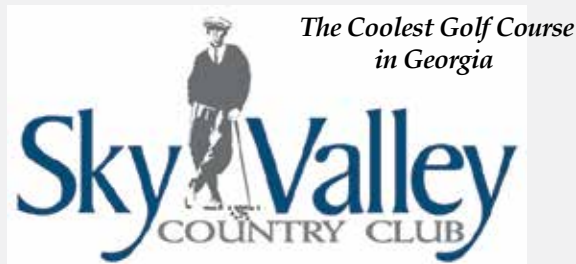
For those with reservations please bring your donation to the Highlands Country Club during the Christmas Dinner event.

Thank you for your support of H.A.N.D.S. and our community's nonprofit organizations. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of our children and families.

- Submitted



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• INK PENN •

Scenic Wales or Coastal Maine?

*"When I read a good book,
 it's like traveling the world without
 ever leaving my chair."*

That quote from Richard Peck perfectly fits this week's books, one set in Wales and the other on the coast of Maine.

Murder in the Valleys

by Pippa McCathie

This is my first Pippa McCathie mystery, and I am so glad I found it. I downloaded her boxset, and I'm looking forward to books 2 & 3 in the series. Fabia Havard and Matt Lambert are the leads, and I particularly like how McCathie allows their back stories to unfold slowly. You know that Fabia took a lengthy sick leave from the police department and has now retired, but something isn't quite right about the situation.

The whys and wherefores come in bits as the book progresses, as do the details about her relationship with Matt Lambert, a close colleague who is now a DCI. Meanwhile, Matt is investigating the murder of a young girl, a mystery that is well plotted.

Not only did the story keep me guessing, the descriptions of the countryside in Wales transported me across the pond. I could easily imagine the river, the mountains in the distance, the village, and the church. If you want to be engrossed in a mystery with well-developed characters and descriptions that bring the setting to life, this book's for you.

The Spy Coast

by Tess Gerritsen

You may recall Tess Gerritsen as the author of the Rizzoli & Isles mysteries, which were turned into a TNT series. I thoroughly enjoyed the show, but I never read the books. It's her medical thriller "Harvest" that sticks out in my mind. Now, the author has turned her attention to a spy thriller.

The seaside village of Purity, Maine is home to a group of government retirees, but don't expect needlepoint and knitting from this gang of former CIA operatives. Unlike the characters in the Thursday Murder Club mysteries, these retirees have no interest in chasing killers and solving crimes—until



Kathy Manos Penn

their past comes calling.

Maggie Bird, the main character, is happy raising her chickens and chasing off the occasional fox. Haunted by memories of her last mission and what it cost her, revisiting the career that took her around the globe is something she wants to avoid.

When a dead body shows up in her driveway, though, she is forced into action. Of course, the local police are called in to investigate and soon the state police join in too. And, of course, the locals are always one step behind the former spies.

The last thing they are going to do is share information with the police. Do they know who's responsible? No, but they have a few candidates in mind. Will Maggie go on the run? Not if she can help it. She and her friends, who've dubbed themselves "The Martini Club," employ their well-honed skills and call in favors from their old network. Identifying the puppet master will require all their combined skills. Not only must Maggie fend off questions from Jo Thibodeau, the local police chief, she's now involved in an international search.

The twists and turns in this thriller will keep you guessing, and you'll be glad to know it's labeled "The Martini Club Book I." A second book is already listed on Amazon, though it won't be published until 2025. Meanwhile, Book I has been optioned by Amazon Studios for a television series.

I visited Bangkok, Istanbul, and London in this book, and I can't wait to see where the next one will take me. Until then, I may return to the lush green scenery of Wales in the Pippa McCathie series. But first, I need to tear myself away from the Australian outback in the latest book I'm reading. Stay tuned. I'm sure I'll write about that one soon.

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

Tis the Season...

*...to be thankful, and we're thankful for you!
Wishing you a joyful holiday season filled with love and laughter.*



Pat Allen
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• BUSINESS / ORGANIZATION NEWS •

Gary named Interim Executive Director of Highlands Biological Foundation

The Highlands Biological Foundation (HBF) is pleased to announce the appointment of Winter Gary as its Interim Executive Director. With four years of full-time dedication to HBF, Gary has not only become an integral

part of the team but has played a pivotal role in shaping the Foundation's growth and success.

Armed with Bachelor of Science Degrees in Environmental Science and Psychology, she first encountered HBF through a trans-

formative semester in UNC-Chapel Hill's Highlands Field Site program where she studied in residence at the Highlands Biological Station (a multi-campus center of WCU), conducting environmental research and learning about the impact hu-

mans have on the southern Appalachian region.

In 2019, Gary returned to Highlands as a Naturalist at the Highlands Nature Center, immersing herself in educational programming and sharing our region's natural wonders with the community. Following her season, she joined HBF part-time, working alongside then-Executive Director, Charlotte Muir, and transitioning to full-time in January 2020.

"It feels like a full circle moment - coming to the Station as a student and now stepping into a guiding role for the Foundation," Gary expressed. "Through my different positions, I've seen how our programming and outreach efforts spark curiosity and appreciation for the natural world across generations."

HBF's Board President, John Mitchener, feels confident that Gary's appointment as Interim Executive Director will ensure a seamless continuation of HBF's work through the or-



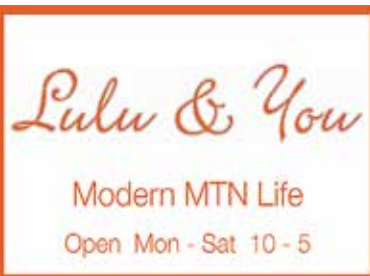
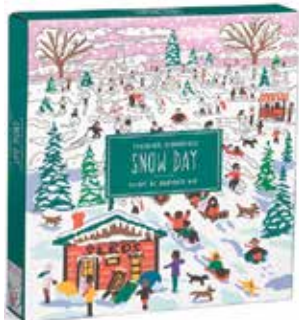
Winter Gary

ganization's leadership transition. "The Foundation plays a dual role, supporting individuals' love for the area through educational programs while actively funding research projects that deepen our understanding of the region's natural wonders and the importance

of their preservation. Winter's understanding of this role and HBF's mission overall positions us for continued growth and impact," stated Mitchener.

Throughout her tenure, Gary has been a driving force behind HBF's member and community communications, and she has played a pivotal role in fundraising initiatives and program services. She often consults other regional nonprofits to assist them in their missions as well.

To learn more about HBF's work and how you can become involved, visit highlandsbiological.org/foundation.



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...MEMBERS continued from page 1

John Dotson, Brian Stiehler, and Jeff Weller were sworn into office by MC Clerk of Superior Court Shawna Lamb.

Of Highlands 1,013 registered voters, only 420 turned out to vote with more than half of those registered to vote not casting a ballot.

Incumbent Commissioner Brian Stiehler got the highest number of votes at 285 and now embarks on his fourth, 4-year term. On election day, 97 people voted for him, 185 voted early and 3 voted absentee.

Next up was newcomer Jeff Weller who got 255 votes - 103 cast on election day, 149 early voters and 3 voted absentee.

Third up, was incumbent John "Buz" Dotson who got 235 votes and now embarks on his fifth, 4-year term. On election day 69 people voted for him, 163 voted early and 3 voted absentee.

When asked for comments, Commissioner Dotson simply said, "Merry Christmas!"

Commissioner Stiehler said he always looks forward to the December meeting because Commissioner Dotson comes dressed for the season in his red jacket, festive tie and socks.

Commissioner Weller said he was excited to be on the board. "I look forward to working with everyone," he said.

Prior to the swearing in, Mayor Pat Taylor presented out-



Mayor Pat Taylor presented Commissioner Hehn with a plaque of appreciation.

- Photo by Kim Lewicki

going Commissioner Marc Hehn with a plaque of appreciation for his time on the board.

Hehn thanked the mayor and the board and "the amazing employees who accomplish so much with the tools they have to work with."

He came to the board with the Highlands-Cashiers Hospital in his sights and said he was disappointed that the issue of hospital employee housing didn't become a reality.

"Hospital housing is needed.

We were able to recruit four doctors but two moved away due to the lack of housing," he said. "But I think the town has a very bright future."

In January the regular Work-session and Town Board meetings will resume - that being the third Thursday of each month with the worksession at 6 p.m. and the Town Board meeting beginning at 7 p.m.

- Kim Lewicki

...FEEDBACK continued from page 1

or email.

With winter weather approaching he reminded people not to call 9-1-1 about power outages, but to call Town Hall.

During Town Manager Josh Ward's report he said Town Hall will be closed Dec. 25 and Dec. 26 and said there won't be trash pickup on Christmas Day.

He also gave a heartfelt thank you to Art and Angela Williams who donated \$30,000 for the pool heaters which needed to be replaced.

The 10-year-old heater was only heating the pool to 72 degrees. Two new heaters were purchased for \$39,000 and now

the pool water is where it's supposed to be - at 82 degrees. The remaining \$9,000 was taken from the pool fund.

A public hearing to change verbiage in the UDO regarding Exterior Commercial Lighting was held with little input from the audience. However, Highlands Newspaper co-owner Jim Lewicki, who is out the early hours every Thursday AM said for safety reasons the string lights should be allowed.

"I am constantly looking over my shoulder for bears and people who like to hang out in dark spaces," he said.

Regardless, the amendment

to the UDO was passed 4-1 with Commissioner Hehn voting against the change.

The purpose of the Exterior Commercial Lighting section of the UDO is to provide direction in controlling exterior lighting to enhance the areas being lit and not adversely affect motorists, pedestrians, and adjacent properties.

The changes to the ordinance deal with "string lighting" which can only be used as accent lights for dining areas like a deck, pavilion, or porch, and private property walkways. They may not be located on or over publicly

• See FEEDBACK page 15

A festive poster for the Highlands Annual Christmas Day Dinner. It features a stylized Christmas tree made of colorful ornaments and gifts. The text reads: "Highlands Annual Christmas Day Dinner Charity fundraiser to benefit: Literacy and Learning Center of Highlands, The HCCDC, and The Gordon Center. All donations go directly to these organizations. Please consider making a donation to support this important cause. Your generosity will help us reach our fundraising goal and ensure that these vital nonprofits can continue their vital work. Donations can be made to: H.A.N.D.S. Highlands Area Nonprofit Donation Sharing PO Box 2834 Highlands, NC 28741."

A photograph of a woman wearing a red hat and a red top, standing in front of a store. The text reads: "Happy Holidays from all of us at Diva's on Main". Below the photo is a sign for "DIVA'S ON MAIN" with the address "24 E. MAIN ST. FRANKLIN, NC 28836" and phone number "828.369.7300". The sign also lists "BOUTIQUE - JEWELRY - ACCESSORIES" and "TUXEDOS & GOWNS". A sign in the background says "MENS AREA".

Holiday Shopping in on in Highlands!

WE HAVE YOUR HOLIDAYS COVERED

- ✓ Gifts
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We will be open Christmas Eve, Sun., Dec. 24

Nancy's & *The Exchange*
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2060 Dillard Road, Highlands, NC, 2 miles South of Main Street
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THE MOLLY GRACE



Come dress yourself
and your home for
the holidays
The Molly Grace!

(Across from Town Hall)
(828) 526-8390
207 N 4th St., Highlands

johnnie-O



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Season
Christmas
SALE!**



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pj harlow
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panky**



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- Gadgets
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450 Main St.
Highlands

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SALE is on
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Fall clothing.
Get your holiday
shopping done
and save
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A Highlands tradition since 1940
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Sunday 12-5

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- Diba
- Blowfish
- Matisse



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(in The Galax Theatre
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Hattitude adjusted!**



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221 N. 4th St.
(Across from Town Hall)

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AndreaGabbard@gmail.com

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• BIZ/ORG NEWS •

Waite of Boys & Girls Club wins award

The Boys and Girls Club of the Plateau is proud to announce that their CEO, Carmen Waite, has been awarded the Richard Ullom CEO Rookie of the Year award. This honorable award was established in 1995 to recognize the outstanding new CEO in the SE region for their service and leadership.

Carmen was chosen as she is a visionary with a strong business acumen and, in a short time, has shown impressive results. She has been a significant contributor to the club's success by championing growth, leading to an unbelievable 300% increase in average daily attendance. She has also focused on actualizing the strategic



Carmen Waite

plan to ensure the continued sustainability of the organization in the future.

With a passionate focus on teens, she oversaw the completion and opening of a new building in 2023, and in 2024, will open a new standalone teen center and a second facility in Highlands. Carmen is a mentor to both the children and the staff, and she has shown an ability to build morale and capacity across all levels of the club. As a result of her efforts, not only are more youth being served, but their

club experience has been greatly enhanced. Congratulations to Carmen Waite for a job well done!

Mountain Findings donates to combat food insecurity

Community partner Mountain Findings has extended a significant donation to the Highlands Emergency Council (EC) as a part of their social impact initiative.

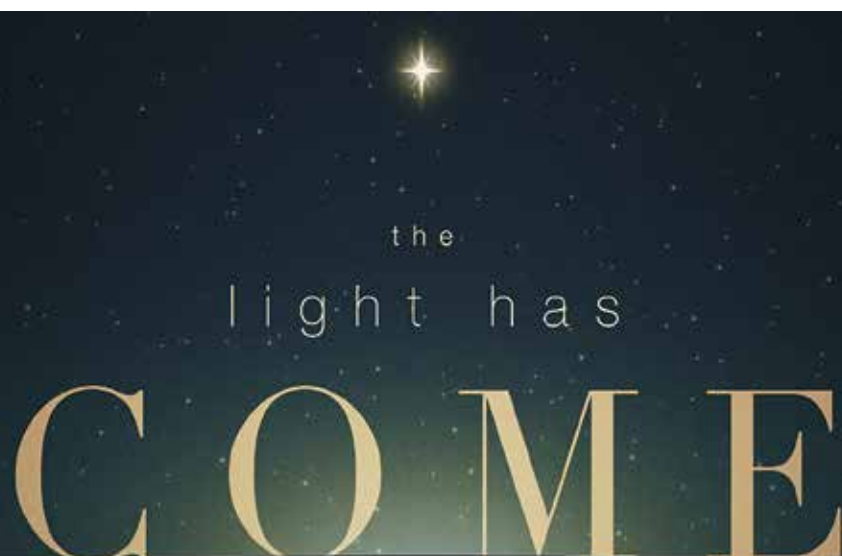
The donation facilitated the purchase of a new food storage refrigeration unit for EC, allowing the council to provide fresh, nutritious food boxes to the region's food-disadvantaged population. The funds also went toward upgrading several windows in the EC building to high-efficiency models, making for a safer, more sustainable environment for both EC volunteers and beneficiaries.

Highlands Emergency Council's Vice President, Marie Johnson, expressed her gratitude, highlighting how such private donations stretch federal, state, and local funds, thereby increasing their ability to serve the community. Johnson along with 14 other volunteers, oversees the monthly distribution of food boxes to nearly 400 families. Additionally, the council is committed to serving those in need beyond food support by also providing heating fuel, furniture, housewares, and clothing.

Mountain Findings' President, Jill Helmer, echoed Johnson's sentiments. She affirmed the empowering effect of assisting others, stressing that their organization prioritizes projects with significant social impact – specifically ones targeting human welfare. Helmer, further expresses, "that working alongside Highlands Emergency Council reflects a conscious, systemic, and sustainable approach to local community needs."

This act is representative of the strategic mission to address disparities within the healthcare field. By improving access to nutritious meals, both organizations are aiming to positively influence several health factors including improved activity levels, maternal health, immune system function, and the reduction of non-communicable diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

To learn more about the ongoing efforts and initiatives of Mountain Findings, please visit their website at www.Mountain-Findings.org.



**CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
5:00 PM DECEMBER 24TH**

**COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH
3645 CASHIERS RD HIGHLANDS NC 28741**

• BIZ/ORG NEWS •



Pictured above are some students from the GCC Pre-School Class.

Merry Christmas from the Gordon Center for Children at HUMC

By Allison Tate

The Gordon Center for Children, Inc. would like to thank its major benefactors for the 2023-2024 academic year: the A.L. Williams Family Foundation, Bel Canto Recital, Mike and Becki Bryson, Ryan and Kayla Bryson, Matthew Chrestman Carpentry, HANDS (Highlands Area Non-Profit Donation Sharing), Highlands Chamber of Commerce, Highlands Community Fund (Community Foundation of WNC), Highlands Decorating Center, Highlands United Methodist Church, Macon County Community Foundation (North Carolina Community Foundation), Macon County Community Funding Pool (Macon County


Board of Commissioners), Heath Massey and John Mitchener, Diane and Ray McPhail, Mountain Findings, the Rotary Club of Highlands, Commissioner Brian Stiehler, and Commissioner-Elect Jeffrey Weller. The grants and donations provided through these benefactors enable the Gordon Center for Children to provide academic scholarships, support extension activities such as music, art and exercise classes, purchase playground equipment, furniture, books and curriculum supplies, support a free after school program for elementary students, and provide additional support to ensure a healthy and safe environment for our children, teachers, and staff. The GCC would also

like to thank other organizations in the Highlands community who help support our programs: the clergy and staff at HUMC, the Hudson Library, the Highlands Biological Station, the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, the Highlands Rec Park, and the Bascom Art Center. Thank you, also, to the Mountain Garden Club for scholarships in the continuation of teachers' education.

The Gordon Center for Children, Inc. is a non-profit organization, an outreach of the Highlands United Methodist Church, oversees operation of a half day preschool program, a full-day child care center, and a free after school program through the gracious hospitality of HUMC. Many individuals within the HUMC family and the Highlands-Cashiers plateau support our organization through monetary donations, attending fundraisers, volunteering time, and offering words of encouragement and prayers. Highlands is a special place that is filled with generous and gifted organizations that help the young children in our community to flourish. It is a great honor for the Gordon Center for Children to be able to continue the legacy Wilma Gordon began 40 years ago of providing a caring, nurturing place to educate young children in Highlands.

Thank you for your support in the different ways that have been displayed. Each act of support is greatly appreciated! For more information or to make a tax-deductible donation, contact the Gordon Center for Children: gordoncenterforchildren@yahoo.com; (828) 526-5084; or PO Box 1959 Highlands, NC 28741.

- Kim Lewicki



**LUTHERAN
CHURCH**
OF THE HOLY FAMILY

*Christmas Eve
Service*
December 24 at 10:30 a.m.

2152 DILLARD RD, HIGHLANDS
Come and fellowship with us!

*Join us in celebrating the birth
of our Savior at the
Highlands United Methodist Church*

All services are in the Sanctuary

**Family-oriented Christmas Eve
Candlelight Service**
5pm
Christmas Eve Eucharist Service
(approx. 30 min.)
7pm
Lessons and Carols
(approx. 30 min.)
9pm
Midnight Eucharist
11:45pm
(approx. 15-20 min.)

Pastors Randy Lucas and Christine Murphy
315 Main Street • 828-526-3376 • highlandsumc@icloud.com

...FEEDBACK continued from page 11

owned property.

In addition, the string lights must be turned off at the close of business each night.

With Commissioner Jeff Weller vacating the Planning Board, and Wendall Willard also vacating his seat, a discussion

was had concerning candidates for both the Planning Board and the Zoning Board which also has a vacancy.

Town Attorney Bob Hagemann walked commissioners through a nomination scenario where candidates with three or

more votes would be considered and voted on by the board.

Anyone interested in applying for a seat on the Planning or Zoning Board should pick up an application at Town Hall.

• HIGHLANDS EVENTS •

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CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY SCHEDULE:

• The Rec Dept will be closed Monday, Dec. 25th for Christmas Day. The Pool will be closed Sunday, Dec. 24th and Tuesday, Dec. 26th.

NEW POOL SCHEDULE

• Lap Swim: Mon.-Fri., 6-9:45a, and Sat., 10a-11p - 6 lanes. Water Aerobics: 18 yrs plus, Mon.-Fri. 10-11am with Karen Chambers. Adult Swim: 18 years old+, Mon.-Thurs 11a-1:30p; Public Swim Mon. thru Thurs. 3:30-7p; Sat. 11a-6p and Sun. 1-6p. For info, call 828-526-1595.

ICE RINK SCHEDULE

• Thursdays 3:30-8p; Fridays 3:30-10p and Saturday's 1-10p; Sundays 1-5p. Also, Sun., Dec. 24, 1-5p; Tues. Dec. 26,

Wed., Dec. 27, Mon. Jan. 1, Wed., Jan 3 -- 1-8p..

Mon.-Fri.

• Nantahala Tennis plays at the Highlands Rec Park 9a-1p.

Mon-Wed, Fri-Sun

• Aerobics with Tina Rogers 8-9am at the Rec Park.

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

• Alcoholics Anonymous: "Open Meetings" are for anyone who thinks they may have a drinking problem or for anyone interested in the A.A. program of recovery. Highlands Mountain View Group holds open meetings in Highlands at the First Presbyterian Church, 471 Main St., on Monday at 5:30 PM and Wednesday and Friday at noon. The Cashiers Valley Group holds open meetings at the Albert Carlton Cashiers Commu-

nity Library Monday at 8:30 AM, Tuesday at 7 PM, Friday and Sunday at 5 PM, and Saturday at 9 AM. For more information, please visit www.aawnc80.org or to speak with a member of AA 24/7 at 828-349-4357

Second Mondays

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

• Indivisible Highlands from 5:15-6:15pm at the Hudson Library Meeting Room.

2nd Tuesdays

• Highlands Writers Group meets on alternate Tuesday afternoons at 3pm. Writers still uncomfortable with in-person gatherings may participate via Zoom meetings For more information contact Bud Katz at either 828-526-3190 or at budandlynn@me.com

Tuesdays

• Strength Training at the Rec Park 8:15-9:15 am. Aim for strong, lean muscles using light weights, body weight, and high repetition to shape and tone. Learn proper form and range of motion to safely target all muscle groups for a metabolic boost and feel great.

• At Hudson Library, Nature Kids on selected Tuesday mornings, For more info call the Hudson Library at 828-526-3031

• At Wayfarers Chapel, Workshop for Writers – Tuesdays from 5-6:30 PM. Facilitated by Sam Renken, this group has a simple mission: to foster and provide consistent community for local writers thereby giving writers of all ages and genres the opportunity to write, read, revise, and present their work to the group.

• ESL classes are held at the Presbyterian Church in Highlands from 5:30-6:30pm. No registration required – just show up and participate. Questions? call 828-526 – 0863 or email info@maconncliteracy.org

Wednesdays

• Hudson Library, in partnership with VAYA Health, is hosting an edu-



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Upstairs and Across the
Walkway at Falls on Main
Highlands



Join us for our worship series "Engaging Advent" at

First Presbyterian Church of Highlands

Sunday, December 17	11:00am	Sunday Celebration: <i>We Prepare</i>
Thursday, December 21	12:00pm	Service of Light: <i>We Remember</i>
Sunday, December 24	11:00am	Sunday Celebration: <i>We Hope</i>
	4:30pm	Harp Prelude by Jillionna Plemmons
	5:00pm	Christmas Eve Service with Candlelight: <i>We Rejoice</i>

All are welcome!

Todos son bienvenidos!

471 Main Street

Highlands, North Carolina

828.526.3175

www.fpchighlands.org

• HIGHLANDS EVENTS •

cational series on adult mental health topics, held on the first Wednesday of each month at 11 AM. This series is aimed particularly at older adults and will focus on mental health topics of particular interest to them, but all ages are welcome to attend. The November 1 program is Dementia: A Deeper Understanding. Reservations are required for this free event. To register, stop by the library or call 828-526-3031.

Wed. thru Nov. 22

- The Bascom: A Center for the Visual Arts Invites You to "Wine Wednesdays" – A New Holiday Tradition. The Bascom: A Center for the Visual Arts is delighted to introduce "Wine Wednesdays." This festive holiday offering will occur each Wednesday leading up to Thanksgiving, from 3:30 to 5 pm. "Wine Wednesdays" offer a unique opportunity for visitors to explore The Shop and Studio Barn, all while enjoying a glass of wine and browsing the work of local and regional artists.

1st Wednesdays

- Hudson Library, in partnership with VAYA Health, is hosting an educational series on adult mental health topics, held on the first Wednesday of each month at 11 AM. This series is aimed particularly at older adults and will focus on mental health topics of particular interest to them, but all ages are welcome to attend.

2nd & 4th Wed.

Digital Navigators will be at the Hudson Library at 1PM - 3PM of each month through Thanksgiving to help patrons with their tech needs. Bring a smartphone, laptop, or other digital device to receive free assistance and support. No appointments are required - all are welcome.

Wednesdays

- Hudson Library, in partnership with VAYA Health, is hosting an educational series on adult mental health topics, held on the first Wednesday of each month at 11 AM. This series is aimed particularly at older adults and will focus on mental health topics of particular interest to them, but all ages are welcome to attend.

Mon-Fri

- Water Aerobics at the Rec Pool.

18 years plus 10-11 am. Contact the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more information.

- Pickle Ball inside and outside at the Rec Park. 10am-1pm, everyone is welcome so come out and enjoy a game of Pickle Ball.

Mon., Tues., Thurs.

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

- Exercise Class with Michelle Lane at the Rec Park at 5:30. A combination class with different types of exercise. Contact the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more information

Thursdays

- Kickboxing 8:15-9:15 am. at the Rec Park. An exhilarating and fun mix of martial arts for a calorie-burning workout. Learn the proper form and technique to execute jabs, hooks, uppercuts, and front and side roundhouse kicks in a non-contact setting. No martial arts background necessary. Contact the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more info.

- At Hudson Library, Family Storytime continues throughout the year on Thursday mornings at 10:40 AM.

- At Hudson Library, Kids Zone at 3:30 pm with a wide variety of STEAM, nature, and craft activities. For more information about any of these summer activities, contact Hudson Library at 828-526-3031.

2nd Saturdays

- The Western North Carolina Woodturners Club meets in Highlands at The Bascom at 10 a.m. thru Nov.

3rd Saturdays

- The American Legion Post 370 meets at the First Methodist Church at 315 Main St. in their community room/909 chapel. We serve breakfast at 9 AM and hold our monthly meeting at 10 AM. We invite ALL veterans to attend - email ncpost370@gmail.com for more information or just join us at 9 AM on the 3rd Saturday of the month.

Sundays

- At Wayfarers Chapel, Sunday Service: 10AM Sunday Morning. Stick around for visitation and coffee hour immediately after service. (Coffee hour is replaced by potluck dinner the 1st Sunday of each month).

Through March 3

- Ice Skating in the Park is opening soon. Thursdays 3:30-8p; Fridays 3:30-10p; Saturdays 1-10p; Sundays 1-5p. \$5 with or without skates.

Through Dec. 31

- The Artistic Work of John Robert Mack at the Macon County Library in Franklin on Siler Road..

Through Dec. 24

- "Home of the Holidays" at Mountain Theatre Company now in residence at the Performing Arts Center on Chestnut Street. Tickets go to www.mountaintheatre.com

Fri., Jan. 19

- Senior Lunch at noon in the Meeting Room in the Highlands Civic Center at the Rec Park.

CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION

ADVENT III

Sunday, December 17 at 10:30am
Annual Festival of Lessons and Carols

ADVENT IV

Sunday, December 24 at 10am
Holy Eucharist - Historic Chapel

CHRISTMAS EVE

Sunday, December 24 at 4pm & 6pm Holy Eucharist with Choir

CHRISTMAS DAY

Monday, December 25 at 10am
Holy Eucharist - Historic Chapel

520 Main Street, Highlands,
NC incarnationwnc.org



• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •



Can the Pope change Catholic teaching?

Fr. Jason Barone
Our Lady of the Mountains
Catholic Church

In the last several months, the Catholic Church has had its fair share of news coverage. In October, there was an important month-long meeting called the Synod of Synodality in which a number of controversial theological issues were discussed. Other newsworthy events also surrounded the synod: as a group of cardinals submitted official questions (or dubia) to the pope that were perceived as challenging the pope's agenda; teachings on same-sex blessings and the Church's governmental structure seemed to change through ambiguous yet suggestive language (what has been dubbed "weaponized ambiguity"); high-ranking cardinals vociferously and directly challenged perceived changes to the faith; and finally the pope sacked Bishop Strickland of Texas (without due process and against canon law) and literally evicted him from his Roman apartment and cut off the salary of the American Cardinal Burke.

The central question behind all of these recent events is the authority of the pope. Can he simply ignore Church law in his dealings with bishops? Or even more important: does he possess the authority to change Catholic teaching? This latter question is especially confusing for both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Misconceptions abound. With this column, I do not intend to provoke theological debate, but simply to present how Catholics traditionally understood papal authority and therefore how we may begin to understand current events.

We understand papal authority simply as the authority that Jesus gave to Peter in giving him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and the power to bind and loose, which we consider legislative power (see Mt 16:16). We believe that authority was handed on to his successors, the bishops of Rome, as explicitly articulated by Saint Irenaeus circa 190 AD (Adversus Haereses 3,3,2).

However, we do not believe this to be unfettered power, but more so like a final court of appeals to settle theological or administrative disputes. Peter was given this authority to shepherd the flock, not to change what Christ taught. "Confirm the brethren in the faith," the Lord admonishes Peter (see Lk 22:32). We see this example in Acts of the Apostles Chapter 15 at the Council of Jerusalem in which Peter gives the definitive clarifying teaching on the unnecessary of circumcision, which had been hotly disputed.

One other key distinction must not be overlooked: doctrine versus discipline. Peter settled the doctrinal teaching on circumcision, but James gave disciplinary measures for the uncircumcised. The key difference is that doctrine does not change whereas discipline can change based on concrete situations and prudential needs.

• See SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING page 19

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

BLUE VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Oliver Rice. Pastor (828) 421-1315

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

CHAPEL OF THE SKY

Sky Valley, GA • 706-746-2999

Sundays: 10 a.m. Worship; Holy Communion 1st & 3rd Sundays

CHRIST ANGLICAN CHURCH

Rev'd Dr. Michael Matlock, Rector

464 Hwy 64E. Cashiers. NC 28717

CAC@christanglicancashiers.org & 828-743-1701

Sundays: 9:30 am Adult Christian Formation;

10:30 am Holy Eucharist Worship

Wednesdays: 6 pm Bible Study, Prayer, Potluck

Thursdays: 10 am Healing Eucharist

CHRIST CHURCH OF THE VALLEY. CASHIERS

Pastor Brent Metcalf • 743-5470

www.cashiers.church

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: Service 10:45am, Children's 10:30am

Wednesdays: Youth 5:30-7pm; Women's Bible Study: Mondays

4:30pm, Tuesdays 10am; Men's Bible Study: Wednesdays &

Thursdays 7am @ Zookeeper Bistro

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. VV. Bentley Manning, Rector • 526-2968

5th and Main streets • www.incarnationwnc.org

Sunday: Rite I, spoken, 8 am in Chapel, Rite II with Choir 10:30

am in Sanctuary, Wed: Healing Eucharist 12 pm in Chapel, Morn-

ing Prayer: Mon-Thurs 8:30 am in Chapel

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; Women's 10:30 am

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Emily Wilmarth, pastor

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

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Dec. 12. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a summons/citation, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or those of public officials have been used.

Dec. 12

• At noon, officers received a report of someone swindling a person under false pretenses.

Dec. 13

• At 3:10 p.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident on Main Street near 2nd Street.

Dec. 15

• At 11:03 a.m., the theft of artwork valued at \$6,000 from an art gallery on N. 4th Street was reported

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Dec. 12.

Dec. 12

• At 7:32 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a gas leak at the Hospital.

Dec. 13

• At 6:45 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a possible structure fire on Dendy Orchard Road but nothing was found.

Dec. 14

• At 2:19 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a location on US 64 west.

• At 6:29 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Country Club Dr.

Dec. 16

• At 4:34 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a loca-

tion on Skyline Lodge Road.

• At 6:31 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Hicks Road.

Dec. 17

• At 7:24 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Walhalla Road.

Dec. 18

• At 6:13 a.m., the dept. responded to a call of a fire on power pole on Berrett Lane.

• At 11:28 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Homer Potts Road.

• At 8:19 p.m., the dept. provided traffic control on the Franklin Road where a tree and power lines were down.

• At 10:06 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on the Walhalla Road.



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Christmas Day Mass

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...SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING continued from page 18

So, the successor of Peter has the authority to change discipline, but not doctrine. He can change how many hours are required for fasting before receiving Communion, but he cannot change the dogmatic teachings on the Eucharist.

At the first Vatican Council in the mid 19th century, while papal infallibility was reaffirmed and given definitive clarity, its limits were also circumscribed: "For

the Holy Spirit was promised to the successors of Peter not so that they might, by his revelation, make known some new doctrine, but that, by his assistance, they might religiously guard and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of faith transmitted by the apostles" (Pastor Aeternus, 4).

In other words, the pope is absolutely restricted by scripture and apostolic tradition. Any attempt to change either is impos-

sible and damning. What would happen should a pope attempt to do this? Are we seeing this now? These are the extremely difficult questions currently distressing Catholics. Only time will tell. We can have absolute confidence, however, that the faith that Jesus deposited to the Apostles absolutely cannot be changed since they are from God.

• BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NEWS •



President Dave O'Harra, Executive Director Melanie Jones and host Jerry Moore.

Rotary hears about Blue Ridge Dental Clinic

At the meeting held on December 12, the Rotary Club of Highlands had the pleasure of hearing from the Executive Director of Blue Ridge Dental Clinic, Melanie Jones. Rotarian Jerry Moore was host. Melanie spoke of the clinic's amazing statistics over the past year. Blue Ridge Dental services 5 counties in Western North Carolina. Reaching over 700 patients with 6000 procedures completed. These services are provided by 1 full-time dentist on staff and 20 volunteer dentist pitching in. Melanie was also presented a charitable donation from the club for the Blue Ridge Dental Clinic.

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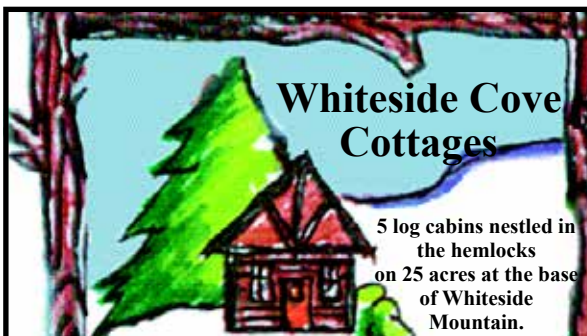
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...CLASSIFIED continued from page 21

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...APOLOGY continued from page 1

directly represent."

Commissioner Shearl then went on to imply that Macon County has been reckless with taxpayer funding placing the responsibility on Roland.

"Like many in this great county, I'm a lifelong conservative Republican, believing in God, family, country, and freedom," said Shearl. "I will always fight for limited government, less taxes and more freedom. History has taught us the bigger the government equals less freedom."

Commissioner Shearl directly addressed Retired Sheriff Robert Holland, claiming that the media reported he asked for Roland's resignation over ARPA funding saying that is not why he asked Roland to resign.

Despite pointing the finger at the media - a review of local media sources proved that no media reported ARPA funding as being the reason for Shearl's outburst in November.

From Highlands Newspaper: "Shearl then shifted his focus to accusing Roland of overseeing a \$25 million increase in the county's budget over eight budget cycles. With Roland's denial and the lack of documentation from Shearl, the claim was refuted by county records.

"I have looked at eight budget cycles since you have been here and the budget has increased \$25 million and the only thing taxpayers have gained by this \$25 million in the budget is higher salaries and a larger government. That is what we have gained and our county is falling apart," Shearl said.

"Roland disagreed and said, 'Maybe in your eyes, he said. "I think we have a pretty good county.

"Shearl then claimed that in a private meeting he had with Roland the county manager said county departments were 50% overstaffed ... to which Roland immediately interjected adamantly denying the claim, at which point Shearl called for Roland to resign from his position.

"I didn't say that, John, said Roland.

"Derek, I am going to tell you something," said Shearl. "You have called me a liar four times in open

session, so tonight, I ask for your resignation."

From the Smoky Mountain News: "From there, the discussion between Shearl and Roland got personal with Shearl claiming that Roland had previously told him the county was 50% over-staffed, which Roland denied.

"You have called me a liar four times in open session, so tonight, I ask for your resignation," said Shearl.

The Franklin Press: "Shearl said Roland had stated in a meeting that the county was 50% over-staffed, a claim that Roland scoffed at.

"I'll tell you what, you called me a liar four times in open session, so tonight, I ask for your resignation," Shearl told Roland to gasps from the audience, and an audience member called Shearl a liar."

Commissioner Shearl did acknowledge that he "misspoke" during the November board meeting and was incorrect in saying that the county's budget had increased by \$25 million over the previous eight years under Roland's management.

However, rather than offering an apology or legitimate clarification of his statements, he again blamed the media and claimed they should have reported on background information and issues they weren't privy to.

"As usual, the media missed the whole point that the taxpayers in Macon County have gotten larger government and bigger salaries at the taxpayers' expense," Shearl falsely claimed. "Certain media outlets and other groups stir controversy by twisting the narrative instead of reporting on the bigger picture. The spin can be put on any topic when information is purposely left out because some journalists have a history of making judgments on something without having a clue, what had transpired behind the scenes to cause the friction in the first place."

Allocating the remainder of ARPA funds which were provided from the federal government as part of the COVID19 pandemic did stick in Shearl's craw and was discussed at the November meet-

ing but wasn't the reason he called for Roland's resignation.

The original October 2022 expenditure of ARPA funds was prior to Shearl being elected to the board of commissioners and based on the limited approved uses of the roughly \$7 million, premium pay was the best possible expenditure method. The funding was approved to be retroactively given to all county employees who worked during the COVID19 pandemic and amounted to a \$2 an hour bonus - or \$80 a week for a 40-hr a week employee.

After the pandemic was declared over, Roland had to update the county's policy regarding spending the ARPA funding to remain compliant with the law. Roland presented the updated language to the board of commissioners, which at that point included Commissioner Shearl. That's when Commissioner Shearl spoke out against providing the previously approved funds to county employees. Shearl wanted to take the already approved bonuses away from county employees and use the remaining \$1.8 million for other county needs such as one-time expenditures for infrastructure improvements - something not directly allowable under the federal guidelines. Certain projects could be considered under the allowable Revenue Replacement category of funding, however Commissioner Shearl did not believe that category of funding was legally allowed.

Despite admitting he provided false information during the November meeting, which led to the confrontation with the county manager, and despite citizens asking for a public apology, Shearl finished his prepared speech by saying there will likely continue to be conflict on the board.

"You might love me, and you might hate me, but I will always represent the taxpayers first and foremost, which is the task that this board all shares in common. If representing the taxpayers and being good stewards of the county's assets by challenging the growth of government is not our common goal, then there will obviously be division on this board."

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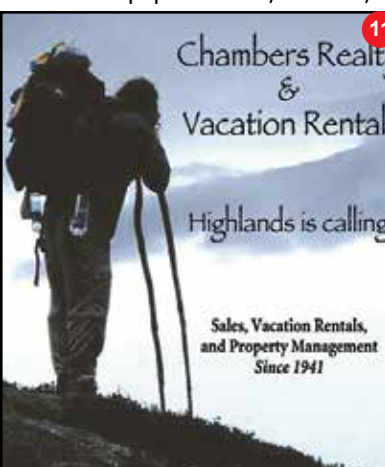
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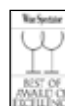
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