

Highlands Newspaper

Happy Valentines Day!

FREE Every Thursday

Volume 20, Number 6 Real-Time News, Weather & WebCams: HighlandsInfo.com Thurs., Feb. 9, 2023

Two organizations set template for long-term preservation in Highlands

When the “Pennies for Preservation” campaign in St. Simon’s, GA - which was relayed by Mayor Pat Taylor in his Feb. 2 “Mayor

on Duty” column - is replicated in some form here in Highlands, it will be on the heels of two organizations who have been running

with this grassroots idea for a long time.

Richard and Melissa Delany
 • See **PRESERVATION** page 16

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Chinese spy balloon causes stir near and far

Congressman Edwards (11th), Senator Corbin (50th), and Representative Gillespie (120th) weigh in

By Brittney Lofthouse and Brian O'Shea

down on February 4.

People in Macon and Jackson counties had eyes and cameras on the sky as a Chinese spy balloon floated across the 11th, 50th and 120th districts on its way to the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of South Carolina where it was shot

“This afternoon, at the direction of President Biden, U.S. fighter aircraft assigned to U.S. Northern Command successfully brought down the high-altitude surveillance balloon launched by and belonging to the People’s

• See **BALLOON** page 16

Public shares frustration over book displays at library

By Brittney Lofthouse

It was standing room only for the Macon County Public Library February meeting as residents signed up to speak during public comment period to express their frustration with LGTBQ book displays that they claim promote the sexualization of children.

“Today’s issue is purely about the library’s obsession with chil-

dren and sex as they pursue a destructive woke agenda,” said Macon County resident Jim Gaston, who was first to speak during public comment. “There has been blatant and purposeful misinformation from the library and news media on this issue.

Very simply, parents and taxpayers want neutrality at a public

• See **LIBRARY** page 19



Eight area fire departments responded to a structure fire on the 200 block of Sagee Woods Drive Saturday. - Photo by Brian O'Shea, Plateau Daily News

Area firefighters pull together to battle house fire in Sagee Woods

Eight area fire departments responded to a house fire on Saturday afternoon on the 200 block of Sagee Woods Drive that took days to fully extinguish.

Firefighters responded from departments throughout the area including Highlands Fire & Res-

• See **FIRE** page 14

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

How about '\$1 for Preservation?'

As mayor, I like getting positive feedback, all elected officials do, it makes for a good week and last week was a very good week.

After writing this column last week, where I proposed a program where businesses collected voluntary donations for preservation, I received overwhelming and enthusiastic feedback. Everyone sent me messages stating such a program was long overdue and would be great for the community and efforts toward preserving this unique, beautiful environment.

I have learned a lot since I wrote the article.

Let me share with you what I have learned and what I believe should be the next steps toward implementation.

Surprisingly, two business leaders sent emails informing me their businesses were already doing a similar program. Richard Delany of OEI told me they had been collecting donations from customers for quite a while, and they send the money to the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust. George



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

Powell, the creator and owner of Highlands Aerial Park told me that they have also been collecting donations for support of the land trust.

The added good news of the OEI and Highland Aerial Park efforts is that we have a foundation of key businesses on which to build this preservation program. I envision other hospitality businesses becoming a part of the effort. Restaurants would be key venues, as well as hotels

and motels. STR operators may also want to participate as well as the folks in Cashiers.

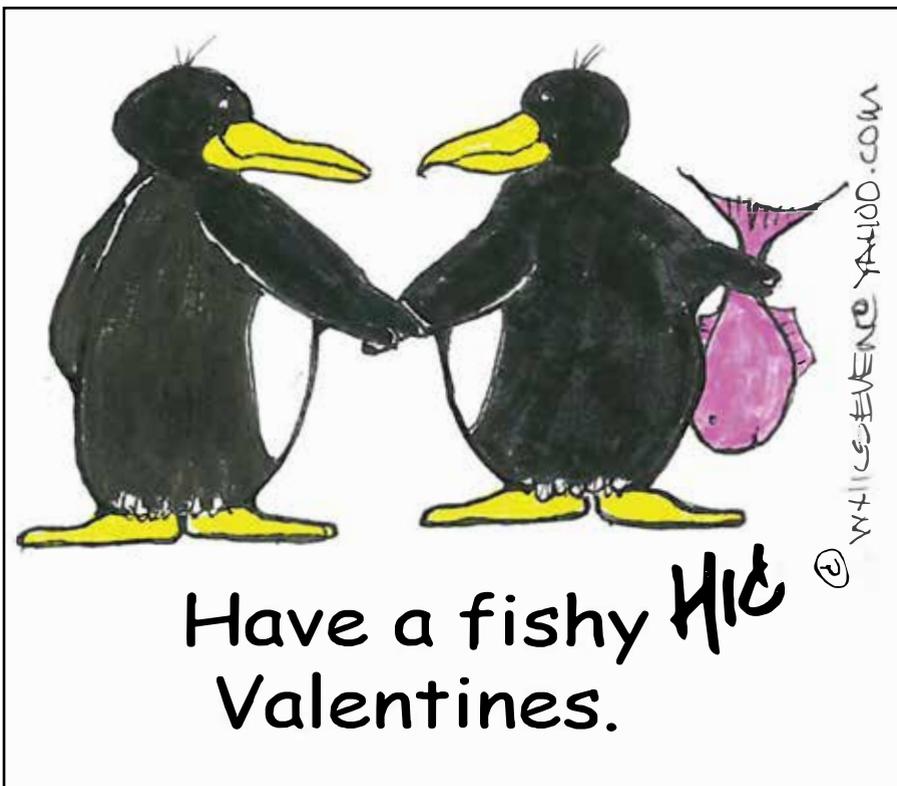
I also believe the program must be focused entirely on preservation. I had lunch this past week with Carlton King, the chairperson of the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust Board of Directors. Carlton was also enthusiastic about the program, which would support their preservation efforts. He stressed that the land trust holds over 3,000 acres of beautiful, undisturbed land in their care and trust. While the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust is committed to acquiring more land to be put into preservation easements, Carlton stressed there were considerable costs for continually managing and caring for the land they hold in trust.

Their staff is not only engaged in acquisition efforts, but they are also involved in maintenance, education, and research initiatives across the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau and in other areas in the local Western Carolina region. Simply put, once the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust acquires a property, that is only the beginning of its ongoing preservation commitment.

The next question is, how does the community implement the program? I have my ideas about the shape and form of the program. For instance, I think the name should be A Dollar for Preservation, not pennies. But broad community input is needed. Businesses and their insights are keys to the success of the program.

In the coming weeks, I will reach out to community leaders about how to proceed. A community meeting, or meetings, will be an important step in the process. Perhaps a committee of business and community

• HIC'S VIEW •



• WEATHER •

Thu, 9-Feb	Fri, 10-Feb	Sat, 11-Feb	Sun, 12-Feb
53°F 39°F	54°F 35°F	39°F 27°F	51°F 31°F
Periods of rain	Rather cloudy, a little rain	Colder with snow and rain	Snow possible in the morning
RealFeel® High: 50° Low: 43°	RealFeel® High: 56° Low: 39°	RealFeel® High: 31° Low: 16°	RealFeel® High: 54° Low: 22°

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FEBRUARY 10 - 14

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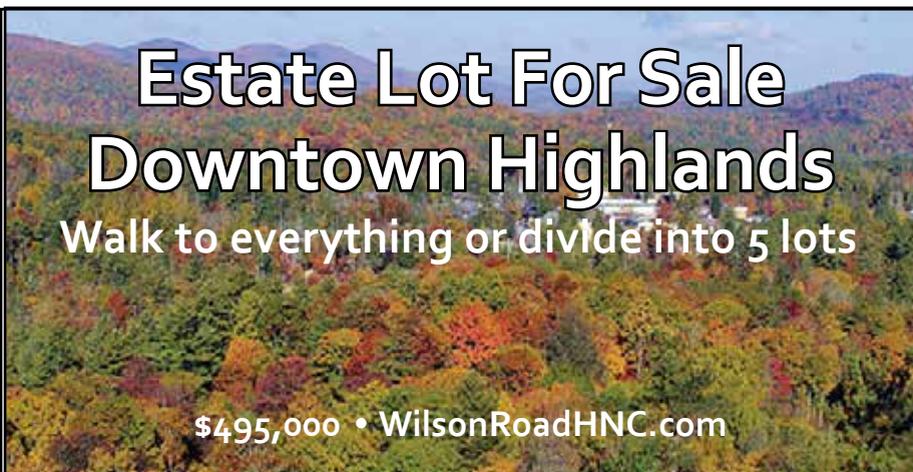
view details

...MAYOR continued from page 2

leaders and land trust representatives could address key issues such as communication to the public, program design and collection of donations, and distribution of funds.

As I stated in my first column, this

should not be a top-down government program but rather a grassroots, community-driven initiative. Highlands and Cashiers have talented people with the expertise and energy to make this program a reality.



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• INVESTING AT 4,118 Ft •

Love is...



Jeannie Chambers
 Chambers Realty
 & Vacation Rentals

People have been spouting quotes about love since the beginning of time. There's no better time than the week of Valentine's Day to delve into some of these quotes and discover how they pertain to you, your home, and your community.

"Look your best. Who says love is blind?"

~ Mae West

Who knew Mae West was such a philosopher? We've all heard beauty is only skin deep, but I bet she knew a little bit about attraction and face it, looking your best is a big part of being attracted to someone...or something. What about a home or a community? Don't we try our best to "dress-up" the town so visitors will be attracted to our community? Gone are the days when a Realtor can snap one or two pictures of a home of a new listing. Look at VRBO, Airbnb, Zillow and any other site meant to entice, and you will see a whole photo album, including drone and vignette shots. Love isn't blind for sure, but in today's world, it's imperative to show lookers to "see themselves" in a home.

"Love the one you're with."

~Stephen Stills

Now, this one is subjective, for sure, but think about that phrase when it comes to a home. Love the home you're in. Today's social media influence would have one think that no one is happy with their home. Just check TikTok or Instagram for a short demonstration on 'how easy' it is to paint, make furniture, repurpose most anything you have. Maintenance is necessary, but not all improvements are.

"I think tolerance and acceptance and love is something that feeds every community."

~Lady Gaga

I think she's on to something, why didn't we all think of that. Oh wait, we have, but we need to do a better job of connecting the dots of doing all three. We have nonprofits and churches in our community who work hard at this.

"Our house is a very, very, very fine house, with two cats in the yard, life used to be so hard."

~Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.

Love your home like this. We live in what used to be referred to as retirement community because retirees bought homes here to stay for the summer. That has been

evolving over the last 20-25 years, and some people can't or won't adjust. There are some very, very, very fine homes here, and some of those homes are permanent residences while others are seasonal homes, and others were bought as "biding my time" homes, homes used as vacation rentals when the property owners can't be here themselves. Their intent to retire here, or at the very least, to spend six-eight months a year here-remain to be seen. Most will sell before that

ever happens for multitudes of reasons when life throws those curveballs.

"You can have more than one home, you can carry your roots with you, and decide where they grow."

~ Henning Mankell

As already mentioned, many property owners have found it easy to 'pull up their roots' and start over here, others thought it sounded like a good idea, but after a few years, move on to other places. You can love your home wherever you are.

"Where we love is home-home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts."

~Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

This is so evident when newcomers come to our community. They fall in love with what is here, but after a while, they yearn to make changes, either to return the community the way it was 50 years ago or go completely in the other direction. We all yearn for the simplicity of days-gone-by, but we forget, if we really went back to the way-it-was, it would mean erasing all the improvements to which we've grown accustomed.

"The ache for home lives in all of us."

~Maya Angelou

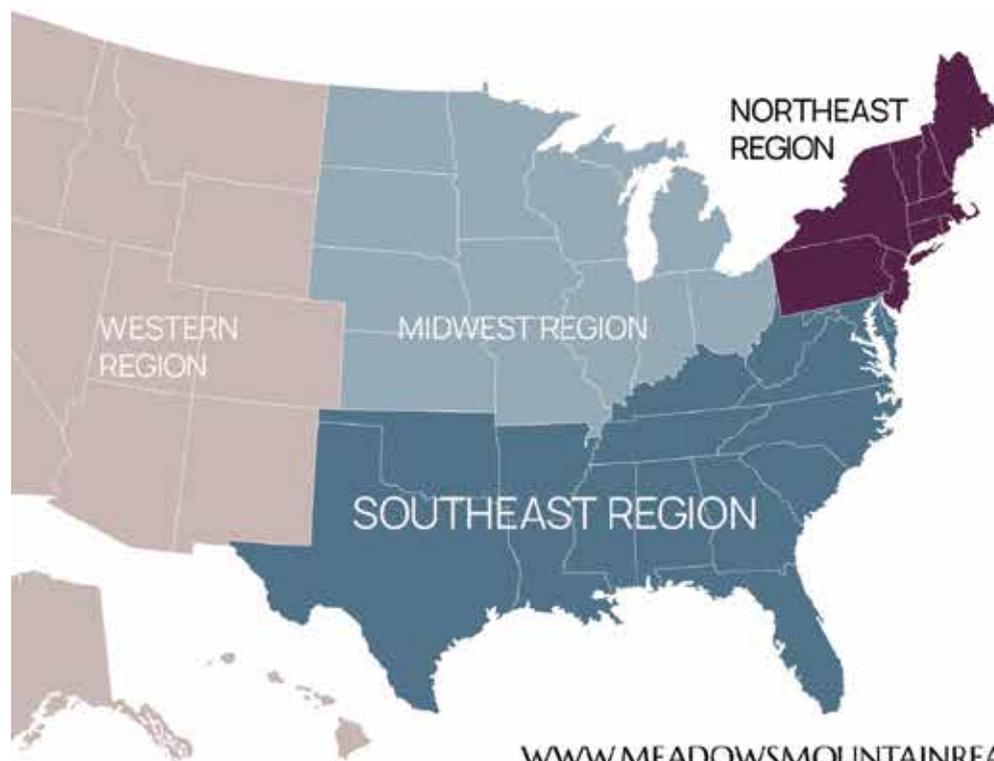
We all want a home. We all want to be a part of a community that knows when to wrap us up and love on us a bit, but at the same time, one that knows when to loosen the wrap so as not to smother its members. Everybody deserves to have a home to call their own, either through ownership or as a rental.

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

~Matthew 6:21

This is where the vision of a community comes in. Since it's impossible to

• See INVESTING page 8



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Beautiful gardens surround this home in gated Highlands Falls Country Club. The living room has high ceilings, gleaming wood floors, a beautiful stone fireplace, and built-in bookcases. A wall of windows creates a bright, airy atmosphere and showcases the lovely landscaping. The living areas flow seamlessly into the kitchen, which is equipped with top-of-the-line appliances. This elegant home boasts three bedrooms, each with its own private bathroom. The primary suite features a large walk-in closet and a spa-like en suite bath with a soaking tub and separate shower. On the upper floor there are two lovely guest suites. Attached double garage.

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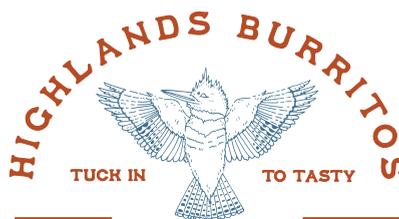
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• OBITUARY •

Leigh Anne Wilson

Leigh Anne Wilson, 61, of Highlands, passed away on Thursday, February 2, 2023.

Born in Highlands, NC, she was the daughter of the late William "Bill" and Annie Belle Lamb Wilson. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, David Stanley, and siblings, Wilene Robinson, Wilma Fendley, and Edward Wilson. Leigh Anne enjoyed crocheting and working security at the Cullasaja Country Club.

She is survived by her daughter, Ahzah Kennemore of Franklin, NC; grandson, Brantley McCall of Franklin, NC; one broth-



er, Gary Wilson of Highlands, NC; and two sisters, Marcia Chastain of Highlands, and Rose Burkett of Central, SC. Numerous nieces, nephews and cousins also survive.

A celebration of life will be at a later date.

In lieu of flowers memorials can be made to Macon Funeral Home, 261 Iotla St, Franklin, NC 28734 or Appalachian Animal Rescue, PO Box 81, Franklin, NC 28744.

Online condolences can be made at www.maconfuneralhome.com.

Macon Funeral Home is handling the arrangements.

Memorial Service for Chris Alley

There will be a Memorial Service for Chris Alley at 1:30pm Sunday, February 19, 2023 in the Historic Chapel, Episco-

pal Church of the Incarnation, Highlands NC; followed by 3pm Mountaintop Service at Sunset Rock Overlook.

Town takes steps to hire new attorney

Once the Town Attorney JK Coward announced his retirement on Jan. 26, the Town Board wasted no time outlining a plan to pursue candidates.

At a Special Town Board Friday, Feb. 3, with the help of Town Manager Josh Ward, commissioners discussed what the town needs in an attorney based on current requirements.

It was decided that a Town Attorney's duties would now include presiding over the Zoning Board of Adjustment as well as the Town Board.

Ward said variances are the issues the Zoning Board is usually concerned about but now that Special Use Permits are needed for Short-term Rentals and Tourist Homes, those, too, will be heard by the Zoning Board.

Interestingly, now that Zoom has come into play, it's no longer necessary for the Town Attorney to appear in person at Town Board meetings and now the Zoning Board.

That means the town won't have to pay travel fees and it can look farther away than in has in the past for candidates.

"I would like to keep candidates 'local' but it would be OK to cast a wider net," said Commissioner Amy Patterson. "But we should want a firm in or familiar with Western North Carolina and maybe someone versed in land use."

She said there are issues germane to Western North Carolina that are not important in the Piedmont.

Ward said some attorneys with Poyner Spruill, the firm that is representing the town regarding short-term rental issues, said they would be interested in being considered.

Commissioners agreed there would be benefits to hav-



JK Coward

ing a large firm with resources and specialties because the town wouldn't have to search for an outside attorney when expertise in a special area is needed.

But Commissioner John Dotson was clear.

"If we go with a candidate in a large firm, we don't want the firm to be the attorney. We want the attorney to be our attorney," he said. "If he or she leaves the firm for whatever reason, we want the option of going with him or her."

Ward presented 34 questions candidates would be asked to answer including previous experience, education, interest in NC Local

Government law, knowledge of NC zoning laws, knowledge of ABC laws, knowledge of NC statutes regarding municipalities, fees, amount of a retainer, terms, and more.

The ad that will run in various applications will include verbiage along these lines, "The board is seeking to fill a vacancy being left by the current contract attorney who has served in this capacity for the past 9+ years, and the board is seeking counsel with considerable local government experience who will attend Town Board and Zoning Board meetings."

According to Commissioner Patterson, Coward's reason for resigning was to begin downsizing his responsibilities so he can retire soon with the hopes of traveling.

Patterson also said he probably wanted to resign before his case load included the lawsuits the town is likely to be involved with down the pike, as disengaging from them would be difficult.

- Kim Lewicki



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...INVESTING continued from page 4

see inside someone's heart, we are tasked to look at their actions and hear the words that come out of their mouths. We all know people who talk pretty but act ugly. It's a learned trait for us to accept that kind of behavior, and one that can be unlearned. As for a home's worth, our treasure -- home ownership is one of the most significant investments we will ever make, and a prudent homeowner will make the best use of their property. In real estate, when appraisers look at a home, one of the things they look for is the highest and best use of the property.

"There's no place like home."

~Dorothy (through the words of
L. Frank Baum)

How often have we said, "Oh, if I could click my heels three times..." We must remind ourselves that if we try hard enough, we will see that we're already home.

Tell someone you love them, and Happy Valentine's Week

ALL ABOUT BOOKS

• INK PENN •

Historical fantasy or romance fantasy?

Two recent reads had me asking myself how best to describe them to my readers. If you google fiction genres, you will find anywhere from five basic genres to hundreds. One list I found included Action, Comedy, Drama, Fantasy, Horror, Mystery, Romance, and Thriller. But those categories aren't enough for most of us.

Naturally, I turned to Amazon because they've added a gazillion genres to the shorter lists I'm most familiar with.

For example, my series falls into the mystery genre at a high level, but there are twelve subgenres beneath it, and my books fit in the cozy mystery subgenre.

The books below are both listed as Historical Fantasy on Amazon and the first one is ranked as a #1 Bestseller in three genres: Romance Literary Fiction, Romantic Fantasy, and Historical Fantasy. The second is categorized as Time Travel Fiction, Science Fiction Adventures, and Historical Fantasy. So, they're the same but different. The first is a more somber tale. The second is an adventure. The good news is I enjoyed them both.

The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue by V. E. Schwab

Wow! Just wow! I couldn't put this one down, and I can see why it is described as a genre-defying tale. It starts in 1714 in France, where young Adeline LaRue makes a deal with the devil. She will live forever, but no one will remember her.

For over three hundred years, she lives a sometimes miserable and at other times thrilling existence. Every year, the devil visits her, asking if she's ready yet to give up her soul. Like Faustus, that's what he's after. And every year, she turns him down, though, in the bleakest times, it's tempting to say yes.

Does she find romance? Well yes, but her partners are destined to forget her by the next day. Until, as you can read on the book jacket, she finds someone who doesn't—in 2014. The story unfolds as she witnesses history, the good and the bad. Her meetings with Luc, the name she gives



Kathy Manos Penn

her devil, evolve and change through the years. Sometimes he is enchanting and at others threatening.

As Luc would say, "I will tell you no more." Seriously, the language is a treat. Read it for the history lessons and the romance and the beautiful writing. If that is, you like Historical Fantasy or Romantic Fantasy.

Lies, Damned Lies, and History by Jodi Taylor

This is book seven in the Chronicles of St. Mary's series and is as entertaining as the first six. I'm happy to report there are thirteen books in the series with a fourteenth coming out this year. Since I'm not a binge reader, they should keep me entertained for at least a few years.

One reviewer describes the series as "a wild mix of history, adventure, comedy, romance, tragedy, and anything else the author could think of." No wonder it falls into Historical Fantasy and Science Fiction genres. Science fiction lovers will get a kick from the pods that travel through history landing in places like Thermopylae and Troy and Merlin's cave.

The job of the characters manning the pods is to investigate and document history—to get the real story. As in any good series, the relationships among the characters are half the fun. Maybe more than half. And, yes, there's a bit of romance thrown in too. There's history, danger, conflict, and humor—lots of humor—mixed with pure farce. I am always delighted by witty dialogue, and this series is filled with it. Maybe one of these days, I'll count the number of double entendres. Rollicking seems to be one of my favorite words as of late, and it aptly describes this book. It's rollicking good fun!

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

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• HS SPORTS •

HS Varsity Swim Team makes Highlands proud at regionals McKim qualifies for State Championship

Steve Hott, Head Coach

HS Varsity Swimming and Diving

On Saturday, Feb. 4, all six of the Highlands Varsity Swim Team traveled to the 1A&2A NC West Regional Championships in Charlotte.

There are 109 1A and 2A school in the NC West Region -- 54 of them the larger 2A schools.

The 1A Highlands boys finished 18th. The overall team 23rd.

The Highlanders were led by freshman Breaststroke/Freestyler Aniah McKim who qualified for state's in the 100 breaststroke. He finished 11th in that race.

The relay team of sophomore Finneas Garner, McKim, freshmen Conner Hughes and Paolo McCrae scored 11th, 12th, and 15th in the 200 Medley, 400 and 200 freestyle relays respectively.

They improved on their seed time in all three. Hughes dropped 12 seconds in his 100 butterfly and got 14th. Garner swam a 24.06 in the 50 free (possibly his 2nd fastest career swim).

Of special note, McCrae did especially well though swimming with a taped ankle and recovering from a rolled ankle suffered at a Highlands Basketball game the night before. First year swimmer Freshman Jesus Mendoza made the trip as 1st alternate for all three relays and was on hand as a backup.

Freshman Tate Wilson dropped 15 seconds off of her 500 freestyle time and finished 19th.

McKim is scheduled to compete in the 2023 1A&2A NC Swimming State Championships on Thursday, February 9 at the Triangle Aquatics Center (TAC) in Cary, NC.



From left: Conner Hughes, Paolo McCrae, Jesus Mendoza, Aniah McKim, Finneas Garner, Coach Steve Hott, and Tate Wilson.

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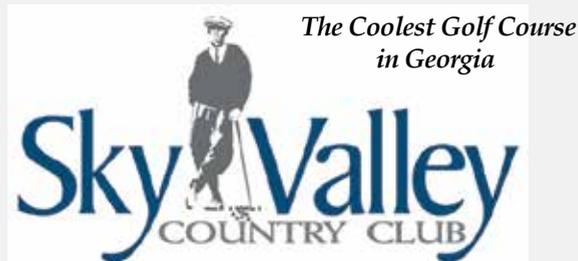


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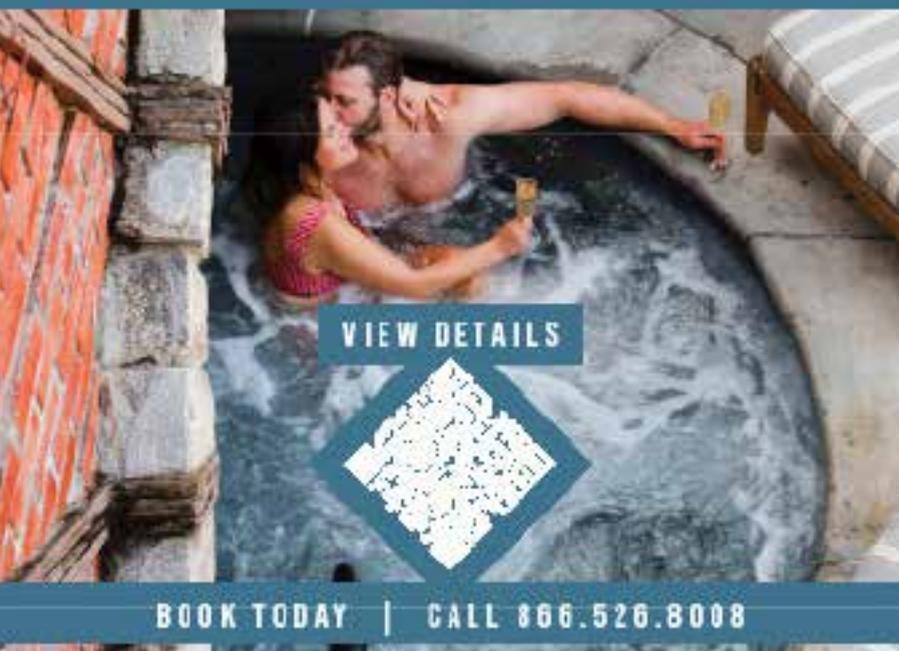
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• HIGHLANDS EVENTS •

ICE RINK SCHEDULE (Through March 5)

- Thursday: 3:30-8 p.m.; Friday 3:30-10pm; Saturday 1-10pm; Sunday 1-5pm. \$5 for skate rental & skating

THE POOL IS OPEN

Rec Pool Hours EXTENDED

- Public Swim: Mon.-Wed. 3:30-7p; Sat. 11a-6p; Sun. 1-6p. Adult Swim: Mon.-Wed. 11a-3:30p and Thurs. and Fri., 11a-2p. Lap Swim: Mon-Fri 6a-9:45a and Sat. 10-11a. Water Aerobics: Mon.-Fri. 10-11a. 828-526-1595.

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

1st Tuesdays

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

2nd Tuesdays

- Highlands Writers Group meets on alternate Tuesday afternoons at 3pm. Writers still uncomfortable with in-person gatherings may participate via Zoom meetings held on the second or third Tuesday of each month at 3pm. Members receive weekly notification regarding when and how the group will assemble. For more information contact Bud Katz at either 828-526-3190 or at budandlynn@me.com

Tuesdays

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

Mon-Fri

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

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

Mon., Tues., Thurs.

- The Food Pantry behind the Meth-

odist Church on Spring Street is open from 10a to 6p.

Mon. & Wed.

- New Mobility Class with Anna Norton It's all about movement. 5:30-6:30pm and Wednesday 6:45-7:45. For more information, call Anna 267-825-0716.

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 w/Tina Rogers 8-9a. Contact the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more info.

Tues. & Thurs.

- New Zumba class with Gay Chalpin from 4:30-5:30p. Contact the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more information.

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

First Wednesdays

Hudson Library, in partnership with VAYA Health, is hosting an educational series on adult mental health, at 11:00 AM. This series is aimed particularly at older adults and will focus on mental health issues of particular interest to them. The February 1 program is PTSD: Healing the Emotional Wound.

Wednesdays

- 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

Thursdays

- Kickboxing 8:15-9:15am. An exhilarating and fun mix of martial arts for a calorie-burning workout. Contact the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more information.

- 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

• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

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. March thru November.

3rd Saturdays

• The American Legion Post 370 meets 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.

• At the Rec Park, Senior Lunches noon in the meeting room. For any other information call Lester Norris or Maxine Ramey at 828-526-3556.

Through Tues. Feb. 14

• Old Edwards offers an array of heart-warming delights to make the celebration special and stress free. Sip on his and hers speciality cocktails while listening to live music in Hummingbird Lounge. Reserve an intimate table for two at Madison's Restaurant to indulge in the chef's specialties created just for the occasion. In the Spa at Old Edwards, relax with a couple's massage including rose petals and champagne. Put a sparkle in her eyes with a visit to the jewelry counter at Acorns where you'll enjoy 10-30% off selected pieces February 1 through the 14. Plan now for your more-love-less-stress Valentine's Celebration at Old Edwards by calling 828-526-8008.

Wed., Feb. 8, 15, and 22

At The Bascom at 3:30-5 p.m., February Youth Pottery: Houses and Automobiles. Ages 5 and up. \$120.

Thurs., Feb. 9

• Chamber Chats at the Highlands Community Building on Poplar Street from 8:30-9:30 a.m. Light breakfast with coffee and tea. For more information and to RSVP contact Colleen Kerrigan at businessservices@highlandschamber.org or call 828-526-5841.

Sat., Feb. 11

• Girl Scout cookies are available for

sale at 4118 Kitchen in Highlands Plaza from 12-4p.

• Mystery Book Club meeting at Shakespeare & Co., in Village Square at 2 p.m. Cathy Pickens, the Carolinas' Queen of Crim and Shakespeare & Co.'s writer-in-residence will host the meeting. Refreshments by The Secret Garden. Snow date is Sat., Feb. 18.

Thurs., Feb. 16

• African Drumming at Macon County Public Library on Siler Road. Celebrate Black History Month with an evening of interactive West African drumming Thursday, at 6:30 p.m., in the Macon County Public Library Great Room. Music educator Fonziba Koster, who has presented drumming and culture workshops to thousands over the last 25 years, brings 30 authentic West African Jembe drums for a hands-on drumming experience. Attendees are invited to bring a drum if they have one. People of all ages are welcome. The event is free; donations will be accepted to support Artists-in-the-Schools. The Library is at 149 Siler Farm Road, Franklin, with

lighted parking and wheelchair access. This program is produced by the Arts Council of Macon County; for information phone 828-524-ARTS or email arts4all@dnet.net.

Fri., & Sat., Feb. 17 & 18

• Early Bird Strolls" from 9-10 a.m.. Birders of all skill levels can meet at the North Campus of the Highlands Biological Station (111 Lower Lake Road) for an introduction to the Great Backyard Bird Count before taking a walk around campus to find our feathered friends. Binoculars will be provided.

Sat., Feb. 18

• At the Nature Center, Great Backyard Bird Count 3-5 p.m. Borrow child-sized binoculars to spot birds around Lindenwood Lake, go on a scavenger hunt in the Botanical Garden, and learn how scientists need our help to count the birds in our backyards. Free.

Wed., Feb. 22

• African Drumming at Albert Carlton Cashiers Community Library. Cele-

• See EVENTS page 12

First 'Mystery Book Club' meeting is Sat., Feb. 11



Cathy Pickens, the Carolinas' Queen of Crime — and Shakespeare & Co. writer-in-residence — will host the first meeting of our Mystery Book Club on Saturday, Feb. 11 at 2pm. Refreshments from the Secret Garden. (Snow date is Sat., Feb. 18.)



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...EVENTS continued from page 11

brate Black History Month with an evening of interactive West African drumming 5:30-6:30 p.m., in the Fonziba Koster, who has presented drumming and culture workshops to thousands over the last 25 years, brings 30 authentic West African Jembe drums for a hands-on drumming experience. Attendees are invited to bring a drum if they have one. People of all ages are welcome. The event is free; donations will be accepted to support Artists-in-the-Schools. This program is produced by the Arts Council of Macon County; for information phone 828-524-ARTS or email arts4all@dnet.net.

Thurs., Feb. 23

• At The Bascom at 5 p.m., free Winter Exhibition Reception.

Sat., Feb. 25

• Girl Scout cookies are

available for sale at Highlands Wine Shoppe at Main and 3rd streets from 12-4p.

• At Hudson Library, In partnership with Albert Carlton Cashiers Community Library, they will be staging "An Evening of Murder, Mystery, & Dinner" on Saturday. Using their best detective skills, participants will be asked to solve a spine-chilling mystery while they share a potluck meal (along with clues and gossip) at 5 p.m. Everyone will come onto the scene in character and in costume. The case should be closed in 3 hours. Space is limited and places will be available on a first-come/first-served basis. This special event is open to the public and free of charge.

• At the Highlander Mountain House on Main and 3rd streets, A family style dinner experience by notable Chef, Ju-

lia Jaksic, followed by an intimate music performance by songstress, Jessie Baylin. Festivities begin at 7 p.m. Go to <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/dinner-and-a-show-tickets-520874879787?aff=ebdsoporgprofile> for tickets.

Thurs., March 2

• African Drumming at the Hudson Library. Celebrate Black History Month with an afternoon of interactive West African drumming Thursday, 3:30-4:30 p.m., Music educator Fonziba Koster, who has presented drumming and culture workshops to thousands over the last 25 years, brings 30 authentic West African Jembe drums for a hands-on drumming experience. Attendees are invited to bring a drum if they have one. People of all ages are welcome. The event is free; donations will be accepted to support Artists-in-the-Schools. This program is produced by the Arts

Council of Macon County; for information phone 828-524-ARTS or email arts4all@dnet.net.

Sat., March 4

• Girl Scout cookies are available for sale at 4118 Kitchen in Highlands Plaza from 12-4p.

Thurs., March 9

• Chamber Chats at the Highlands Community Building on Poplar Street from 8:30-9:30 a.m. Light breakfast with coffee and tea. To RSVP contact Colleen Kerrigan at businessservices@highlandschamber.org or call 828-526-5841.

Fri., March 24

• At PAC, Rhythm of the Dance. For tickets, email highlandspacnc@gmail.com

Sun., May 14

• At PAC, Steep Canyon Rangers. For tickets, email highlandspacnc@gmail.com.

June 23-July 8

"Jersey Boys" at Mountain

Theatre Company now in residence at the Performing Arts Center on Chestnut Street. For tickets go to www.mountaintheatre.com

July 28-Aug. 19

"Rock of Ages" at Mountain Theatre Company now in residence at the Performing Arts Center on Chestnut Street. For tickets go to www.mountaintheatre.com.

Oct. 6-28

"The Rocky Horror Show" at Mountain Theatre Company now in residence at the Performing Arts Center on Chestnut Street. For tickets go to www.mountaintheatre.com.

Dec. 8-24

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



Thank you to everyone who made 2023 Snow Fest @ 4118

Snow much fun,
especially:

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Meadows Mountain Realty

Highlands Police Department

Lester Norris, Highlands Recreational Park

Mountaintop Rotary Club of Highlands

Town of Highlands

And all who attended!



• BUSINESS / ORGANIZATION NEWS •

Nonprofits warn of upcoming cuts to Food Stamps as special pandemic protections come to an end

Pisgah Legal Services and MANNA FoodBank offer resources, steps to take now

Life is about to get even harder for low-income people who depend on Food and Nutrition Services, better known as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or “food stamps” to feed themselves and their families.

Beginning in March, North Carolina households will no longer receive additional emergency allotments of food stamps, reducing the total monthly amount by \$95 or more per household.

Monthly emergency allotment payments began during the pandemic in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19. Now those additional allotments are being rolled back. According to NC Health and Human Services, the average benefit per person per day will decrease from \$8.12 to \$5.45. They estimate that an average of 900,000 North Carolina households received FNS emergency allotments since March of 2020.

Pisgah Legal Services COO Jaelyn Kiger says, “We expect that thousands more people in Western North Carolina (WNC) will be experiencing food insecurity in the coming months with food costs rising and benefits decreasing. People living in poverty are struggling to feed themselves and their families now and it’s only going to get worse when benefits are cut significantly in March.”

MANNA FoodBank CEO Dr. Claire Neal says, “We are working hard with our partner food pantries across the region to help meet the tremendous need. These cuts to food stamps go into effect in just a few weeks, and we want to get the word out now so that folks can prepare and reach out for help if they need it.”

Nonprofits Pisgah Legal Services and MANNA FoodBank encourage local people in need to

take the following steps now:

Make Sure Your Contact Information is Current

For households receiving food stamps, contact your county’s Department of Social Services (DSS) and connect with the Food and Nutrition Services Department (FNS) to speak with a caseworker to report any changes. (individuals apply through their counties DSS – link here: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/local-dss-directory>)

Investigate All Available Resources

Households in need of food, help paying rent or bills, or other immediate assistance should call or contact 211 to find out the most current information about local resources and services.

Make Sure You Claim Your Refund

If you have not filed taxes in recent years, you may be eligible for a large refund from your tax return or missed stimulus checks, especially if you have children. Contact Pisgah Legal Services to find out if you might be eligible and to inquire about free tax preparation services at (828) 210-3404.

Pisgah Legal Services also offers free legal assistance with certain tax issues through its new Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic, created through grants from the Internal Revenue Service and Dogwood Health Trust. Call (828) 253-0406 or apply online at pisgahlegal.org.

Access Help Through the Healthy Opportunities Program

North Carolina Medicaid Members with a Managed Care Medicaid plan may be eligible for food vouchers and other services to boost overall health through the Healthy Opportunities Pilot Program. For more information and eligibility information call (828) 278-9900 or visit impacthealth.org.

org/hop.

• *Nonprofit Pisgah Legal Services provides a broad a broad array of free, civil legal aid, anti-poverty advocacy and access to health care in 18 counties and the Qualla Boundary in WNC. Pisgah Legal has offices in Asheville, Burnsville, Highlands/Cashiers, Hendersonville, Marshall, Newland, Rutherfordton, Spruce Pine and Waynesville. Last year Pisgah Legal assisted more than 21,000 people. If you need help, call Pisgah Legal Services at 828-253-0406 or toll free at 800-489-6144 or visit pisgahlegal.org.*

• *MANNA FoodBank is a private, not-for-profit service organization working to end food insecurity in the 16 counties of WNC, including the Qualla Boundary. For food assistance, call 1-800-820-1109 or online at mannafoodbank.org.*

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...FIRE continued from page 1

cue, Cashiers/Glenville, Sky Valley-Scaly Mountain, Cullasaja Gorge, Rabun County Station 8, Macon County Squad 4, Lake Toxaway, and Rosman.

HFR had the lead on the call and Assistant Chief Robbie Forrester said there were no injuries and the residents were able to exit the home safely, but there were some challenges putting out the blaze in an estimated 7,000 square foot structure.

“It’s a big house with a lot of rooms, so the fire was kind of chopped up all over,” he said. “Then you have fire in the crawl-space and the attic, so fire above and below you. When that collapses, everything in the middle gets pancaked. So, you can’t really get in there and dig.”

CGFD Chief Randy Dillard said it took some time to locate all the hotspots throughout the home.

“The size and all the wood make for a very hot fast-moving fire,” said Dillard. “All of our crews stayed there a long time but could not find all the fire in the walls and it got dangerous real fast.”

Dillard added that it was a huge benefit having the support of other departments.

“Getting a lot of help on a fire this size is very important,” he said. “It takes a lot of people to run that many trucks and pull hose.”

Sagee Woods Drive in not an easy place to park a fire engine, and even tougher to park 10 of them because the road is very narrow and it’s a tight squeeze. Hoses were running from an assortment of trucks along the road to feed water to firefighters battling the blaze on the property.

The fire was fully extinguished by Monday afternoon and Forrester said the cause is unknown and is under investigation by the Jackson County Fire Marshal.

HFR Chief Ryan Gearhart said assistance from other departments was crucial.

“We appreciate all our mutual aid, to everyone that responded a huge thank you,” he said.

Gearhart also thanked a good Samaritan who paid for dinner on Saturday night.

“We ordered 30 burgers from Mountain Fresh and when I got there to pick them up, someone had already paid for them,” he said. “We don’t know who that was, but it was really kind.”

**Photos by
Brian O’Shea
Plateau Daily News**



Above: It was all hands on deck with several teams from multiple fire departments battling the flames.



HFR Asst. Chief Robbie Forrester mans a truck mounted hose.



Flames spread quickly throughout the 7,000 sq. ft. structure.



On Sunday, firefighters were still dousing the structure.



A firefighter scaled a 20-ft ladder to attack the blaze on the second level.

Four Chaplains Memorial Ceremony held Feb. 3

They gave their lives to save others - Mayor names Feb. 3 'Four Chaplains Day' in Highlands

Chip Snyder PIO

Highlands American Legion Post 370

Highlands Mayor Pat Taylor and the Highlands American Legion Post 370 held a service at Veterans Plaza on Friday, February 3rd to commemorate the sacrifice of four armed forces chaplains during World War II.

Mayor Taylor honored this day by declaring February 3rd as the official Four Chaplains Day in Highlands. Post Commander Ed McCloskey read a brief recitation of the events that took place on that day in 1943.

Post members Zach Claxton, Ken Knight, Bill Edwards and Chip Snyder then read a story outlining the individual contributions each chaplain made in saving the lives of others on this tragic day in World War II history.

The four chaplain's represented various faiths including a Jewish Rabbi, a Roman Catholic priest, and two Protestant ministers. The chaplains issued lifebelts to American servicemen aboard the troop transport after it was torpedoed on Feb. 3, 1943. When the supply of life preservers was exhausted, the four chap-

lains removed their own life belts and gave them to four soldiers and then stood calmly on the sinking ship, their arms around one another's shoulders, and their heads bowed in prayer.

Their efforts were credited with saving more than 200 lives.

Inspired by the four chaplains, over 900 American Legion Posts across the country mark the anniversary of their sacrifice through special services and programs.

This annual observance is part of the Legion's "Service to God and Country" program.



Mayor Pat Taylor with Zach Claxton, Ken Knight, Bill Edwards and Chip Snyder.

- Photos by Brian O'Shea
Plateau Daily News



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...PRESERVATION continued from page 1

of Old Edwards Hospitality Group (OEI) and George Powell of Highlands Aerial Park have been asking guests and patrons to contribute to this socially consciousness effort for years –12 years for OEI and six years for Highlands Aerial Park.

The Delanys were involved in these efforts during their time at Sea Island prior to coming to Highlands for OEI.

“Richard and I were part of the preservation process in St. Simons for years,

which encompassed the Sea Island Resort and the town overall,” said Melissa. “It’s so important to give back to the community where we do business, particularly entities like the Biological Station and Land Trust which preserve, protect and create awareness of the unique ecosystem and natural environment that makes the Highlands-Cashiers area such a special place to live and visit.”

OEI’s program requests a \$1 donation per stay which is added to each guest’s bill upon booking, with the opportunity to opt out, which nobody does, said Melissa. “We state where the money goes and why it is important.”

Though the program was started years ago, the Delanys feel it is more relevant today than ever before.

“It is so relevant today because a rapidly growing sector of today’s population is basing decisions about where to travel (and to do business) on how socially responsible those companies and destinations are, with environmental focus being a big driver,” she said.

According to founder of the Highlands Aerial Park George Powell, they add a 6% environmental fee to patrons’ total bill and when questioned - which is rare, he said, they explain what the “fee” is for.

Powell said since the trees on the acre-

age are such a big part of what they do, a portion of the fee goes to an arborist who combs the forest to make sure the trees are healthy. The rest is divided annually between the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust and the Highlands Biological Station.

“If patrons object to the environmental fee we simply take it off the bill,” said Powell.

OEI started the program in 2011, adding 200 Main in 2014.

“In total since 2011, our guests have contributed \$105,350 to the Highlands Biological Station,” said Melissa.

In 2015, OEI initiated the program at Half-Mile Farm and decided to bring in the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust as a beneficiary due to its important conservation efforts in the community.

“Since then, our Half-Mile Farm guests have donated \$7,836 to the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust,” she said.

Gary Wein, executive director of the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust said the organization wouldn’t be able to do what it does - preserve and maintain land - without the help of donors.

“We rely solely on our donors. We aren’t fiscally supported by the town or the county, nor do we get grants. What OEI and

Highlands Aerial Park are doing is incredibly awesome and appreciated,” he said

The Highlands Biological Foundation said it has received continuous support from local businesses, notably Old Edwards Inn and Highlands Aerial Park, too.

“OEI recently exceeded over \$100,000 through monthly contributions over the past 10 years,” said Charlotte Muir, executive director Highlands Biological Foundation .

“These partnerships enable us to provide public environmental education programs throughout our community and at the Highlands Nature Center, directly supporting the community we live in. It’s a wonderful way for businesses to give back and we are so grateful to for the support.”

As the Pennies for Preservation idea ferments here in Highlands, potential beneficiaries might be the Mirror Lake Improvement Association which is trying to raise money to restore Mirror Lake, Highlands Plateau Greenway as it strives to construct and maintain trails around Highlands, the garden clubs who beautify Highlands’ public places and other like-minded organizations.

- Kim Lewicki

...BALLOON continued from page 1

Republic of China (PRC) over the water off the coast of South Carolina in U.S. airspace,” Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III said in a statement last week. “The balloon, which was being used by the PRC in an attempt to surveil strategic sites in the continental United States, was brought down above U.S. territorial waters. On Wednesday, President Biden gave his authorization to take down the surveillance balloon as soon as the mission could be accomplished without undue risk to American lives under the balloon’s path.”

Before being shot down, the balloon was spotted by many throughout the Plateau area as it floated its way across the Carolinas.

Little Bear Pen resident Robin Neal had been following the story when she and her husband Tom saw it floating over Flat Mountain on Saturday morning, which she said was a “surreal” experience.

“I had joked the day before that I was looking for it,” said Robin. “We were having breakfast and Tom said, ‘there’s your spy balloon.’ He ran and got the telescope and sure enough, it was it! I couldn’t believe it, because I had been following the story on the news. We watched it for a good hour until it disappeared near Whiteside. It was

exciting and creepy at the same time.”

After seeing a white speck in the sky, Tom grabbed his telescope and used an attachment with his cell phone to take a photo through the magnified lens. He was surprised to see it because news reports said it was flying over Kansas and would not reach the Carolinas until later that day.

“I felt disbelief and shock, as we had been watching it on the news all week,” said Tom. “It was kind of creepy, invasive, and concerning and we were wondering why they were over us.”

Cashiers resident Mason Stoltzfus was at work near the crossroads on Saturday when his boss called him outside to check out a white speck in the sky.

“I ran outside and just thought that’s crazy that you can see it from the ground,” said Stoltzfus. “It was moving fairly slowly, that’s the only reason my boss noticed it. There weren’t any other planes around it, just the balloon.”

Following the order to down the balloon, an operation was launched in U.S. territorial waters to recover debris from the balloon, which had been flying at about 60,000 feet and estimated to be about the

• See BALLOON page 17



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...BALLOON continued from page 16

size of three school buses.

U.S. officials reported the massive surveillance balloon, believed to be from China, early last week when it was first spotted flying over Montana. It was tracked by military officials throughout the week and on Friday officials reported the projected path would have it fly over North Carolina. By Saturday morning, there were reports the balloon was spotted over Highlands and Cashiers.

The Federal Aviation Administration closed airspace in parts of North Carolina and South Carolina. All operations at Charleston, Myrtle Beach and Wilmington airports were paused for national security initiatives.

“The Chinese spy balloon was a National Security Threat and should not have been permitted to pass over the United States,” said NC House of Representative Karl Gillespie. Gillespie represents House District 120 which includes Macon and Jackson counties over which the balloon was spotted.

The U.S. government waited until the balloon was over water due to concerns with downing the balloon over land and the substantial manpower needed to safely down the balloon over land.

Congressman Edwards shared his anger over the news surrounding the balloon’s path crossing through North Carolina’s 11th District. “I am outraged at this unprecedented Chinese invasion of American airspace. This is happening because we have a weak president who garners no respect from the Chinese Communist Party.”

Although Congressman Edwards categorized the event as an “unprecedented Chinese invasion of American airspace,” a US military intelligence report from last year that focused on China’s use of high-altitude balloons mentioned sightings in Hawaii and Florida in 2019, according to CNN.

The April 2022 report, titled “People’s Republic of China

High-Altitude Balloon,” found a Chinese spy balloon “circumnavigated the globe” in 2019 – while Donald Trump was president – at an altitude of roughly 65,000 feet, and “drifted past Hawaii and across Florida before continuing its journey,” the US Air Force document states.

Congressman Edwards seemed to agree with the Biden Administration’s handling of the Chinese balloon by saying, “Our Constitution grants immediate authority only to the president to take action. As soon as citizens are out of harm’s way, President Biden needs to act with all haste to bring this balloon and any others down and capture their surveillance equipment intact.”

This is exactly what the Biden Administration did by waiting until

the balloon reached the Atlantic Ocean on Saturday.

According to China’s Foreign Ministry, the balloon was a civilian balloon used for meteorological purposes. The Pentagon also confirmed that a second Chinese surveillance balloon was flying over South America at the same time, being spotted in Colombia and Venezuela.

“While the Chinese government claims the balloon was a civilian operation researching weather trends, it should have never been permitted to enter United States airspace,” said Senator Kevin Corbin, who represents Senate District 50 covering WNC. “It posed significant safety concerns across WNC and in our airspace that should have been avoided.”



Tom Neal took these photos of the balloon - one from afar and one using a telescopic lens as it crossed over Highlands Saturday morning.



• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

Demonstrate a special love

Pastor Dan Robinson
Highlands Central
Baptist Church

If you were approached for an “on-the-street-interview” and asked the question, “How Would You Describe Valentine’s Day?” What would your answer be? How about, “Valentine’s Day is a special day, illustrated by special acts and demonstrated by a special love?” Does that definition work for you?

It was estimated that Americans would spend some 26 billion dollars or \$192.80 (average per person) on this day for lovers (National Retail Federation And Prosper Insights).

Naturally a pastor wonders then, how does that figure of spending compare to the annual giving to the church?

The Fast Company reports that the annual giving to the church by regular tithers is right at 50 billion dollars per year.

“Impressive,” we say.

But we’re not really comparing apples to apples are we?

The Valentine’s Day spending is for one day. The church giving is for 365 days.

By the way, I hope you spent as much as you reasonably (or even unreasonably) could on Valentine’s Day and for those you love. But let’s take another look at the definition I’m suggesting.

A Special Day

According to the Bible it is God who gives life (Psalm 139:15-16). So, the day that you were born must be regarded as a Special Day.

Illustrated By A Special Act

Again, according to the Bible, we may regard the most special act of all acts to be that of the Cross of Jesus Christ. There, He gave His life for you and me. He died in our place and for our sins. Can anything be more special than that?

Demonstrated By A Special Love

The Bible says that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son! That whosoever believes in Him would never perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16).

How special you must be!

No one knows you better and no one loves you more than Jesus Christ!

In light then, of all that I’ve said I am now asking you to turn your attention to Jesus Christ in the post Valentine days.

• See SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING page 19

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

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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

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Tues. Guys study 8am. Gals 10am.

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Testimony meeting: 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 p.m.

CLEAR CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

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Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11 a.m.
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Wednesdays – Supper at 6 p.m.

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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

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5th and Main streets • www.incarnationwnc.org
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Sanctuary 10:30a; Morning Prayer Mon-Thurs 8:30a in Chapel

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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

Emily Wilmarth, pastor
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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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

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Pastor Dan Robinson • 11339 Buck Creek Road
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Rev. Marty Kilby
Sundays: School – 10 a.m.; Worship – 11 a.m. & 7
Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 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

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Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11 a.m.
Wednesdays: Prayer & Bible Study: 6 p.m.

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Jan. 23. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a summons/citation, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or those of public officials have been used.

Jan. 23

• At 6:25 p.m., officers responded to a one-vehicle accident on NC 28 and Many Road.

Jan. 31

• At 11 a.m., officers received a call about the theft of a motor vehicle parts or accessories about a vehicle parked on Main Street whose mirror was missing.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Feb. 1

Feb. 1

• At 3:26 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a location on Simon Speed Road.

Feb. 4

• A little after midnight, the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Lyman Zachary Road.

• At 3:27 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a structure on Cullasaja Club

Drive.

• At 4:24 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Whiteside Cove Road.

• At 1:19 p.m., the dept. responded to a structure fire on Sagee Woods Drive.

• At 1:48 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Main Street.

• At 6:29 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a location on U.S. 64 west.

Feb. 5

• At 3:01 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Main Street.

• At 4:24 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Oak Road.

• At 7:33 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a vehicle fire on NC 28 south.

Feb. 6

• At 5:13 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Main Street.

• At 8:03 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Spring Street.

• At 5:40 p.m., the dept. provided traffic control at a motor vehicle accident on NC 106.

...SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING from page 18

- Discover ways to love Him more
 - Find ways to get to know Him better
 - Consider your financial investment into His kingdom and work
 - Concentrate on ways to demonstrate your love for Him in light of His selfless love for you
- Valentine's Day is a special day for lovers.

Every day is a special day for the follower of Jesus Christ whereby we may learn

to love Him more and more.

I hope that you will do that. And that you will start today.

The old hymn puts it like this;
More love to Thee, O Christ, More love to Thee,

Hear Thou the prayer I make on bend-
ed knee,

This is my earnest plea; More love, O
Christ to Thee,

More love to Thee, More love to Thee.

• BIZ/ORG NEWS •



At the meeting held on January 31, 2023, Rotary Club of Highlands welcomed fellow Rotarian and guest speaker Jim Ward. Jim presented a very informative presentation on what the Highlands Plateau Greenway, Inc., group has been up to, and an update on the possible future Blue Ridge trekking route.

...LIBRARY continued from page 1

place and if there are media reps here today, which I know there are, if you try to spin this dialogue as intolerant or wanting to ban books, or shut down libraries or restrict access, you're going to be lying through your teeth and not have any credibility. The same goes for any library staff or anyone else who speaks with the buzzwords of equity, inclusion, or diversity. This is specifically to change the narrative because that is what the extremist library association has coached the library staff to do."

Gaston's comments come following a nearly two-year back and forth between a group of community members and the Macon County Public Library over a June Pride Month display at the library.

Gaston, along with other members of the community first spoke out against the Pride Month display in 2021 after displays were featured in both the children's and teen sections of the library. The displays included decorations and LGBTQ themed books.

After receiving concerns from the community in 2021, the library staff did not include a Pride month display in the children's section in 2022, however, there was a display featured in the teen's section.

Despite the library's efforts to appease those opposed to the display, the group again spoke against the library and the display in 2022 — this time calling for the Macon County Board of Commissioners to not grant a \$20,000 funding increase to the library for employee raises as a result.

The Fontana Regional Library system manages six libraries across Macon, Jackson and Swain counties, including three libraries in Macon County. In January, the Fontana Regional Library Board proposed a change to library system's collections development policy "designed to foster productive conversations with the community moving forward."

Tuesday night's public comment was sparked by the policy changes and called for the board to take official action regarding future displays.

Gaston continued by claiming that the ALA (American Library Association) has provided public libraries with information on how to censor parents and to change the narrative with the media to be able to "promote child sex in the name of diversity."

"It is past time for this library to separate from the ALA," Gaston stated. He finished by stating that if the library were to feature "another display of sex-themed or gender confusion to minors the community would be publicly calling for the resignation of certain staff that need to be replaced."

While Gaston and other residents called for the Macon County Public Library to separate from or "pull out of" the ALA, library board members informed the group that Macon County is not part of the ALA.

Other residents who addressed the board on Tuesday stated that despite what some may think, the group did not want to

• See LIBRARY page 22



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• CLASSIFIEDS •

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THE HIGHLANDS-CASHIERS CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL is looking for a responsible, reliable part-time administrative assistant for the 2023 Season. Music knowledge is not a requirement. A warm, friendly environment awaits you! Please email hccmfnc@gmail.com to arrange an appointment (st. 2/2)

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HIGHLANDS-CASHIERS LAND TRUST IS LOOKING FOR AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR. Applications must be received by February 15, 2023. Start date is May 1, 2023.

The Executive Director is responsible for execution of strategic plans, donor education and development, land acquisition and stewardship, staff management, and office administration. The Director should embrace servant-leadership and will work closely with an involved Board of Directors and experienced staff. The full-time position includes benefits, and the salary will be commensurate with experience and comparable with non-profit executive director positions in the region.

POSITION OVERVIEW: The successful candidate will report to the Board of Directors. In addition to the HCLT staff include three full-time and two seasonal staff. At a minimum the successful candidate must demonstrate an appreciation for and curiosity about natural resources, and superior organizational skills. He or she should have experience with successful non-profits. Experience with other land trusts or other environmental non-profits is not required but would be helpful.

QUALIFICATIONS: Capacity to excel at influencing and leading the staff and the organization; Outstanding communication skills and ability to work well with board, staff, the community and media; High executive functionality; Nature-oriented; Energetic, curious, and social; Passion for the mission and programs of HCLT; Experience in program planning and execution; Donor support and fundraising capabilities; Age-appropriate education programming; Fiscal and operational management; Environmental, property, and/or fiscal regulations

TO APPLY: Please send introductory letter and resume to: Carlton King, President, HCLT, P.O. Box 1703, Highlands, NC 28741. Or email to personnel@hcltnc.org

HCLT is an Equal Opportunity Employer and encourages diversity and equity in all facets of the organization's work. All qualified applicants will receive consideration.

• See CLASSIFIEDS page 22

...LIBRARY continued from page 19

ban books.

"We do not want to ban books. We have never asked for that," said Elizabeth Albers. "This is what Macon County taxpayers and concerned parents are asking: For books that have controversial, sexual ideas not be placed front and center in the children's and teen's display. This is about what is being promoted in our children's and teen's area...Let me repeat. Parents and taxpayers have said repeatedly that we do not want to ban books. If anyone makes this false claim after what has been spoken today, they will have no credibility whatsoever."

MC Commissioner Danny Antoine, who serves alongside Commissioner Paul Higdon as a liaison to the library on behalf of the commission, spoke during public comment period regarding his concerns about certain books being available to the public at the library.

"There are books we have in our library system that are absolutely unacceptable and it's beyond reprehensible to even speak to what is inside of these books," said Antoine. Specifically addressing the

book Gender Queer, which has been identified as the number one banned book in America due to its explicit content, Antoine said, "If I opened this book right now, everyone in this room would look at me like I was crazy. Why? Because it is too explicit. But we are ok with our kids reading it? It is wrong."

Antoine went on to say that there is no reason children should have access to books such as Gender Queer and that there is no reason for the library to carry the book at all.

Commissioner Antoine then referenced NC General Statute 14-190.17A — third degree sexual exploitation of a minor which states that "a person commits the offense of third degree exploitation of a minor if, knowing the character or content of the material, he possesses material that contains a visual representation of a minor engaging in sexual activity."

Again referring to Gender Queer, Commissioner Antoine followed his reading of the NC General Statute by stating, "This is wrong. These books got to go."

While addressing the library board, Antoine also referenced NC General Statute

14-190.1 — which says it shall be unlawful for any person, firm or corporation to intentionally disseminate obscenity.

Antoine said he was provided the statutes he read during the public comment period by MC Attorney Eric Ridenour.

The library board countered Commissioner Antoine's claims regarding the general statute by noting that he only referenced a portion of NCGS 14-190.

A specific provision in the statute regarding disseminating harmful materials to minors states, "It is an affirmative defense to a prosecution under this section that: The defendant was a school, church, museum, public library, governmental agency, medical clinic, or hospital carrying out its legitimate function; or an employee or agent of such an organization acting in that capacity and carrying out a legitimate duty of his employment."

Several speakers during the public comment period called for "neutrality" from the public library and dawning stickers with the slogan. Stating that they want to see the library avoid political issues or controversial topics and remain neutral in all things.

"I just want to speak to the parents in this room right now. God came and he revealed himself as a Father. That was his Supreme Authority that he revealed himself as. So that tells me that the parents in this room, and the Fathers represented here, are the highest authority in the land so I just want to thank you for showing up," said Casey Wilson. Wilson pleaded with the library board to "allow parents to raise their children in regards to their sexual preferences. Let us educate and teach them in regards to these things," he said.

Members of the library board said they agreed that parents should be in charge of what their children read and see, and they should monitor what books their children are reading from the library and decide what is appropriate to read and check out.

However, members of the crowd said that parents shouldn't have to monitor their children at the public library and that the library should be a safe place.

Commissioner Paul Higdon stated that at a separate meeting with library leadership it might have been perceived that the county would not continue funding the library over the issues surrounding the Pride displays, however that was not the case.

"We will continue funding the library. This library is a valuable asset to the community," said Chairman Higdon. "We have a disagreement now about some book displays and other things, but those things are going to be worked out."

Librarian Tracy Fitzmaurice said that

she understood Commissioner Antoine to mean he wouldn't finally support the library due to the disagreements, to which Antoine denied.

"What you heard me say was I wouldn't support this kind of mess [pointing to the Gender Queer book on the table] in a library. That is what I said pretty clearly," said Antoine.

Antoine later further clarified by stating, "My stance is pretty clear. It has nothing to do with funding the library, ok? It has everything to do with what I will and I will not support and I will not support it. In no way, shape or form. There is no sexually explicit, pornographic materials that should ever be available to any child."

Chairman Higdon said that he and Commissioner Antoine requested that "these books be labeled, segregated or placed in a separate section and not allow someone with just a card, who isn't 18 years old, to check them out or have access to them."

Higdon said that request was rejected by the library staff under the first amendment clause. Higdon said he then requested to make the Macon County Public Library a neutral facility.

"By neutral I mean when you walk in, there are no displays of any kind supporting anything that is recognized by the Federal or State government, or the ALA, or anybody else with a political bone to grind. Make it neutral," said Higdon.

Higdon said that suggestion was also rejected, at which point that meeting between himself, Commissioner Antoine, Fitzmaurice and new Macon County Public Librarian Abby Hardison was ended.

Although several of the speakers during public comment suggested members of the library board "worked for the taxpayers" the members of the Macon County library board are volunteers who serve as an advisory board to the Fontana Regional Library System. And while the Macon County Public library is funded in part by a contribution from the Macon County Board of Commissioners, the library operates as a nonprofit entity.

In 2022, The Fontana Regional Library system's annual audit report showed a total revenue of \$3,637,486 of which, \$2,503,356 was identified as being unrestricted county and municipal appropriations.

Though nothing was decided at the meeting, the library board agreed to work to get an understanding of the groups and their overlapping concerns and are committed to working with the MC Commission board to find a solution.

• CLASSIFIEDS •

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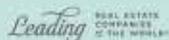


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