

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Jan. 19, 2023

Appraised property values skyrocket

Highlands Township and Highlands City represent half of the county's total taxable property value.

By **Brittney Lofthouse**

Property reappraisals in Macon County are being sent out in February and property owners

can expect to see a significant increase in the taxes they owe.

Although the county's property tax rate hasn't increased, the

county's property revaluation will cause the majority of tax bills to increase. The Macon County Tax

• See **VALUES** page 7

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HS Varsity Swim Team braves snow to travel to swim meet

By **Coach Steve Hott**

HS Varsity Swim & Dive Team

With several other teams canceling out due to weather concerns, on Saturday, January 14, the Highlands School Varsity Swim Team traveled to Franklin for what turned into a triangular meet between 3A Franklin, 3A Smoky Mountain and 1A Highlands.

The five swimmer boys' team of Finneas Garner, Aniah McKim, Conner Hughes, Paolo McRae, and Jesus Mendoza finished 2nd ahead of Smoky Mountain, while the one girl team, Tate Wilson finished 3rd.

In the boy's 4x100 yd free-

• See **SWIM** page 15



The new Highlands Fire & Rescue building on Main Street is open for business.

- Photo by Brian O'Shea

Highlands Fire & Rescue is in its new home

By **Brian O'Shea**

Plateau Daily News

Highlands Fire & Rescue has officially moved into the new station on Franklin Road across the

street from the Highlands Post Office. HFR Chief Ryan Gearhart said they began operations in the new building on Jan. 6 after the trucks, equipment, and gear were

transferred over.

The driving forces behind building a new facility include quicker response times and an in-

• See **STATION** page 12

Zoning Board hears first SUP case about STRs

On Wednesday, Jan. 11, the first Zoning Board of Adjustment meeting requiring board action since March 22, 2022, was heard.

It involved the first Special Use Permit case regarding the Short-term Rentals (STR) issue since the Unified Development Code (UDO) was amended.

Colleen Kerrigan who lives in Mirror Lake was required to get a SUP to rent a room in her house – something she has done intermittently over the years as an STR as attested by county room tax payments.

According to Planning Director Michael Mathis, Kerrigan has rented out a room in the past but since the UDO defined

• See **ZONING** page 14

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

What to expect at tonight's TB meeting

The new year is well underway. Thursday, January 19, will be the first meeting of the year for the Highlands Town Board. It begins at 7 PM at the Highlands Community Center next to the ball field. You can remotely access the meeting through the town website.

Several agenda items are carryovers from last year. I hope the board will take final action on several of these items.

The draft of the lease for the WHLC transmission antenna located on the town's Big Bear Pen tower will again be up for review. If the board approves this draft, it will have to be posted in the newspaper before final action is taken. The same will apply to the lease for the small HAM radio antenna that will also be placed on the town tower. Since this antenna is for non-commercial use, I foresee no issues.

The board is still waiting for information from the county concerning the renewal of the Highlands Chamber of Commerce building lease. Hopefully, more



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

information will be available at the next Town Board meeting.

Members of the ABC board and staff will attend the meeting to present a more detailed proposal concerning the possible relocation of the ABC Store to the old Oak Street fire department building.

The fire department has transferred its operations to the new facility on US 64. Last month Steve Mehder, the chair of the ABC Board, and Kevin

Vinson, the ABC Manager, proposed that the ABC store be relocated to the old fire department building. The Town Board requested more information before making a decision.

The ABC representatives will make an in-depth presentation, including architectural schematic drawings, an assessment of future space needs, project financial data, and the impact on the long-term ABC store operation. I anticipate a final decision on the ABC proposal at a later date.

At the December meeting, commissioners expressed an interest in conducting a land-use study for the entire town property where the police, EMS, Playhouse, and Town Hall are located. If the board decides to hire a company to conduct a land-use study, I believe it should be a comprehensive review of future needs for all facilities, including those in the recreation and public works departments.

As he first did last fall, Lamar Nix will present a report concerning town obligations and costs for the proposed downtown electric vehicle charging stations. Upon hearing Lamar's report, I hope for a final decision on this proposal.

Last year the board entered a contract with Environmental, Inc. to operate the Highlands sewer plant. In the meantime, we have also been helping town personnel acquire the required operator licenses. The contract and training efforts have gone well. The current strategy is to continue using a private company to operate the plant while also developing redundancy by having license operators on staff. At the meeting, the board will review the contract for operating the sewer plant for the coming year.

• HIC'S VIEW •



• WEATHER •

Thu, 19-Jan	Fri, 20-Jan	Sat, 21-Jan	Sun, 22-Jan
59°F 34°F	47°F 25°F	46°F 31°F	39°F 27°F
A shower and thunderstorm	Mostly sunny and cooler	Partly sunny	A shower and t-storm; colder
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• INVESTING AT 4,118 Ft •

Luxury Real Estate Outlook 2023

Happy New Year from the Plateau! As we reflect on an exciting and productive 2022, the proverbial question is how will real estate sales in this market fare in 2023?

One of the many benefits being an affiliate of an international brand, Sotheby's International Realty, in addition to the extensive exposure for clients, is the deep marketing and research teams which provide current information for our brokers and clients in this fast-moving and ever-changing real estate market.

Sotheby's International Realty just published their 2023 Luxury Real Estate Outlook report based on surveys of luxury brokers across the globe as well as an analysis of sales statistics in the high-end markets. While conventional wisdom about supply and demand and interest-rate fluctuation would suggest luxury home prices should be falling, that did not occur in 2022. Prices remained steady or continued to climb in the top-tier of home sales.

The report states that the reasons for prices staying strong are multi-fold: firstly,



Jody Lovell
Highlands and Cashiers
Sotheby's International Realty
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the world's seen a surge of wealth creation in recent years and the affluent still have more money to spend; secondly, many luxury purchases are made in cash, so the high-end sector remains somewhat insulated from interest-rate fluctuations. Finally, the lifestyle change resulting from Covid-19 is here to stay: people are spending more time at home and placing more of an emphasis on home life, even as the world has opened up. What that means is that luxury homeowners can rationalize the expenses of owning multiple properties since they are spending more time in them, and are therefore less likely to put them up for sale. As such, inventory continues to be low coupled with an undersupply of new construction.

Fannie Mae's forecast for 2023 is that home sales will decline but begin to rebound in 2024. Fannie Mae economists also believe that mortgage rates will steadily fall. Despite this prediction, luxury agents remain busy brokering deals for their clients, many of

whom are looking to make opportunistic investments during a fluctuating market. Now more than ever, it is apparent that the affluent want to spend their equity prudently, and the wise, experienced agents are poised to help them do just that.

Like other luxury markets across the U.S., this market saw prices rise in value and inventory shrink since the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020. The homes that sold are holding their value and some are continuing to increase. This area is still extraordinarily desirable, and there are no signs of buyers' remorse from the many pandemic home purchasers. In fact, we are seeing a second tier of buyers - the friends and family of the buyers who came during the pandemic.

One of the important trends to acknowledge in the Sotheby's International Realty Luxury Outlook 2023 Study is that natural amenities are extremely important to the luxury buyers who want to enjoy outdoor adventures and beautiful natural settings such as the mountains or the beach. The lifestyle choice of moving to high-quality smaller towns within driving distances of larger cities continues to inspire buyers of all ages to explore and choose Western North Carolina as a summer refuge to escape the heat or as a full-time residence to step back and remove themselves and their families from the problems of big cities. We continue to see this pipeline of buyers trekking up the mountain to make this area their home.

As a seller, you should recognize that the frenzy of buying that occurred in 2020

• See **INVESTING** page 7

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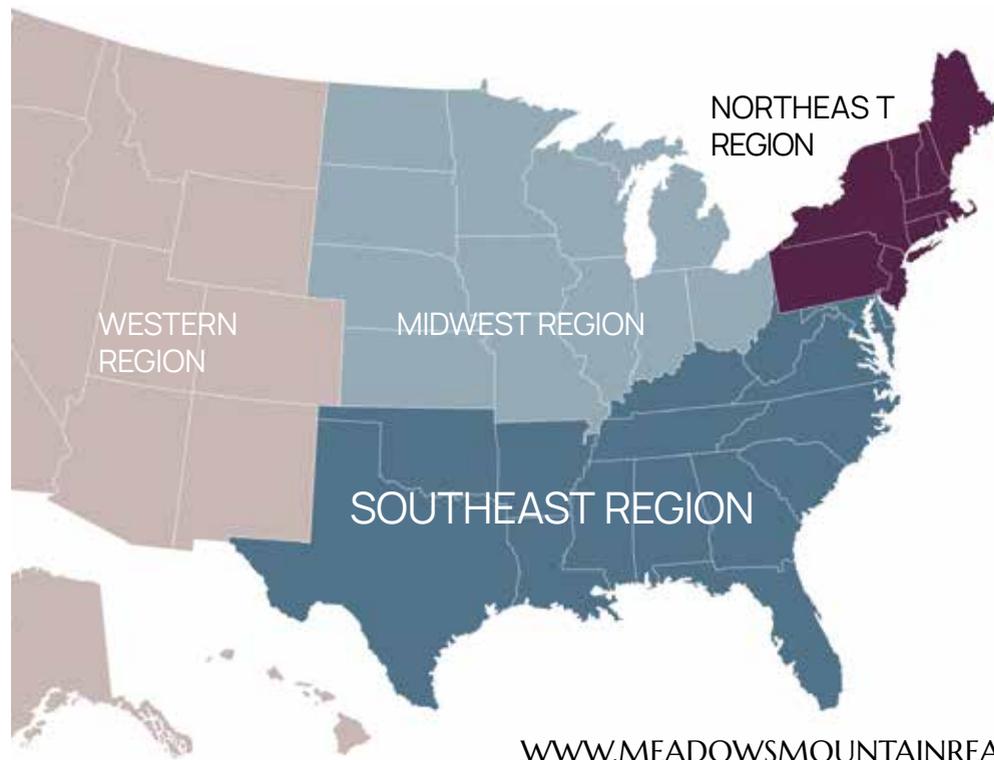


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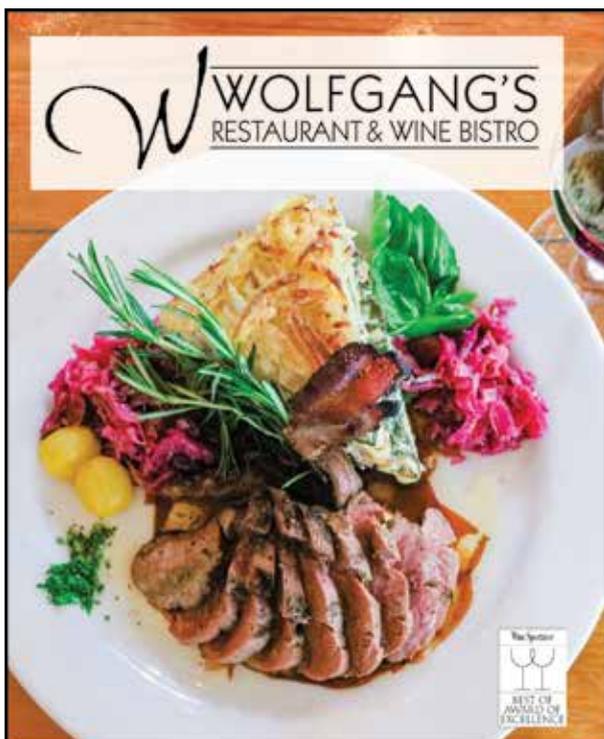
This spacious Trillium Place town home is in the perfect downtown Highlands location — walk to restaurants, shopping, and entertainment venues! It is offered fully furnished with elegant designer finishes and furnishings throughout and is move-in ready. A gas log stone fireplace anchors the living area. The modernized kitchen is open to the dining and living areas and boasts stainless steel appliances. Upstairs are two oversized bedrooms; each has a large en suite bathroom with a beautifully tiled walk-in shower. Gorgeous designer light fixtures throughout are an added bonus. A large covered patio that has cypress trees for privacy overlooks the grounds of Trillium Place, and is the perfect spot for dining al fresco.



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...INVESTING from page 4

has calmed, but if your home is updated, well-maintained, in a good location and priced fairly, it will sell. As a buyer, you should accept that inventory is still scarce, and you may have to embrace imperfection and compromise to purchase a home in this market. That means that you may have to accept that your entire wish-list may not be met, but you can immediately enjoy the lifestyle offered here and perfect your home as time unfolds.

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• OBITUARY •

Joyce Gail Rogers

Joyce Gail Rogers, 77, of Highlands went home to be with Jesus on Monday, January 16, 2023.

Born in Jackson County, she was the daughter of the late Leonard and Flossie McCall Potts. She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers, Roy Potts and Jimmy Potts. Mrs. Rogers was a member of Yellow Mountain Baptist Church. She enjoyed crocheting and spending time with her family, especially her four grandsons.

She is survived by two daughters, Melissa Crowe (Chris) of Athens, GA, and Monica Vinson (Kevin) of Highlands, NC; one son, Justin Rogers of Atlanta, GA; and four grandsons, Tyler Crowe, Ryan Vinson, Travis Crowe, and Dylan Vinson. She also is survived by two sisters, Helen Holden



of Cullowhee, NC, and Willene Conner of Franklin, NC; three brothers, Curley Potts of Cullowhee, NC, Dennis Potts of Black Duck, MN, and Robbie Potts of Cullowhee, NC; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Graveside service will be 2pm on Saturday, January 21 at Potts Cemetery in Cullowhee. Rev. Tommy Holden will officiate.

The family will serve as pallbearers.

In lieu of flowers donations can be made to the Potts Cemetery, C/O Robert Potts, PO Box 2444, Cashiers, NC 28717.

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

Macon Funeral Home is handling the arrangements.

• LETTER •

The Center for Plastic Surgery is closing Jan. 31, 2023

Dear Editor,

After 23 exceptional years of practice at the Center for Plastic Surgery, Dr. Robert Buchanan will retire on January 31, 2023.

On that date, the Center for Plastic Surgery will permanently close. Until then the office is open for all consultations, simple procedures, and sales.

Dr. Buchanan would like to extend thanks to his patients and the entire community in and around Highlands for their

trust, support, and loyalty. He considers his retirement bittersweet, as he has enjoyed caring for his patients over the years but is excited to continue serving the community in other ways.

Before the Center for Plastic Surgery closes, patients wishing to obtain their medical records may either download electronic copies through their Patient Portals or contact the office directly at 828-526-3788.

...VALUE continued from page 1

Office is sending out the reappraisal notices following the completion of the 2023 property revaluation at the end of the month.

At the January Macon County commission meeting, Tax Administrator Abby Braswell said after the completion of the 2023 reappraisal, the total taxable property value in Macon County came to \$12.6 billion, nearly a \$5 billion increase over 2022.

Revaluation is the process in which all counties in North Carolina revalue all property (land and buildings) to its current market value as of an established date. North Carolina law requires all counties to conduct a property revaluation at least every eight years. Macon County does it every four years. The last reval was 2019.

The county tax office monitors market data to accurately determine the market value of all properties. Staff visit and observe properties to verify characteristics, compare similar property sales and consider improvements or changes made. Revaluation captures these changes in value for property tax purposes. In simpler terms, it's how much a home would sell for under normal conditions.

As Braswell explained to commissioners, homes that

were assessed in 2020 for \$100,000 recently sold for double that value, even with no changes being made. Because people were willing to pay double, the market inflated values, resulting in significant changes in revaluations.

Properties are revalued to ensure assessed values are based on the current market and establish equalization for property owners throughout Macon County.

Now that the revaluation is complete, property owners will be notified of their new assessed value in the coming weeks and will then have an opportunity to appeal the new rates if desired.

On average, Macon County sees about 10 percent of property owners appeal, however, with the significant increase expected after this revaluation, Braswell said the tax office is bracing for an influx of appeals.

As part of the reappraisal process, the tax office reviewed property sales by townships with Macon County as a whole reporting 1,856 sales in 2021 and 1,479 sales in 2022. Out of Macon County's 13 townships, Highlands and Highlands City accounted for 429 sales in 2021 with the lowest sold parcel being \$5,000 in Highlands Town-

• See VALUES page 13

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• INK PENN •

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Whether it's to new locales or familiar ones, reading can transport you wherever you'd like to go. I especially enjoy visiting cities I've explored in the past because I like recognizing familiar landmarks. That's what I got to do with these two books—first I crossed the pond to visit London, and then I hopped the channel to see Paris.

“The Twist of a Knife”
by Anthony Horowitz

If you're a fan of Masterpiece Mystery, you likely watched “Magpie Murders,” a recent hit on PBS. It is based on the book of the same name by Anthony Horowitz. The author was also the screenwriter for “Foyle's War,” another fan favorite on Masterpiece Mystery.

What fun to read a novel in which the author is the main character. That's the case with Horowitz's Detective Hawthorne novels. In this fourth in the series, Horowitz is once again the reluctant author who writes about the mysterious Detective Hawthorne. This book opens with him telling the detective he no longer wants to write about him.

When Horowitz becomes a murder suspect, though, he has no choice but to call on the reclusive detective and resume a reluctant partnership with him. Intrigued by the blurring of fact and fiction, I turned to the internet for more information.

Fact: Horowitz did write a play called “Mindgame” and it debuted at the Vaudeville Theatre in London. A fact not in the book is that it also debuted on Broadway with Keith Carradine in the lead role.

Fact: As happens in the book, the play was not a success in London, and in real life, its Broadway run wasn't either.

If you've read the first three books, you will recall that the titles have a pattern—“The WORD is Murder, The SENTENCE is Death, A LINE to Kill.” This title is different, and he mentions in the story that the first three titles were a mistake as they were difficult to continue.

I have to wonder if that detail is fact or fiction, and I wonder whether there will be a fifth book. Something tells me the series will



Kathy Manos Penn

continue because there's more to learn about Detective Hawthorne. Horowitz the author has yet to reveal the complete story about the man, and, of course, in the books, Horowitz the character is as clueless as we readers are.

“Time was Soft There: A Paris Sojourn at Shakespeare & Co.” by Jeremy Mercer

I had to pick up this book when I saw it displayed at Shakespeare & Co.—the bookshop in North Carolina,

not France. I feel quite fortunate that I've gotten to know Stuart Ferguson, the manager of this quaint bookshop in Highlands, and that he decided to carry my books. Yes, I visited the namesake shop in Paris but didn't have the time it takes to get to know it. This book showed me what I missed.

Most of us have heard of the original shop that opened in 1919 and became a home away from home to authors such as Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others. It didn't reopen after WWII. Today's Shakespeare & Co. opened in 1951 on the banks of the Seine as Le Mistral and its owner changed the name to Shakespeare & Co. in 1964 when the original owner died.

This book is a memoir about an unemployed Canadian journalist who made his home there in early 2000. He lived above the store and worked for “the proprietor ... patron saint of the city's down-and-out writers.” It is a memoir, though it is as much about the strange and wonderful bookshop as it is about the author's time there. For me, it was a very different visit to Paris.

Where will your next book take you? I'm reading “A Dangerous Fossil” so I'm off to Dorset, a county in southwest England known for the Jurassic Coast. Such is the beauty of a good book.

• 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/KathyManosPenn.Author/.

• HS SPORTS •



Order and pay for 'Black Out' T-shirts by Fri., Jan. 20.

'Black Out Cancer' and HS Senior Night is Friday Jan. 27

On January 27 Highlands Varsity Girls and Boys basketball plays Blue Ridge at home. This night will serve as two special occasions.

It is senior night with students recognized between the varsity girls and boys games.

In addition, it's "BLACK OUT AGAINST CANCER" night. Teams will be wearing their black away uniforms. Please wear black to show support for cancer awareness. Part of the game proceeds will be donated to cancer research.

To purchase a Black Out T-shirt email sizes to brett.lamb@macon.k12.nc.us. The cost is \$15 per shirt. Make checks out to the Highlands Booster Club, cash or you can venmo to @Brett-Lamb-45

T-shirt orders will be sent this Friday Jan 20th. Shirts will only be ordered with payment.

T-shirt orders will be sent this Friday Jan 20th. Shirts will only be ordered with payment.

Water damage in pump room temporarily closes Rec Park pool

Despite just announcing new pool hours for public swim, on Sunday, Jan. 15 the pool was closed.

"We had an interior water line blow apart sometime Sunday night in the pump room," said Recreation Director Lester Norris. "At this time we are not sure what all was damaged due to the water and electronics in the room."

Norris said dehumidifiers and air movers were set up and are running non-stop.

On Tuesday, Norris announced that the pool will be closed until further notice due to equipment failure and repairs.



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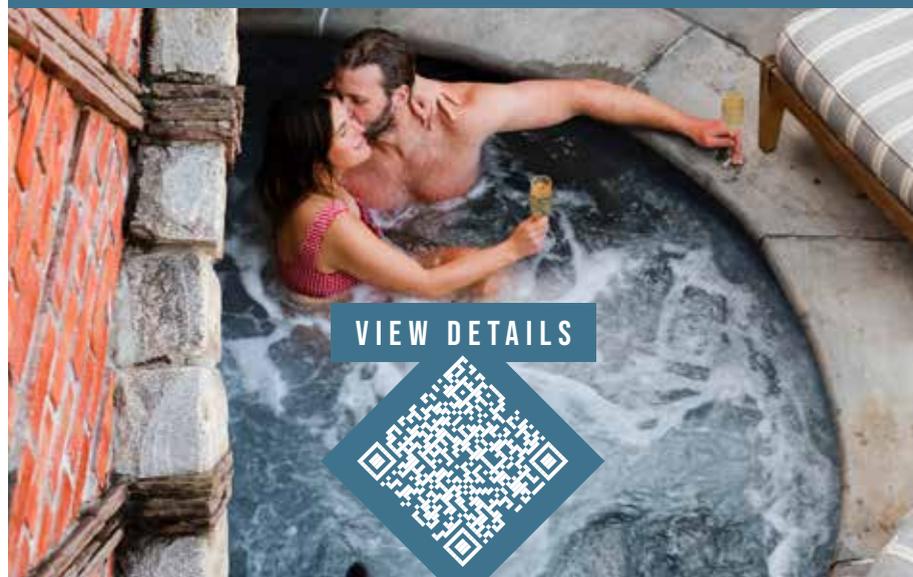
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• HIGHLANDS EVENTS •

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- **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 Methodist 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

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

• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

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. 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.

Sat. & Sun, Jan. 28-29

• Snow Fest in Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park. It's back and better! Bring friends and family for guaranteed winter fun (courtesy of snow blowers, if needed) in the park. A snowball toss, a merry-go-round, a snow slide, s'mores, snowga (a twist on yoga) and more.

Sat., Jan. 28

• A modern retelling of William Shakespeare's classic Much to do About Nothing. Since the 1930s, the legendary family-run Hotel Messina has been visited by artists, celebrities and royalty. When the current owner's daughter falls for a dashing young soldier, the hallways are ringing with the sound of wedding bells. However, not all the guests are in the mood for love, and a string of deceptions soon surround not only the young couple, but also the steadfastly single Beatrice and Benedick. 1 p.m. For tickets call 828-526-9047

Second Annual Snow Fest

Saturday, Jan. 28 & Sunday, Jan. 29 | 1 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park

It's back and even better! Bring friends and family for guaranteed winter fun (courtesy of snow blowers, if needed) in the park. A snowball toss, a snow tube merry-go-round, a snow slide, an ice-skating rink and more will be waiting. S'mores will be available for purchase and roasting, with proceeds going to the Highlands School Booster Club. Enjoy "snowga" (a twist on yoga), provided by Highlands Yoga. A DJ will provide music to add to the fun. [Watch our video](#) for more! Don't miss it.



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...STATION continued from page 1

crease in call volume as more and more people move to the mountains.

Gearhart said a big part of reducing response time is establishing a manned station 24-hours a day. The new station includes several sleeping quarters so firefighters can work in 24-hour shifts. The plan is to have six full-time paid firefighters in the near future - two per shift with three shifts. For now, the new station is home to 27 volunteers.

“An improved response time increases the chances of saving a life or a house by a lot,” said Gearhart. “Our goal is to have our trucks roll within 30 seconds of a call during the day, and a couple minutes at night. But we need guys here 24/7 to make that happen.”

He added that responding to calls from an unmanned station takes approx. 13 minutes from the time a call comes in, to when trucks are on the move. Having a force that can respond quicker

may also lower homeowners’ insurance premiums.

Fire tax proceeds which have been saved over the years have paid for the new firehouse and now finding the money to station firefighters on site at all times is still in the works, but Gearhart said the town is looking at multiple options and hopes to have them in place in 2023.

Also improving response times at the new station is the building’s centralized layout. Gearhart said now all their trucks, equipment, and gear are in one location.

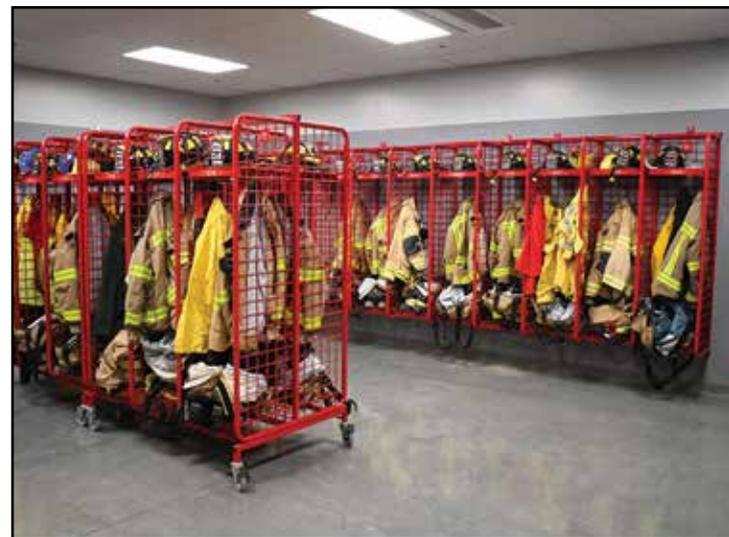
“Having all the apparatuses in one bay area instead of scattered all over the place like the old station is much easier,” said Gearhart. “Truck checks, maintenance, responding to calls, or any time we need to work on something, everything is right there. Before we had five different sections housing our trucks.”

The new facility includes a large bay area housing all of HFR’s trucks, a conference room, exercise room, rec room, five sleeping quarters, a kitchen, a room for gear, a rear covered deck, office space and yes, a fire pole.

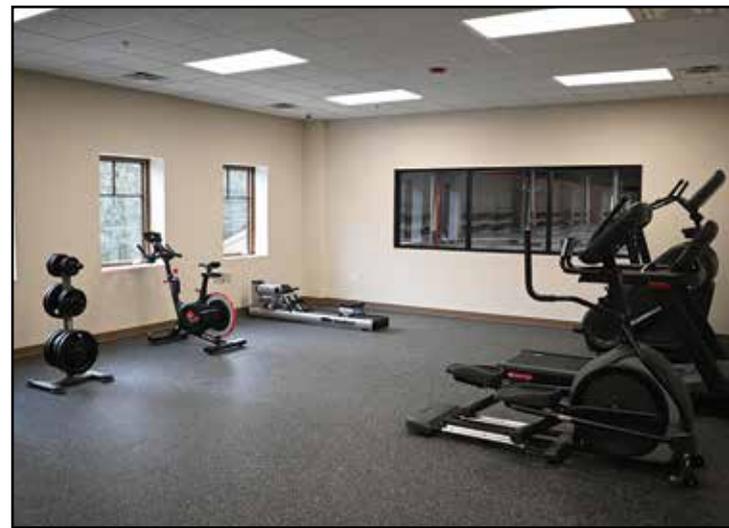
Gearhart said it’s safer for firefighters to slide down a pole, as opposed to running down two flights of stairs after waking up from a deep sleep.

When not responding to calls, those on duty will be responsible to keep the trucks in running order, maintain the hydrants, keep the entire complex clean and in order from top to bottom and to exercise in the fitness room at least 30 minutes per day.

Photos by Brian O’Shea
Plateau Daily News



Having all the apparatuses - including turnout gear - in one bay area instead of scattered all over the place like in the old station is much more efficient.



When on duty, firefighters are required to work out in the exercise room 30 minutes per day.



Firefighters will be cooking their own meals and can stock their lockers with the food they want to eat.



All the trucks are housed in one place rather than in five different areas.



Waking from a dead sleep and sliding down the pole is safer than navigating two flights of stairs.



...VALUES continued from page 7

Highlands City Business sale example December 2022

Current business

1912 Building - .07 acres - corner lot Sold

December 2022 for \$2,000,000

2022 Assessment \$ 889,270

2023 Assessment \$ 1,884,140

Increase of \$ 994,870 or 111.8%



ship and the highest sold parcel in the Highlands City with a price tag of \$5,500,000. At \$4,000,000, Highlands boasts the second highest sold property with the next highest parcel being sold in Millshoal for \$2,900,000.

In 2022, Highlands and Highlands City accounted for 263 of the overall 1,429 parcels sold with the lowest parcel being sold for \$16,500 within Highlands City and the highest parcel going for \$8,000,000. The next highest parcel sold in 2022 was in the Flats township for \$6,600,000 followed by a parcel sold for \$6,300,000 within the Franklin City township.

The Highlands area tax base increased significantly during the revaluation process.

In 2022, the Highlands Township reported 4,079 taxable parcels with a total taxable amount of \$1,739,040,720.

After the revaluation, the Highlands township had 4,130 taxable parcels -- an increase of 51 parcels. Despite only having 51 new parcels, the total taxable value for Highlands after the revaluation is \$2,893,508,640.

At an increase of 66.39 percent in taxable value -- which amounts to an increase of \$1,154,467,92, the Highlands Township saw the largest percent increase in Macon County.

Highlands City was second

highest with a percent increase of 65.24 percent or \$1,167,571,910 increase in taxable parcels.

But unlike Highlands which reported 51 new taxable parcels -- Highlands City actually had two fewer parcels -- reporting 3,013 for 2023 and 3,015 in 2022.

The taxable value in 2022 was \$1,789,593,180 and after the reappraisal process, the new taxable value is \$2,957,165,090.

In total, the Highlands Township and Highlands City represent a total taxable value of \$5,850,673,730, which at 46.3 percent is just under half of the county's total taxable property value.

The 58.58 percent increase in property values in Macon County is due to a number of factors.

Since the last revaluation, home prices across North Carolina have increased significantly and according to Braswell, resulted in some values in Macon County jumping by more than 100 percent.

The hike in property values could mean higher taxes for homeowners, but just how much will depend on the tax rate set by the Macon County Board of Commissioners during the annual budget process. The value of a property combined with the tax rate determines the property's tax bill, which is mailed in early July.

Based on Macon County's current tax rate of .40 percent of \$100 assessed value, a homeowner

with a property valued at \$100,000 today, would pay \$400 in annual taxes. After the revaluation process, if that same home was reappraised at \$200,000, the property owner's annual taxes would double -- resulting in an annual tax payment of \$800.

Each local government in

• See **VALUES** page 16

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...ZONING continued from page 1

“Tourist Homes” prior to the newly adopted amendments, Kerrigan, in renting a room, violated the Town’s UDO.

The Highlands UDO defines a Tourist Home as “a building or part thereof, not including a motel, hotel or whole house short term rental, where sleeping accommodations or lodging of not more than four (4) bedrooms are provided to guests paying compensation, where the owner, operator or manager also stays on the same parcel during any period of guest occupancy. This term includes bed and breakfast homes, inns, rooming or boarding houses or homestays.”

Once Kerrigan discovered she was in violation, she paid \$250 to apply for a Special Use Permit from the Zoning Board.

Mathis said since she satisfied all the requirements of a Tourist Home – the fact that her home is her primary residence, that she has ample parking spots (5) with only three required, one for the renter and two for the homeowner, and the fact that her house doesn’t need to be inspected by the health department since she isn’t serving food – the Zoning Board granted the SUP.

However, in doing so, numerous questions came to light.

In the beginning days of

AirBnB in California, renting a room in a house as a short-term rental with owners present was the norm. But in Highlands, that scenario is equivalent to a Tourist Home which requires a SUP.

Prior to owning the Business Spot and living in Highlands full-time, Kerrigan said she rented the home as a short-term rental through AirBnB and VRBO. Then, when she moved to Highlands full-time, she moved into the home and made the upper back area a loft apartment with its own entrance which she rented as a STR for several years.

Then for about two years, she rented it out as a long-term rental for folks working in Highlands.

When she decided to start renting the apartments as an STR again, with new STR rules now in place, she reached out to the Town to see what she needed to do to comply.

“When I mentioned that I lived full-time in the front of the house and therefore am not an absentee owner, they decided that the category for my case would be “Tourist Home,” she said.

Since the Zoning Board meeting, several questions arose for which Mathis is seeking advice.

Does the fact that Kerrigan had to get a SUP as a Tourist

Home instead of continuing as an STR which she has done off and on over the years ... both whole house and an apartment ... mean that anyone in R2 who has rented a room/apt. as an STR in the past have to now be reclassified as a Tourist Home which requires an SUP?

Do all on-site homeowners in R2 who have a cottage or garage apartment on their property that they have been renting out as an STR now have to be reclassified as a Tourist Home?

What if absentee homeowners have a cottage or garage apartment that they have been renting as an STR existing as of Sept. 15, 2022 (not the main house). Are they still classified as a permitted STR?

Does a homeowner (absentee or not) who rented their home prior to Sept. 15, 2022, but temporarily stopped due to COVID still qualify as a STR owner by today’s UDO standards?

Planning Director Mathis said these questions represent complex legal determinations that are tough to put in writing. He is said he will discuss with Town Manager Josh Ward as well as legal counsel and respond once a correct ruling is determined.

- Kim Lewicki

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• HS SPORTS •

Highlands girls varsity basketball team hosted Summit on Thursday, Jan. 12, and walked away with a solid victory ending with a final of 51-28

Right: Highlands B Bryson brings the ball down court for the Lady Highlanders.



By Mason Stoltzfus,
Plateau Daily News

...SWIM continued from page 1

style relay, McRae in the 200 Individual Medley, Garner in the 100 free, McKim in the 100 breaststroke all won their events. Garner and McRae each scored 23.5 pts. McKim brought home 22.5 pts.

Hughes and Wilson both had a 3rd and 4th place finish -- Hughes in the 100 and 50 free, Wilson in the 50 free and the

100 butterfly.

With the relays Hughes scored 18.5 pts, and Wilson 11. Mendoza swam well in the 100 backstroke (4th), and the 50 free, garnering 5 pts.

The next meet for the team is scheduled for Friday, January 20 at Rabun Gap Nagoochee School at 5 pm.

Right: Highlands School Swim & Dive Team from left are Tate Wilson, Jesus Mendoza, Conner Hughes, Paulo McRae, Finneaus Garner, Aniah McKim, and Coach Steve Hott.



Photos by Brian O'Shea, Plateau Daily News



Jesus Mendoza swimming the backstroke.



Tate Wilson competes in a butterfly heat in Franklin.



Paulo McRae swimming freestyle.



Finneaus Garner swimming freestyle.



Conner Hughes makes good time swimming freestyle in Franklin.



Aniah McKim competes at a meet in Franklin on Saturday.

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...VALUES continued from page 13

Sales by Township

2021 Sales				2022 Sales				
Township	Parcels sold	Highest	Lowest	Township	Increase or Decrease %	Parcels Sold	Highest	Lowest
Burningtown	41	650,000	14,000	Burningtown	5%	39	\$740,000	\$4,500
Cartoogechaye	138	825,000	6,000	Cartoogechaye	24%	105	768,000	8,000
Cowee	154	1,496,500	4,000	Cowee	27%	113	1,000,000	4,000
Elijay	108	1,275,000	5,000	Elijay	7%	116	1,200,000	5,500
Flats	51	1,290,000	30,000	Flats	5%	54	6,600,000	20,000
Franklin	323	1,173,000	5,000	Franklin	10.5%	289	1,009,000	5,000
Franklin City	123	950,000	10,000	Franklin City	14%	106	6,300,000	17,000
Highlands	241	4,000,000	5,000	Highlands	39.5%	146	3,200,000	17,500
Highlands City	188	5,500,000	20,000	Highlands City	38%	117	8,000,000	16,500
Millshoal	154	2,900,000	6,000	Millshoal	23%	118	750,000	4,000
Nantahala	112	1,250,000	7,500	Nantahala	12%	99	2,000,000	10,000
Smithbridge	171	1,650,000	3,000	Smithbridge	15%	146	1,300,000	7,000
Sugarfork	52	1,250,000	7,000	Sugarfork	40%	31	1,264,500	15,000
Total Qualified Sales	1856			Total Qualified Sales	20%	1479		

• BIZ/ORG NEWS •



Rotarians learn about bats

At the meeting held on January 10, Rotary Club of Highlands welcomed Dr. Rada Petric. Dr. Petric presented a wonderful presentation on "Bats in your Backyard" and spoke on two projects currently under way - the BatPak Project and the Bat and Noise project. Dr. Petric was presented at the meeting by Rotary host, Charlotte Muir.

TAXABLE TOTALS BY TOWNSHIP

TOWNSHIP	2022		2023		VALUE INCREASE	PERCENT INCREASE
	PARCEL COUNT	TOTAL TAXABLE	PARCEL COUNT	TOTAL TAXABLE		
BURINGTOWN	1,315	\$143,020,570	1,379	\$221,525,650	\$78,505,080	54.89%
CARTOOGECHAYE	3,213	\$390,052,700	3,218	\$605,200,470	\$215,147,770	55.16%
COWEE	3,888	\$349,602,520	3,920	\$550,209,280	\$200,606,760	57.38%
ELIJAY	3,330	\$309,419,400	3,340	\$505,330,890	\$195,911,490	63.32%
FLATS	1,215	\$262,653,750	1,245	\$383,599,370	\$120,945,620	46.05%
FRANKLN	8,625	\$998,091,200	8,642	\$1,571,523,710	\$573,432,510	57.45%
FRANKLIN CITY	2,733	\$666,166,730	2,743	\$905,463,150	\$239,296,420	35.92%
HIGHLANDS	4,079	\$1,739,040,720	4,130	\$2,893,508,640	\$1,154,467,920	66.39%
HIGHLANDS CITY	3,015	\$1,789,593,180	3,013	\$2,957,165,090	\$1,167,571,910	65.24%
MILLSHOAL	3,757	\$335,215,800	3,781	\$534,999,550	\$199,783,750	59.60%
NANTAHALA	2,573	\$311,798,005	2,601	\$477,408,780	\$165,610,775	53.11%
SMITHBRIDGE	4,515	\$479,104,060	4,542	\$734,484,750	\$255,380,690	53.30%
SUGARFORK	1,569	\$194,374,310	1,577	\$295,853,900	\$101,479,590	52.21%
TOTALS	43,827	7,968,132,945	44,131	12,636,273,230	\$4,668,140,285	58.58%

the state is required to calculate a revenue-neutral tax rate based on the total value of properties within the jurisdiction. But calculating the rate is not the same as adopting the rate. That decision is up to elected officials.

North Carolina General Statute mandates counties produce a revenue-neutral budget, which is defined as the tax rate estimated to produce revenue for the next fiscal year equal to the revenue that would have been produced by the current

tax rate if no revaluation had occurred. However, the rate can account for a few growth factors.

As it stands, with a property valuation of around \$8 billion and a property tax rate of 40 cents per \$100 valuation, Macon County's total property tax revenue is around \$32 million.

With the revaluation property valuation of \$12.6 billion in assessed value, the current tax rate of 40 cents per \$100 valuation would produce a total tax revenue of \$50.4 million. Therefore, to

produce a revenue neutral budget, Macon County will have to reduce the county's tax rate.

State law requires the revenue-neutral tax rate be stated in the annual budget message. During the budget planning process, county commissioners could elect to lower the tax rate, which won't change the new revaluation, but could lower the overall tax bill. Jackson County lowered their tax rate following their last reappraisal. If Macon County decided to lower the tax rate from .40 to

Rotary Asst. Gov. visits Rotary Club of Highlands

At the meeting held on January 10, Rotary Club of Highlands welcomed Rotary District 7670 Assistant Governor, Area 2, Bill Swift. Mr. Swift presented an update on possible membership modules available to encourage and increase club membership



Asst. Governor Bill Swift

.37, the home would still have a new appraised value of \$200,000, however combined with the new tax rate, the property owner would only have to pay \$740 versus \$800 at .40.

County leaders could reduce the property tax rate while not reducing services being provided or without changing the overall county's budget because before the revaluation, the county had about \$8 billion in taxable property values and now the county will be looking at \$12 billion in taxable values.

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• BUSINESS / ORGANIZATION NEWS •



Marci Henderson, Alice Canup, Susan Andres, Martha Wright, Paula McDonald, Sarah Wallin, Price Connor, Patty Hutchins, and Becky Byard.

P.E.O. celebrates Founders' Day

January 21st marks 154th year of the founding of P.E.O., an organization formed to strengthen the bond of women and advocate for women who do not have opportunities to expand their education. It was in 1869 that seven women met at Iowa Wesleyan University and formed the Philanthropic Educational Organization (P.E.O.) that now reaches around the globe and has impacted the lives of millions of women.

P.E.O. Sisterhood is a nonprofit organization that has helped more 119,000 women pursue their educational goals and provided over \$389 million in educational assistance. P.E.O.'s mission is to celebrate the advancement of women, educate women through scholarships, grants, awards, loans and stewardship of Cottey College and motivate women to achieve their highest aspirations.

In North Carolina alone, P.E.O. has 99 chapters and the Cashiers-Highlands Chapter continues to grow. Three new members, Price Connor, Martha Wright, and Trisha Foor were recently inducted into the local

chapter and at least three more new members will be inducted in the coming months. Membership is open to any women dedicated to encouraging and supporting women through chapter life and providing educational opportunities for women all over the world.

Women over the age of 18 are eligible to be considered for P.E.O. membership. Members meet to support each other, for fellowship and for the common and uniting purpose of assisting women with their educational goals. Members participate in philanthropic outreach to positively impact women's lives in their community, state/province and worldwide, help to provide life-changing educational opportunities for women, are involved in opportunities for personal growth and advanced leadership skills, share in fun and friendship with wonderful and diverse women, and become part of a Sisterhood, beyond their own chapter, which provides loving concern and support to all members.

The Cashier-Highlands P.E.O. Chapter is led by President Paula McDonald and meets the second Monday of each month. Guests are welcome and any woman wanting

more information should contact Paula McDonald at 706-372-3004 or 828-482-0315.

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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

Some Things to Know About Pope Benedict XVI

Fr. Jason Barone
Our Lady of the Mountains
Catholic Church

As the passing of Pope Benedict XVI dominated global ecclesial news the past few weeks, this occasion warrants a reflection of his life.

Joseph Ratzinger was born to a devout Catholic family in Bavaria on Holy Saturday in 1927 as one of three children. His father, Joseph Sr., was a police officer and vociferous in his criticisms of the Nazi regime.

While young Joseph was precocious and quickly manifested intellectual brilliance, his studies would be stymied by the Second World War. By the end of the war, he was conscripted and manned an unarmed anti-aircraft gun as the Germans exhausted their ammunition. He spent a few months as a POW under the American victors and was soon released.

Joseph and his brother, Georg, both entered seminary that same year and were ordained together six years later in 1951. Joseph would continue his studies soon receiving a doctorate focusing on the work of St. Augustine. He would then pursue an academic career as a priest working as a professor at several universities for the next 15 years.

During the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger joined his cardinal archbishop as one of the periti, or theological experts. So, while not a voting member of the Council, he nonetheless advised his bishop and participated in important theological committees. Despite later having the reputation of a conservative or traditionalist, the young Father Ratzinger played a key role on the reformist side of the Council.

While Ratzinger would always maintain that his theological views remained consistent, the dramatic changes seen in the late '60s, both inside and outside the Catholic Church, would give him the reputation of a conservative as he refused to push an ecclesiastical agenda well beyond what the Council actually prescribed.

Following Vatican II, Ratzinger continued his professorships and academic work until he was named the archbishop of Munich and Freising, as well as a cardinal, in 1977 by Pope Paul VI. This new responsibility, which marked a dramatic shift in his life, continued until a new pope, John Paul II, was elected and looking for a new prefect or head at the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in 1982. For nearly a quarter century Ratzinger helmed one of the most important offices in the Church ensuring doctrinal fidelity. In other words, it was his job to make sure the message

• See SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING page 19

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

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Wednesday night Dinner and Service 5:30

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Bible Study & Dinner, 6pm, call for details.

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Pastor Brent Metcalf • 743-5470
Sun. 10:45am. S.S. 9:30am. Wed. 6pm supper and teaching.
Tues. Guys study 8am. Gals 10am.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHURCH

283 Spring Street - Sunday Service: 10:30 a.m.
Testimony meeting: 3rd Wednesday at 5:30 p.m.

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. W. Bentley Manning, Rector • 526-2968
5th and Main streets • www.incarnationwnc.org
Sunday Services Chapel: Rite I spoken, 8a. Rite II with Choir in
Sanctuary 10:30a; Morning Prayer Mon-Thurs 8:30a 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; 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

(Off Franklin/Highlands Rd)
Sunday School: 10 am. Worship Service: 11 am

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www.gracecashiers.com • Pastor Steve Doerter 743-9814
Services: Sundays 10am - Wed. - 7pm; Dinner - Wed. 6pm

HAMBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Hwy 107N. • Glenville, NC • 743-2729 • Nathan Johnson
Sunday: School 9:45a. Worship 11a & 7p. Bible Study 6p
Wed. Kidsquest 6p.; Worship 7p.

HIGHLANDS ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Randy Reed, Pastor 828-421-9172 • 165 S. Sixth Street
Wed. Bible Study: 6 p.m.; Sundays: Worship: 11

HIGHLANDS CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Dan Robinson • 11339 Buck Creek Road
The Highlands Central Baptist Church is temporarily
sharing the facilities of the Shortoff Baptist Church.
Sunday Worship is at 9a. Wednesday Worship is 6:30p

HIGHLANDS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Pastor Zane Talley

Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11. Choir: 6 p.m.
Wed: Bible Study and Youth Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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Franklin • 828-634-1312 • mountainsynagoguewnc.com.
Services: 1st /Fri. and 3rd Sat.

and Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur.

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743-2583 • Independent Bible Church
Sun: 10:30 a.m. at Big Ridge Baptist Church.
4224 Big Ridge Road (4.5 miles from NC 107)
Wed: Bible Study 6:30 p.m.; Youth Group 6 p.m.

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Rev. Fr. Jason K. Barone - 526-2418
Tues. - 9:30am Latin; Thurs. - 9:30am English; Sun. - 11am English

SCALY MOUNTAIN BAPTIST CHURCH

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.

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

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

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WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers
Sunday School: 10 am. Worship Service: 11 am

• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Jan. 5. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a summons/citation, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or those of public officials have been used.

Jan. 5

• At 4:54 p.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident on US 64 east at Foreman Road.

Jan. 6

• At 10:26 p.m., officers responded to a 1-vehicle accident on US 64 east at Sherwood Forest.

Jan. 13

• At 4:20 p.m. officers responded to a 3-vehicle accident on US 64 east and Heatherwood Lane

• At 7:10 p.m., officers responded to a 1-vehicle accident on US 64 west at Mirror Lake Road.

• At 11:30 p.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident at Chowan and Dogwood drives.

Jan. 14

• At 1 p.m., officers responded to a 1-vehicle accident at Billy Cabin and Mirror Lake roads.

• At 5:15 p.m., officers responded to a 1-vehicle accident on Satulah Ridge and Lucas Lane.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Jan. 10

Jan. 10

• At 10:30 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Half

...SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING from page 18

Jesus gave to the Apostles was intact and protected within the Church.

As the prefect of CDF, Cardinal Ratzinger's academic career had to adapt. He could no longer enjoy the luxury of writing books; however, his constant involvement in the intellectual life of the Church through documents, articles, and talks nonetheless made a lasting mark.

Despite requesting several times to retire, Pope John Paul, perhaps with a premonition of what would...or should...happen, refused his request until his death in 2005 when, at the age of 78, Joseph would be elected to don a new cassock and a new name.

During his seven years as Pope, Bene-

dixt reigned in the same manner in which he spoke: softly. He was a firm believer that truth itself, if proclaimed faithfully and effectively, would win over hearts and minds. His chief concerns as Pope were promoting the inerrancy of Scripture and preserving the Church's liturgical patrimony.

Jan. 12

• At 1:18 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Skyline Lodge Road.

• At 7:01 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance on Oak Street.

Jan. 13

• At 4:38 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on N. 4th Street.

• At 9:13 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Main Street.

• At 4:13 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on N. 4th Street.

• At 6:07 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on Buck Creek Road.

• At 6:47 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on Webbmont Road.

• At 6:23 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on USA US 64 east.

• At 7:23 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a location on NC 106.

Jan. 14

• At 10:20 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Morewood Road.

• At 1:02 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Edwards Creek Road.

Perhaps what Benedict will be best known for, however, is his abdication in February 2013. This act sent shock waves around the world as it was the first papal resignation since before the printing press was invented. While the appearances of two men wearing white cassocks at the Vatican suggested two popes currently living, in reality Pope Benedict was no longer pope, but pope emeritus.

• BIZ/ORG NEWS •



Vecinos spearheads one-stop services hub for low income WNC residents

Vecinos, a free and charitable clinic providing bilingual primary and behavioral health care in western North Carolina, is leading a \$6.6 million effort to better serve the region's uninsured and low-income residents by bringing multiple health and social services under one roof.

\$6.6 million Community Health Hub will put health care, other services under one roof

Effort inspired by unmet needs especially noted by community outreach during pandemic

Franklin facility will improve access to services and expand providers' capacity to serve

Last June, the clinic purchased a 15,000-square-foot building near downtown Franklin that will become the Community Health Hub, home to medical, dental, and behavioral health care, domestic violence counseling, legal services, and community advocacy – all offered on a bilingual basis. Pictured at the top of the article is the future Community Health Hub building in Franklin.

"The uninsured and low-income population in western North Carolina, in particular the Spanish-speaking population, faces significant barriers to accessing health care," said Marianne Martinez, Vecinos' executive director. "The Community Health Hub will allow our neighbors to conveniently receive coordinated and streamlined, high-quality services for free in their language."

Vecinos' focus since its founding in 2004 has been on serving farmworkers, but the clinic increased its community outreach in 2020 in response to COVID-related health care needs. The experience led Vecinos to change its charter to expand its mis-

sion and inspired the Community Health Hub concept.

In addition to Vecinos, named for the Spanish word for "neighbors," coalition partners utilizing the Community Health Hub will include:

Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic, which will continue providing dental care at its clinic in Cashiers and add four dental operatories at the Franklin location

30th Judicial District Domestic Violence-Sexual Assault Alliance in Waynesville

El Centro Comunitario of Macon County, a Hispanic community advocacy group

Asheville-based Pisgah Legal Services, which provides legal services to low-income people

Dogwood Health Trust in Asheville provided a temporary bridge loan to finance the cost of the building purchase. The coalition launched a \$6.6 million capital campaign to repay the loan and fund required renovations to the facility. The projected opening date for the Community Health Hub is early 2024.

Vecinos and Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic are members of the North Carolina Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (NCAFFCC), a network of 72 clinics offering high-quality primary, specialty and behavioral health care, pharmacy, and other services to uninsured and underserved residents at little or no cost to patients.

Vecinos will keep its current clinic and office location on the campus of Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, where it saw 732 patients in 2021, and will be able to serve an additional 2,000 patients a year once the Community Health Hub is fully operational.

Ryan M. Bears

Branch Leader

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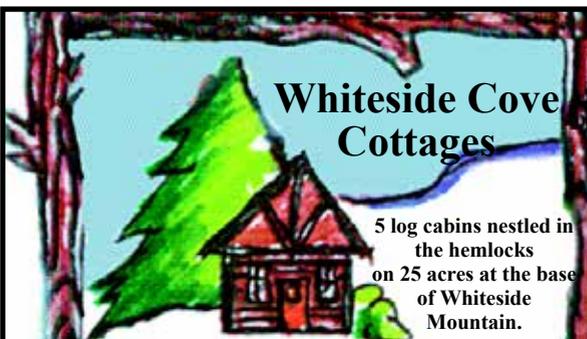
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• See CLASSIFIEDS page 22

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• CLASSIFIEDS •

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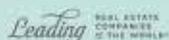


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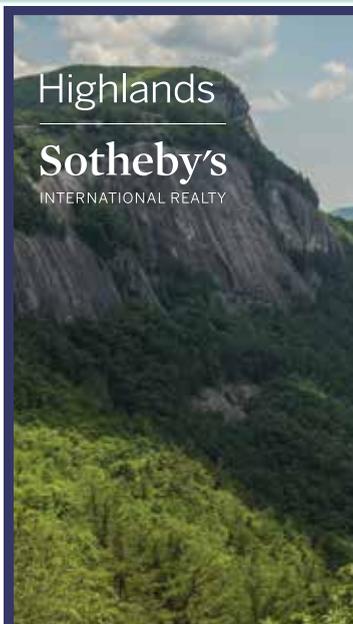



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