

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., April 18, 2024

FY '24-'25 budget - good news and bad

By Kim Lewicki

The town stays on top of its budgetary needs year-to-year, even years in advance, so there weren't too many surprises at the first budget workshop for FY '24-

'25 Thursday, April 11, but still ideas about saving and spending money were discussed at length.

All the projects considered critical during the March retreat are being funded through various

'23-'24 fund balances and ARPA funding, but fund balances are depleting at an alarming rate – something frowned upon by the Local Government Commission – and

• See **BUDGET** page 22

Last week's severe weather left its mark on Highlands

By Kim Lewicki

Warnings were issued about severe weather headed to the area late last week and they weren't for naught.

Gusts of wind that clocked in at 25 mph a little after midnight Thursday, April 11, took down trees, power lines and in at least one case, the roof of a structure.

Between 11:19 p.m. Thursday, April 11 and 5 p.m., Friday, April 12 Highlands Fire & Rescue responded to five calls regarding downed trees, downed power lines, dislodged roofs and a tree on a roof.

Power went out at 11:30 p.m. Thursday and stayed out for seven hours in downtown Highlands

• See **WEATHER** page 19



This Jeep was snared by a downed tree and power lines on Main Street across from Wright Square Thursday night. - Photo by Roger Lee Wilson



One of the roofs on Main Street Nursery blew off and landed at the gas station next door and knocked down power lines. - Photo by Kim Lewicki

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BBS of WNC and HF&R to teach health and fire safety

By Brittney Lofthouse

In a bid to bridge the gap between communities and first responders, Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) of Western North Carolina has teamed up with the Highlands Fire Department to launch a unique educational program. The partnership aims to break down stereotypes, build relationships, and provide valuable insights into the roles of firefighters, EMTs, police officers, and more.

The BBBS Program Director for Cashiers & Highlands, Jackson, Macon, Clay, Graham, Cherokee, Qualla Boundary, Danielle Hernandez, a strong advocate for community engagement and one of the driving forces behind the initiative, expressed her enthusiasm for the project.

"I'm a strong believer in connecting our communities with first-responders, doing away with stigma and building relationships. What better way to connect the two than through a learning experience. Plus, the firehouse is really cool, too."

The curriculum for the pro-

gram is being developed by the HF&R and will focus on topics such as what to expect when calling 911, basic fire safety, how to "stop the bleed" in emergencies, recognizing signs of a stroke, and more. The sessions will be interactive, drawing on the team's interactions with the public and their passion for educating and preparing the community.

"This program is free, and while multiple sessions will be available, space is limited to 15 participants for each session on a first-come, first-served basis," said Hernandez. "Participants have the option to attend one session or multiple sessions based on their interest and availability."

The first session is scheduled for Wed., May 8th, with future sessions to be announced based on the availability of the HF&R staff and community members.

For more information and updates, community members are encouraged to follow BBBS of WNC and the HF&R on social media.

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Comint up tonight and ... STRs!

On Thursday, April 18, the Town Board will hold its monthly meeting and workshop. Both sessions will be at the Highlands Recreation Center since the Highlands Community Building continues to be under renovation. That renovation project is going well, and I anticipate the meetings returning to the community center around June or July.

The workshop will begin at 6 p.m., followed by the business meeting at 7 p.m. At the workshop, the board will review several items, including the policy for holding events on recreation and town property. Specifically, an out-of-town company wants to hold a pickleball tournament at our recreation center courts. The board will discuss the pros and cons of such a plan. Another discussion will be about ice skating costs and fees.

The top item on the business meeting agenda will be a public hearing on a conditional zoning request from Our Lady of



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

the Mountains Catholic Church. This hearing was scheduled last month but was postponed due to a procedural problem that our town staff discovered before that March meeting.

The board will also review several changes to the UDO concerning the zoning and planning board's terms. They will also examine noise ordinance changes to the code.

The Highlands Chamber of Commerce will present several agenda items. These include an update on the housing study, improvements to the dog park, and the formation of a proposed chamber business committee.

The board will also hold a closed session concerning the status of the lawsuit against the town brought by the Save Highlands group. All meeting proceedings except for the close session can be accessed at a YouTube link on the town website.

Last week my article concerning Hochatown brought me feedback. Some folks thought I was advocating such a development for the Highlands area. Quite the contrary, I am concerned that such a plan could pop up almost anywhere in Western Carolina, especially places with no zoning restrictions. Fortunately, Highlands has zoning restrictions.

One person sent me an article about STR development in another state. Instead of developing an entire town, folks there are just developing STR neighborhoods. In other words, all houses in the development are short-term rentals. With our ordinance concerning short-term rentals, that concept could not be done in the town limits. Still, in the surrounding township, it certainly could be done. In fact, similar concepts, albeit on a small scale, are already underway.

One person called me nuts for writing the article. They went on to say that I am in cahoots with the chamber in promoting more and more tourists at the expense of ignoring the needs of local people. I was accused of destroying Highlands, a charge that I have heard before. At least the person didn't call for me to be tarred and feathered as some have in the past.





• See MAYOR page 11

• HIC'S VIEW •



"And this is our bad loan collection department.
After a few polite sessions with Rick, they always pay."

• WEATHER •

Thu, 18-Apr	Fri, 19-Apr	Sat, 20-Apr	Sun, 21-Apr
 77°F 49°F	 72°F 51°F	 69°F 44°F	 56°F 42°F
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Letter Policy:

There is a 500-word limit. We reserve the right to reject or edit letters-to-the-editor. No anonymous letters will be accepted. Views expressed are not necessarily those of Highlands Newspaper.

Obituary Policy:

We do not charge for obituaries at this time, but we reserve the right to edit as needed for space.

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• INVESTING AT 4,118 Ft. •

The New Deal

After the Great Depression, FDR enacted the New Deal as a way of stimulating our country's economic system. The policy came with safeguards and constraints in the banking industry and birthed new programs like the SSA and the WPA. Another program, the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) benefitted our area greatly. It was said The New Deal included the three Rs: Relief, Recovery and Reform.

In today's real estate, we're experiencing a new deal or sorts, too. There has been a lot in the headlines lately about the NAR (National Association of Realtors) settlement. Let's face it, \$418 million is newsworthy in any industry. Along with media coverage comes misinformation. Not necessarily fake news but close.

While the Sitzer-Burnett case has to do with commissions, it has absolutely nothing to do with The Real Estate Commission, yet it receives calls daily. For questions or comments call NAR or search the internet for statements from NAR or .gov sites having to do with this case.

Here are some of the facts: The Sitzer-Burnett case is a class action law suit filed in the Missouri Federal Courts against NAR, Anywhere,* Berkshire Hathaway Home Services, Keller-Williams and ReMax. *Anywhere Real Estate is a parent company of Better Homes & Gardens Real Estate, Century 21, Coldwell Banker, ERA and Corcoran Real Estate.

The suit claimed the real estate commission rates were too high and buyer's representatives were being paid too much, and the NAR Code of Ethics and MLS handbook lead to inflated commission rates.

Even President Biden was fed misinformation which prompted him to say on March, 20th, "Last week, the National Association of Realtors agreed for the first time that Americans can negotiate lower commissions when they buy or sell their home. On a typical home purchase, that alone could save folks an average of \$10,000. ..." FALSE.

From the NAR website, "NAR does NOT set commissions. Commissions are and will remain negotiable between Realtors and their clients. Housing prices are dictated by market forces, things beyond Realtor member's control.

The proposed settlement will resolve any claims against Realtors whose residential transactions are less than two



Jeannie Chambers
Chambers Realty
& Vacation Rentals

million. It also preserves compensation for consumers looking to buy or sell as long as any offer of compensation is NOT shown in the MLS.

I attended a Zoom meeting with over 1,000 other Brokers-in-Charge last week presented by the NC Association of Realtors, and one of the interesting things I learned is that NC is one of only 18 states that already have in place at least one of the items listed in the proposed settlement: that buyer agency

agreements must be in writing. The change that goes into effect July, 2024 is that buyer agency agreements must be signed before showing the property instead of before an offer is being made. These changes have been in effect for 20 years if you live in one of the 18 states; the state chapters of the NAR had the foresight to make changes when buyer agency first became "a thing."

Arkansas, Alaska, Georgia, Idaho, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin. In any event, agency is supposed to be discussed before showing property.

Here are three quotes from NAR that everyone should know.

"NAR continues to deny any wrongdoing and maintains that cooperative compensation is in the best interest of consumers."

"NAR exists to serve our members and consumers, and while the settlement comes at a significant cost, we believe the benefits it will provide to our industry are worth that cost."

"NAR is focused firmly on the future and on leading this industry forward. We are committed to innovation and defining the next steps that will allow us to continue providing unmatched value to members and American consumers."

The commission problem is like trying to decide which comes first, the chicken or the egg. The listing price of a home comes from the comparable sales of the area, supply and demand, and of course, location, location, location.

The sales commission is between the seller and the listing broker. The sales price determines the commission. The buyer pays the sales price and that price is agreed by both buyer and seller. So, yes, the seller pays the commission, but with funds provided by the buyer. The middle men and

• See INVESTING page 10

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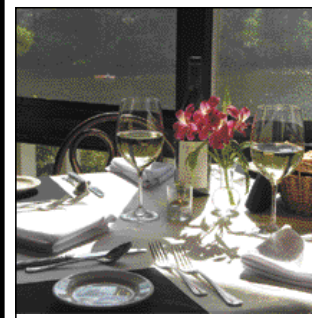
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• OBITUARIES •

Carolyn Louise Dendy Carpenter

Carolyn Louise Dendy Carpenter of Highlands passed away April 12, 2024. She was born January 16, 1950, in Macon County to the late Rev. Earl Dendy and Gladys McCall Dendy.

Carolyn worked as a secretary in a dental office. Carolyn loved her church, singing gospel music with the Dendy Sisters and the Dendy family. She also loved her piano and started singing at a young age. Her music was her ministry to God. Her other love was for all animals. She also loved flowers of all kinds. Carolyn was a member of Goldmine Baptist Church and a devoted servant of the Lord.

Carolyn is survived by her husband of 30 years, John (Tommy) Carpenter; stepdaughters, Carey Spurgeon (Chris) of Hoschton, GA. and Tiffani Davis (Jimmy Lee) of Camarillo, CA.; one stepson, Casey Carpenter of Highlands, NC; one sister, Dale Roper of Franklin, NC, and two brothers, Jack Dendy (Carolyn) and Mack Dendy of Hayesville, NC. She is also survived by 10 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren and a number of nieces and nephews.

In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by one brother, Olan Dendy and one sister, Gale Dendy Alford.

A funeral service will be held at 2pm on Tuesday April



16, at Goldmine Baptist Church with the Rev. Gary McDaniel and Rev. Gene Hawkins officiating. Burial will follow at Mount Moriah Cemetery. Visitation will be from 6-8pm on Monday April 15, at Bryant Grant Funeral Home, Franklin, NC, Pallbearers will be Chris Spurgeon, Larry Dendy, Ben Cotton, Timothy Crabtree, John McCall, Richie Jones, Gunnar Williams and James Burrell.

The family request in lieu of flowers that memorial donations be made to the Mount Moriah Cemetery, 242 Dendy Orchard Road, Highlands, NC 28741 or to the Appalachian Animal Rescue, 851 Lake Emory Road, Franklin, NC 28734.

Online condolences can be left at www.bryantgrantfuneralhome.com. Bryant-Grant Funeral Home & Crematory is honored to serve the Carpenter family.

• See OBITUARIES page 14

• LETTER •

Be warned: He really is the world's most dangerous man

Dear Editor:

"How is it possible for Americans to cheer and celebrate the most transparent fraud, the most outrageous liar, most straight-tacket-ready psycho ever visited on the body politic (?)" asks Hal Crowther, journalist and essayist. You may write us off as suffering "Trump Derangement Syndrome" but it's more likely someone neglected the burnt offering to the god of common sense.

What can I say about Donald Trump that has not been said ad nauseam? "His tweets and his lying, he has no principles, none, Donald is cruel," said the late Maryanne Trump Barry, his older sister. Mary Trump (his niece) refers to her uncle as "the world's most dangerous man."

Have we not heard enough from people who worked in the Trump Administration and those associated with him: Mark Esper, Rex Tillerson, William Barr, John Kelly, Mark Milley, John Bolton (the list is virtually endless); the descriptions of Trump relentless: "a phony, a fraud, a moron, contemptuous of democratic institutions, the rule of law, an existential threat to democracy, a consummate narcissist" --- and the ever-present underlying truth --- "unfit to be President of the United States."

If these eyewitnesses cannot convince you of Trump's unsuitability, I certainly can't. With the possible exception of his niece and ghostwriter, these warnings came from conservatives, Republicans, individuals ordinarily on Trump's side of the political divide.

• See LETTERS page 10

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A thrill or two

These books are a shift from my typical reading fare, as I more often choose British mysteries—cozies and police procedurals. From time to time, I branch out to titles I find reviewed in the local paper or the “Wall Street Journal,” or who knows where. These two thrillers were a pleasant change of pace.



Kathy Manos Penn

ine what would have happened if he'd been found in time to save his life. With someone like Mae working her magic, we might never have known he overdosed.

If you're looking for a book to keep you up late at night, a book to keep you guessing until the end, this one's a keeper.

The Last Mona Lisa by Jonathan Santlofer

After reading a review of the author's latest book, “The Lost Van Gogh,” I went in search of his first thriller. The storyline is based on the real-life theft that occurred in 1911. The Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre and recovered two years later when the thief tried to sell it. Since then, some have believed that what hangs today in the Louvre is a copy.

This account of the heist shifts between what led to Vincent Peruggia's 1911 theft of the famous painting and his fictional great-grandson's 2019 search for his story. Why did Vincent steal the painting? Was it greed? Was it need? We discover his circumstances and motivation when his great-grandson Luke Perrone visits the Laurentian Library in Florence to view what may be Vincent's journal.

As a university art professor and artist, Luke has been trying for years to learn more about his great-grandfather. Day after day, Luke reads a journal allegedly written when Vincent was in prison. Mix in a rogue employee of INTERPOL's Art Theft Division and a beautiful blonde from New York City, and you have an intriguing thriller.

Who is tracking Luke's every move? Is it INTERPOL? Is it the blonde? Is it someone else? Let's just say that he is a person of interest to many. Once again, a book kept me up late too many nights in a row. I had to know how the loose ends tied together and whether a happy ending was in the cards. You'll have to read the book to find out. Me? I'm off to put “The Lost Van Gogh” on hold at the library and join Luke in yet another art mystery.

•Award-winning author and two-time Georgia Author of the Year nominee Kathy Manos Penn is a Georgia resident. Find her cozy mysteries at Franklin Office Supply & Gifts, and on Amazon. Contact her at inkpenn119@gmail.com, and follow her on Facebook, www.facebook.com/KathyManosPennAuthor/.

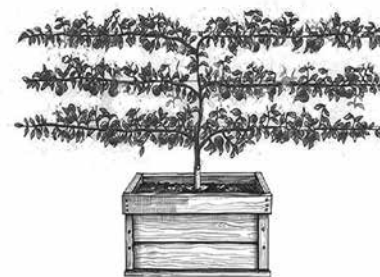
Everybody Knows by Jordan Harper

Harper's latest novel is billed as a murder thriller and praised by the likes of authors Michael Connelly, Megan Abbott, and S. A. Cosby.

Set in Los Angeles, its protagonist is a black bag publicist. I had no idea what that was until I read this book, but it makes sense that people like her exist. I have no doubt that crisis PR firms are in the business of making the messes of the rich and powerful disappear. With enough money and enough power, the rich and famous can have their debauchery and depravity managed and whitewashed.

As I read of Mae Pruett's work for the firm, I could easily put celebrity names to some of the scenarios she handles. Sometimes, real life situations are referenced, like the discovery of John Belushi dead of an overdose. It only takes a small leap to imag-

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...LETTER continued from page 7

The things that portray Trump unfit and absurdly obvious to anyone paying for office are conspicuously transparent even marginal attention. In addition to his

criminal activities, he is often ridiculous, repulsive, crude, infantile and indisputably unhinged from reality.

Donald Trump lacks any beliefs be-

yond self-glorification. I say that as a life-long conservative and an almost lifelong Republican. How the Grand Old Party, millions of seemingly intelligent men and women got lured into the orbit of this shameless conman may forever remain the unsolved mystery of the ages.

History reveals that Germany's Hitler was so thoroughly untruthful that he finally could no longer recognize the difference between lies and truth. So it is with Trump and despite that handicap, he managed to seduce a large swath of our populace into his swamp of lies, distortions and half truths.

Donald Trump faces nearly 100 felony indictments and is the only president in history to ignite an armed and deadly assault on his own Capitol in an attempt to overturn an election he knew he'd lost. Many Americans remain deafeningly silent while Trump supporters rain death threats on judges, prosecutors, court staff, states attorneys general (and their families), anyone who endeavors to hold the former president accountable. This is the real life 21st Century threat of fascism and tyranny.

Will the American people wake up in time to save us from ourselves, in time to rebuild and strengthen the foundations upon which America was conceived and established, in time to save our Republic and our democratic form of government from Donald Trump? We will know the answer in approximately six months.

**David L. Snell
Franklin, NC**

...INVESTING continued from page 4

women are the ones who facilitate the transaction which include agents for the seller, who lists the property and agents for the buyer who brings the buyers to the table. It is still perfectly acceptable to have only one broker who represents both buyer and seller, those are called dual agents, and may or may not be allowed according to the broker's office policy. Other parties in the transactions could include bankers, as well as the closing attorney, who, in NC handles the deed preparations, recording of deeds and overseeing all the written agreements.

I wouldn't be surprised if we started seeing advertising slogans like the old L'Oreal hair color commercials who felt the need to justify their prices based on the quality of their product. Real estate brokers work hard, and much of what they do is behind the scenes of a transaction. So, before buyers and sellers pack their cannons, let me just say, "I'm a Realtor, and I'm worth it."



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Spring Home Improvement 2024

7 Reasons to Upgrade to Electric and Induction

(StatePoint) Cooking with gas? Industry experts say there are many reasons to consider retiring your gas-powered appliances.

To help you understand what your kitchen may be missing, Melissa Haber, the vice president of EuroChef USA, the exclusive importer of the Verona and Lofra brands of residential cooking appliances, offers seven reasons why your next home upgrade should include making the swap to electric or induction cooking.

1. You're health- and eco-conscious. Gas appliances at home are associated with an increased risk of asthma and other illnesses, particularly in children, as they emit harmful air pollutants like nitrogen dioxide and methane, even when they're not in use. The same pollutants are also harmful to the environment, contributing to air quality issues and climate change. In fact, national annual emissions from gas cooktops are equivalent to the emissions transmitted from half a million cars.

2. They're easy to maintain. Compared to the metal grates of a conventional gas stove, the flat surface of an electric or induction cooktop is nearly effortless to clean. A damp dish rag and soap works for most cleanup sessions. For more involved messes, a little vinegar goes a long way.

3. They offer safety benefits. With no open flame, electric appliances lower the risk of burns or fires, particularly those with safety features such as "power on" lights and residual heat warnings that inform users when the surface is still hot. Induction cooking also has safety benefits, since only the cooking vessel is directly heated and the

surface of the cooktop itself does not retain or give off heat.

4. You value precision. Induction cooking is faster and more efficient than cooking with gas. The high-end induction ranges offered by the Italian brand Lofra, which combine elegant design with modern cooking features, are a good example of how accurate temperature control allows you to prepare meals like a professional in the comfort of home.

5. Making changes can be feasible. Installing a gas hookup can be costly, time-consuming and involve inspections. The installation process for electric appliances on the other hand is easier and less expensive. Not able to replace your gas appliances with electric? Investing in a range hood is a sensible solution that can cut your appliance's air pollution by about half.

6. You'll be ahead of the curve. A growing number of cities and municipalities are banning new gas hookups for appliances to reduce air pollution and help fight climate change. Making the switch to electric or induction can help you get ahead of the regulatory curve.

7. New options are being introduced. With sales of electric appliances on the rise, a few select manufacturers have taken note, and to meet customer demand, have recently introduced additional options offering style and sought-after features. For example, the Italian brand Verona offers electric ranges in its Prestige and Designer Collections that deliver an upgraded look, with single and double oven options to suit varying needs and tastes. All are equipped with five burners that accommodate pots

of any size, and a multi-tasking dual element that ranges from simmer to boil with the simple turn of a knob.

"As more consumers have come to realize the value and advantages of electric and induction cooking, it became important to us to offer them the same versatility and style they might expect with traditional gas-powered cooking appliances," says Haber.

Whether you want to prioritize your family's health and safety, or you simply want to embrace the convenience of modern cooking technology, electric and induction appliances can be a game changer in your kitchen.

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On the corner of 3rd & Spring

...MAYOR continued from page 2

My response is that I am concerned about over tourism in Highlands and have expressed my position on numerous occasions. That said, we have always had tourists visiting Highlands and will continue to do so. Except for Native Americans, we can all say we have been tourists in some shape or form before deciding to settle and call Highlands home.

Now, what I am about to say may alarm my friends at the chamber. However, I suspect if the chamber of commerce did no tourist promotion whatsoever, Highlands would still have a steady stream

of tourists. Or we could witness a reverse psychology effect by creating a campaign declaring Highlands fully settled and no tourist should visit. Folks might think if the people of Highlands don't want me there, it must be a great place, and I'm all in and on my way.

As Highlanders, we can't stop the future and transform the Highlands into a Medieval castle replete with a mote and crocodiles. On the other hand, we can make good decisions about development that will ensure a bright future for the community we all love.

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When purchasing a hot tub, where you will put it will be the first question that needs answering. Hot tubs are quite heavy when filled and will need a solid and level foundation to sit on. When considering your hot tub's foundation, there are four main options to choose between: a spa pad, pouring a concrete slab, a wooden deck, or pavers. Each method will vary in styling, functionality, and price.

For those working on a budget, spa pads can create a simple and easy foundation for your hot tub with minimal cost and effort, they usually come in the form of interlocking thick rubber pads that form a solid base for your hot tub.

The simplest and most common foundation is a concrete slab. Pouring a concrete slab will also be relatively inexpensive and quick. Concrete slabs are very durable and will easily last the life of your spa.

Another common place hot tub owners like to house their spas are wooden decks. While most wooden decks are stable enough to uphold the full weight of a filled hot tub, you will need to call in an expert to assess that your deck is structurally sound enough. Another option is to blend a concrete slab with a wooden deck. Some homeowners choose to place their hot tubs on a concrete slab under their deck, with the top of the hot tub seamlessly rising through for easy access.

The last method that is commonly used, is placing your hot tub on pavers, many homes already have areas covered in pavers, and can be used as a solid foundation for your spa.

How much does installation cost?

The cost of your hot tub foundation can range from 0-\$1,000+ depending on if you already have a solid foundation, or if you decide to build a custom deck for your hot tub. For reference, spa pads range in price from \$100 to \$500, and concrete slabs range from \$900 – \$2,000.

The cost of having a professional electrician wire a hot tub usually ranges from \$200 – \$500.

Delivery can also be costly if you require a crane to lift

the hot tub into your backyard, which can cost between \$500 – \$1,000. Usually, a portion of a fence is taken down, and a hot tub will be carried into place by multiple people.

Water Care Options

Manual Water Care

Traditional water care means the spa owner manually adds Chlorine or Bromine to the spa once a week and before each use. You should only purchase chemicals from an authorized hot tub dealer to make sure you get the highest quality products to assure your spa and water stay healthy. The amount of maintenance required by the spa owner depends on how frequently they use the hot tub. With regular hot tub use, the spa water should be checked with a test strip each time the hot tub is used.

Ozone Systems

Ozone with MPS and Silver Ions is slightly more expensive than traditional water care. It is still a fairly manual process but requires a little less interaction from the spa owner than manually adding chlorine or bromine. Spa owners enjoy this system because it only requires a very small amount of chlorine and chemicals.

Ozone systems were once considered the best water care option for hot tubs and has since become the industry standard for hot tub water care in most middle tier hot tubs. Ozone water care systems use powerful oxidizers – ozone and MPS – with silver ions to decrease the need for chlorine. Once the Ozone unit is installed, it continually releases tiny ozone bubbles into the spa water. The silver ion cartridge then automatically releases silver ions into the water that inhibit the growth of bacteria. The spa owner then has to manually add MPS to the spa with each use, and a small amount of chlorine once a week. The silver ion cartridge should be replaced every three months, and the ozone unit will need to be replaced every 4-5 years.

Salt Water Systems

Salt water systems are specifically found on high-end hot tubs from Hot Spring Spas & Caldera Spas. These systems are widely regarded as the pinnacle of water care systems due to their ease of use and low maintenance. With just a little salt added to your spa's water, the system will automatically generate chlorine when needed to keep your spa water clean and clear for up to a full year until you have to drain and refill. Other than simple routine adjustment, the system runs off of disposable cartridges that last 4 months. So, with three cartridges and routinely adjusting your system, you can avoid having to drain and refill your water for up to a year!

What are the Best Hot Tub brands?

With more and more hot tub companies entering the market, choosing between models and brands is more difficult than ever. The amount of factors you will have to consider when picking out a new hot tub is quite large:

Home Improvement 2024

price, size, availability of parts, warranty, dealer proximity, design, jet technology, and more should all be considered in your decision.

Lucky for you, we used our expansive knowledge of the hot tub industry to break down the top 4 hot tub brands you should be focussing on.

Hot Spring Spas

Hot Spring Spas tops our list for a multitude of reasons. Besides from being the World's #1 selling Hot Tub brand, the features, design, and longevity of these hot tubs are unmatched. Hot Spring recently collaborated with DesignWorks, a BMW company the specializes in blending modern design with ergonomic comfort, and it shows in the design of their newer spas.

Hot Spring Spas are well known for their long lifespan, and their nationwide dealer network in always stocked with parts for their new and old models. This provides a level of customer service and reliability that is unmatched in the industry.

Another unique feature of Hot Spring Spas is their innovative Salt Water System. Its patented design keeps spa water clean and clear by generating chlorine from a small amount of salt in your spa's water. This unique system reduces the usual chemical smell, and skin irritation that traditional water care systems can cause. This system also requires very little maintenance when compared to other water care options.

The last feature we love about Hot Spring Spas is their jet technology paired with their easy to use control panels. In their Flagship Highlife Collection, you get a detachable touchscreen display that you can use to customize your aqua massage experience. Hot Spring Spas features some of the most unique jet technology, such as their unique motorized jets that sweep up and down your back.

Hot Spring Spas have three lines of hot tubs ranging from entry-level to ultra-luxurious. If you are looking for a reliable, long lasting hot tub that will provide the best technology in the hot tub industry, then Hot Spring Spas is the brand to go with.

Caldera Spas

Caldera Spas is another popular choice and shares

many of the same qualities as Hot Spring Spas. Both brands have a nationwide dealer network, similar warranties, advanced heating and filtration technology, and are the only two brands with the innovative Salt Water System available. The two brands are quite evenly matched, and which brand you go with may easily depend on your personal preference, which brand has a closer dealer, and the prices of the individual models. Regardless, when you start researching which brand to go with, or head to a dealer to check out different brands, you are sure to come across Hot Spring or Caldera Spas.

Caldera features three lines of hot tubs that rise in price and features, and their jet technology is quite advanced. We believe that their Utopia Series line pictured below, feature some of the best designed hot tubs on the market.



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Spring Home Improvement

4 Trends to Take Muted Interiors from Drab to Dreamy in 2024

(StatePoint) While neutral tones continue to be popular this year among home DIYers, bold and colorful surroundings also are trending right now.

From adding dramatic style to the kitchen to giving an unexpected space a splash of color, these ideas —inspired by the 2024 FrogTape Design Trends, as identified by celebrity interior designer Taniya Nayak — will make areas around your home pop in 2024.

Colorful Kitchens.

Make the kitchen a focal point by painting the cabinets or panels on the island a vivid color. Calming blue will ensure a relaxed and laid-back feeling, while fuchsia will energize the design. Nayak recommends using FrogTape Delicate Surface Painter's Tape to prevent paint bleed and achieve crisp paint lines. The low-adhesion tape is designed to prevent damage on surfaces like cabinets, freshly painted walls, wallpaper and more.

Dynamic Décor.

If painting projects aren't in the plan for this year, revive a living room or bedroom by adding a collection of brightly colored pillows and throws, bohemian-style macramé, wall art and a rug with geometric patterns. As long as the colors are complementary to each other, the blend of styles and textures will catch the eye and make the room

feel refreshed with little effort.

Nourishing Green.

A simple, but effective, way to boost the mood of a space is to fill it with large blooms. Place a modern plant stand in an empty corner or between rooms as a divider, and layer in green houseplants or ones with colorful leaves on the shelves. Accentuate the greenery with pops of the same color throughout the room to create a sense of cohesion.

Elevated Exteriors.

It's not just the interiors of the home that should speak to personal style, the outside should, too! Give the front door a facelift by painting it a daring color. Don't be afraid to choose one hue for the outside of the door and another for the inside. For this project, apply FrogTape Multi-Surface Painter's Tape before painting, so that trim around the door and doorknob is protected from paint bleed.

For more fresh decor ideas and design tips, visit FrogTape.com.

Whether you choose one or all of these trends, they can be tackled by DIYers with a range of skillsets to transform dull living spaces into the home of your dreams.



...OBITUARIES continued from page 7

Barbara Ann Green

Mrs. Barbara Ann Green, 85, of Highlands, NC passed away Monday, April 15, 2024. Mrs. Green was born November 17, 1938, in Cook, County, Illinois to the late Dewey Jackson and Helen E. Jackson. She was married to the late Roy N. Green who preceded her.

She was a cosmetologist and was a member of the Highlands Church of The Incarnation.

Barbara had such a big heart and a love for animals especially her cats. She was always interested in what her friends were doing.

Survivors include a son, Michael Short; and a grandson, Ian Short.

No services are planned at this time.

Online condolences can be left at www.bryantgrant-funeralhome.com

Bryant-Grant Funeral Home & Crematory is honored to serve the Green family.

• HOSPITAL NEWS •

Thanks to NC's Medicaid expansion, community members have better coverage and access to essential care



**Tom Neal CEO, CNO
Highlands-Cashiers
Hospital**

As we head into spring on our beautiful Plateau, I'd like to touch on a welcome change in the world of healthcare in North Carolina — Medicaid expansion. This was a topic of political debate across the country, and the expansion process started a decade ago. At that point, just 26 states and the District of Columbia had enacted expansion. Over the years, however, more and more states expanded Medicaid, and last October was when the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) granted final approval to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCD-HHS) to launch Medicaid expansion, effective December 1, 2023.

Medicaid expansion in North Carolina has deeply impacted healthcare for communities across the state. What does it mean mathematically? Thanks to Medicaid expansion, more than 600,000 North Carolinians who are ages 19-64 are now eligible. Before Medicaid expansion, they would not have qualified, since their annual income was more than the pre-expansion threshold allowed. This is welcome news for single people who earn less than \$20,000 in annual income, as well as, for instance, a three-person family earning less than \$34,000 in combined income annually.

What does expansion mean for them in terms of accessible healthcare services? They are now able to receive either full or nearly complete comprehensive coverage, such as primary care, emergency care, and mental health care. Expansion is also helping people by providing dental, vision, and hearing care, maternity care, and hospital stay coverage.

I would like to thank North Carolina State Senate member Kevin Corbin and North Carolina House Representative Karl Gillespie, our local leaders, for supporting Medicaid expansion and understanding the difference it would make.

Even though Medicaid expansion is a very good thing for many in our community, it can be confusing to determine whether you or your family qualify, and get through the application process. Fortunately, we have an excellent community

resource to help with that. Pisgah Legal Services' Highlands office can help you figure out if you qualify for Medicaid now that the expansion has occurred, and assist you with applying if you do.

Another thing that many seniors are needing help with is deciding about whether they should sign up for traditional Medicare or a Medicare Advantage Plan. In-depth research and guidance are also necessary for many people considering these two plans.

The major difference between them is that Medicare is federally run, and Medicare Advantage plans are the private insurance alternative. What's best for you depends on many factors, but resources like Pisgah Legal Services, the Jackson County Department on Aging and the Macon County Department of Social Services' Senior Services department can help you make the most informed decision for you.

Additionally, if you are a patient at any Mission Health facility, we have financial advisors who can assist you in navigating your coverage options, including Medicaid expansion.

I think the most important thing to remember about Medicaid expansion in our state, and specifically here on the Plateau, is that it equals stability and greater access to critical care. This means being able to receive preventive screenings like mammograms and colonoscopies, having the opportunity to get connected and develop a relationship with a primary care provider who really gets to know you, receiving support around healthy living, and more. There's no question — being uninsured or underinsured is a serious barrier to getting the healthcare that you need.

Preventive care is so key to our health, because it allows problems to be noticed and diagnoses to be made before something like colon cancer, for example, can progress to a point that treatment may not be able to save a person's life.

If you or someone you love may qualify for Medicaid now, investigate the possibilities so you can get the best healthcare possible. We at Highlands-Cashiers Hospital are here to help provide this essential care throughout your lifetime.

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• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

For more information about Rec Park activities, call Lester Norris or Janice Mathis at 828-526-3556.

Mon.-Fri.

• Pickle Ball will be played inside the Recreation Center Mon.-Fri., 10am-1pm for the winter.

POOL SCHEDULE

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

MEETINGS ALL WEEK

• Highlands/ Cashiers Alcoholics Anonymous "Open Meetings" are for anyone who thinks they may have a drinking problem or for anyone interested in the A.A. recovery program. Open meetings are held in Highlands @ the 1st Presbyterian Church, 471 Main St., on Monday at 5:30 p.m. and on Wednesday & Fridays @ 12:00 noon. Open in person meetings are held in Cashiers @ the Albert Carlton Cashiers Community Library, 249 Frank Allen Rd. on Sunday at 5:00 pm, on Tuesday @ 7:00 pm, on Friday at 5:00 pm and on Saturday at 9:00 am. Cashiers Open ZOOM Meetings are on Wednesday @ 700 pm. ZOOM ROOM 921 817 2966 PASSWORD CVG2020. For

more information please visit our website www.aawnc80.org or to speak with a member of A.A. 24/7 call our HELP Line 828 349-4357.

Mountain Findings Hours

April & May: Fri. and Sat. 10a to 1p. **June:** Thurs.-Sat., 10a to 1p.

Mon.-Fri.

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

Mon-Wed-Fri

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

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

Second Mondays

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

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

2nd Tuesdays

• Highlands Writers Group meets on alternate Tuesday afternoons at 3pm. Writers still uncomfortable with in-person gatherings

may participate via Zoom meetings For more information contact Bud Katz at either 828-526-3190 or at budandlynn@me.com

Tuesdays

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

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

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

• ESL classes are held at the Presbyterian Church in Highlands from 6:30-7:30pm. No registration required – just show up and participate. Questions? call 828-526-0863 or email info@maconncliteracy.org

Wednesdays

• Hudson Library, in partnership with VAYA Health, is hosting an educational series on adult mental health topics, held on the first Wednesday of each month at 11 AM. This se-

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

2nd & 4th Wed.

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

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

Mon., Tues., Thurs.

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

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

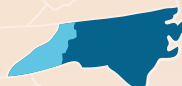
2nd & 4th Thursdays

• Hudson Library is hosting a new program for dementia caregivers. On the second and fourth Thursday of each month, you are invited to join the Dementia Caregivers Sup-

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Make a change



Fossil fuels are a major cause of global heating. Consider a move to **renewable energy sources**, taking advantage of solar, wind, hybrid or electric vehicles. Walk and bike more.



Plant native species at home and along waterways. Keep outdoor lights off at night. **Dark skies** help the migrating birds navigate.



Use stainless steel or **reusable water bottles** and avoid buying water in plastic bottles or other products wrapped in plastic. Carry reusable grocery bags.

Join the solution community



Support local resources such as the Highlands Biological Station, the Mountain Retreat and Learning Center, Mainspring Conservation Trust and the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust. Each provide opportunities to get involved.



Consider getting an app to **track your carbon footprint** such as the one at oneplanetlife.com and get hints for making joyful changes.



Learn about **planting natives** to increase biodiversity and provide food for birds and other wildlife.



Tell your representatives you want climate change and plastic proliferation addressed. Vote for the candidates that are taking on climate change and big polluters.

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• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

port Group, a welcoming group of people that understand what you are going through. They come together to offer each other support, resources, and a listening ear. Moderators Chris and Fred ensure that the group is a safe place for judgement-free discussion. The next meeting of the Dementia Caregivers Support Group is February 22 at 10:15 AM at Hudson Library. For more information about the group, contact Chris at 772-473-1088.

Thursdays

- Kickboxing 8:15-9:15 am. at the Rec Park. An exhilarating and fun mix of martial arts for a calorie-burning workout. No martial arts background necessary Contact the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more info.

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

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

Saturdays

- Story Ballet - a gentle ballet & creative movement class for Children 3-4. The flow of class follows a story or theme that changes each month, engaging imaginations! Saturday 5:30-6:30pm. 828-421-6720

- Adult Ballet - crafted for beginners, but mindfully taught for all levels. Ballet is an excellent way to move, grow stronger, improve balance, flexibility and coordination while having fun. 6:30-7:30pm. 828-421-6720.

2nd Saturdays

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

3rd Saturdays

- The American Legion Post 370 meets

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

Sundays

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

Through April 19

- The Town of Highlands will conduct its annual white goods pickup. During this week, the town will come to a residence and pick up any used appliances such as washing machines, stoves, or other appliances. Please call Town Hall at (828) 526 - 2118 for more information. The town will recycle the metal of these defunct machines. Money from the recycling effort will help defray some of the program's costs.

Thurs., April 18

- OEI's The Orchard Sessions with Mike Kinnebrew at The Farm. Indie folk fueled by soulful inspiration. Light bites, a cash bar 6-8 p.m. \$40. Book Online: <https://www.simpletix.com/e/mike-kinnebrew-orchard-sessions-at-the-far-tickets-149347>

Fri., April 19

- Senior Lunch will be Friday at noon at the Rec Dept in the Meeting Room. For any other information call Lester Norris or Janice Mathis at 828-526-3556.

Sun. April 21

- Volunteers needed for Cashiers Litter Clean Up from 1-4 p.m. Sunday. If available, email Bob Lewis at Bob@BobLewis.management or call 404-219-1785.

Wed., April 24

- "Songs From Snow Hill" Music by Angela Faye Martin at 6 p.m. in the Macon County Public Library Living Room in the main hall, under the stained glass.

Fri.-Sun., April 26-28

- PAC Educational Theatre presents Oliver. Opening Night Gala 6p, show at 7p; Sat, a7 p.m. and Sun., 3 p.m. For tickets go to www.highlandsp Performingarts.com.

Wed., May 1

- The Bascom has a Call for Entries for the Dazzling Dahlia Festival 2024 in partnership with the Highlands Historical Society. Open to any age or experience level. Entry Deadline: May 1st For more info, call (828) 526-4949.

Sat., May 4

- Pop-Up Bagpipers are scheduled from 4:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

- At PAC Main Stage, Mojo & The Bayou Gypsies, 7:30 p.m. For tickets go to www.highlandsp Performingarts.com.

Sun., May 5

- OEI's Chef Dinners at The Farm. Dinner with James Beard Winner Chef Terry Koval Book Online at OldEdwardsHospitality.com/ChefDinners

Sat.-Sun., May 11-12

- The 4th annual Bear Shadow will be held again at Winfield Farm in Scaly Mountain. Visit <https://bearshadownc.com/> for information about how to purchase tickets.

Sat., May 11

- 3rd Annual FREE Highlands Dog Show in K-H Founders Park on Pine Street. Registration 1-1:30. Judging begins at 1:30 p.m. Award ceremony 2:30-3:30 p.m. Categories: Best in Show, Best Trick, Happiest Dog, Best Behavior, Looks Like Owner.

Fri., May 17

- High Style Meet & Greet in Kelsey Hutchinson Founders Park on Pine Street 5-6:30 p.m. Join us for an evening of mingling,

sipping, and savoring. Music by Zorki. Food, beer and wine included in the ticket price. \$45

- Friday Night Live showcases traditional mountain music and exceptional local talent on Main Street's Town Square 6-8:30 p.m. - Silly Ridge (High Style event weekend)

Sat., May 18

- High Style Fashion Show in Town Square at 341 Main St. from 9:30-11 a.m. Whether you are a fashion enthusiast, a trendsetter, or simply looking for entertainment, the High Style Fashion Show promises an unforgettable experience for all. Price includes seating, beverage and swag bag. *We encourage guests to embrace their personal style and dress to impress.* \$25 VIP seating

- Saturdays on Pine features a variety of popular, regional bands and musicians at Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park 6-8:30 p.m. - Continental Divide (High Style event weekend)

Tues., May 21

- Boys & Girls Club of the Plateau ribbon cutting ceremony at its Highlands location on the HC Hospital campus - 171 Hospital Drive. Refreshments, outdoor activities and optional self-guided tour following the ceremony.

- Free Sports Physicals at Highlands School at 2 p.m. Rising 5th-12 graders who will be participating in NCHSAA sanctioned sports. A state-mandated sports physical is required prior to trying out for any sport. Parents or guardians should plan to attend the sports physical to answer questions the medical team may have during the exam. For more information contact Highlands School's Mission Sports Medicine Athletic Trainer Will Mathiowdis at William.Mathiowdis@HCA-Healthcare.com.

Fri., May 24

- Friday Night Live in Town Square 6-8:30 p.m. - McClain Family Band.



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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

'When I Die, I Shall Rot...?'



Jacob Tedder
Congregational Pastor
Christ Church of the Valley

How can Christians make absolute claims about religion? Don't all roads lead to heaven? Doesn't science disprove Christianity? Recently, we concluded a series at Christ Church of the Valley called "Why Christianity?" where we sought answers to these questions. It made us ask some difficult questions about faith, reason, and doubt. You might think in this article I will try to prove that Christianity is undoubtable true. But, maybe to your surprise, you'd be wrong. Ultimately, I believe both atheism and Christianity to be unprovable. There is no empirical formula to prove God does or does not exist. But what I do believe I can prove, is that Christianity is much more compelling than atheism because it offers us something atheism never can: hope.

Bertrand Russell, a noted atheist philosopher and writer, once gave a lecture called "Why I am not a Christian." In which, he concludes that religion is primarily built on the back of fear (i.e. the fear of hell and of death). His view is represented in his haunting words, "When I die, I shall rot."

Whether or not Russell understood this at the time, he was arguing for "ultimate hopelessness" on behalf of atheism. If, "when I die, I shall rot" is really true, if there is no life after death, then everything in life is ultimately meaningless. This is the main problem that all atheists must deal with. The nonexistence of ultimate hope that atheism holds to leads to ultimate despair. There is nothing to comfort you of your impending doom and the eventual destruction of our universe.

This is the dilemma Ayaan Hirsi Ali faced. Ali is labeled one of the prominent "new atheists," colleagues with Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. For years, she served in the Dutch parliament and spoke out against religion, especially Islam. In 2023, she shockingly converted to Christianity. When speaking about her conversion she said,

"I ultimately found life without any spiritual solace unendurable — indeed very nearly self-destructive. Atheism failed to answer a simple question: what is the meaning and purpose of life?"

I'm sure Hitchens is now rolling in his grave, and Dawkins penned a public letter admonishing her for her new-found belief.

But what hope is she talking about? What hope does Christianity offer? Put simply, Jesus tell us that "everything will be made new" and this is the spring of our hope from which all else flows from. I think we can all admit that something is wrong with this world and something is wrong with humans. It is perhaps the most obvious thing in the world today. Atheists believe humans will

• See SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING page 19

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

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CAC@christanglicancashiers.org & 828-743-1701
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10:30 am Holy Eucharist Worship

Wednesdays: 6 pm Bible Study, Prayer, Potluck
Thursdays: 11:30 am Healing Eucharist

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Pastor Jacob Tedder jacob@cashiers.church • 743-5470
www.cashiers.church

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Contact Ellen@cashiers.church for add'l programming

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am in Sanctuary, Wed: Healing Eucharist 12 pm in Chapel, Morning
Prayer: Mon-Thurs 8:30 am in Chapel

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from April 8. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a summons/citation, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or those of public officials have been used.

April 8

• At 1:16 p.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident on Main Street near 3rd Street.

April 11

• At 11:24 p.m., officers responded to a 1-vehicle accident on Main Street near Dillard Road.

April 14

• At 10 a.m., Rhiannon Rachele Sanders, 30, of Franklin, was arrested for possession of meth and possession of drug paraphernalia at the Spinx parking lot. She was issued a secured bond. Her trial date

was not disclosed.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from April 10.

April 10

• At 10:22 a.m., the dept. responded to a Co2 alarm at a residence on Randall Road.

• At 7:57 p.m., the dept. responded to a Co2 alarm at a residence on Forest Trail.

April 11

• At 8:02 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Dendy Orchard Road.

• At 11:19 p.m., the dept. responded to a power line down on Main Street.

• At 11:48 p.m., the dept. responded to a power line down on Webbmont Road.

April 12

• At 7:35 a.m., the dept. responded to

tree on power line on Azalea Woods Drive.

• At 2:39 p.m., the dept. responded to a tree on a power line on N. 4th Street.

• At 4:55 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a tree on a house on Bobby Jones Road.

• At 5:16 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Worley Road.

April 13

• At 10:17 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a structure on Log Cabin Lane.

• At 6:26 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a resident on Walkingstick Road.

April 14

• At 6:26 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Wilson Road.

sponders to a residence on Wilson Road.

April 15

• At 12:48 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance at a residence on Spruce Street.

• At 9:29 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Clubhouse Trail.

...WEATHER continued from page 1



Photo by Kim Lewicki

when a large, white pine on the Main Street embankment below 200 Main Lodge and across the street from Wright Square took out the power lines on its way down before settling on Main Street in front of an on-coming Jeep.

By all accounts the tree was healthy but rain-soaked earth and powerful gusts toppled the tree, root ball and all.

According to firefighters, due to the weather conditions, the driver didn't see the downed power lines and once he hit those his hood blocked the view of the tree. Luckily the driver walked away unharmed.

At about the same time, gusts ripped the roof off Main Street Nursery's side structure sailing it into the parking lot of the gas station next door.

Town workers sawed the pine tree apart piece by piece to clear Main Street and the sidewalk on the embankment.


...SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING continued from page 18

get better; that utopia will develop when humans finally evolve. I, quite frankly, find it completely absurd. There is no evidence that humanity is getting any better. The fear of another global war starting, COVID, Russia, Ukraine, Israel, Palestine.

Do you really think world peace will ever be a reality? Remarkably, Jesus says YES. One of the reasons he came is to bring "peace on earth and good will to men." However, this does not prove anything, it just makes Christianity quite compelling.

For me, the atheistic position is too

simple and reductionistic to fill the longing of the human heart. It cannot hold the weight of beauty, longing, love and peace. If, in the end, nothing matters, then why act like it does? This is too simple and inconsistent. For the atheist, they look at the universe, and attribute its beauty to the artist named "chance." For the Christian, it is the "Logos," or "the Word made flesh" by whom "everything was made." And this Logos thought humans worthy of his time, love and life. Now, the Christian can say instead, "Because he died, I shall live."




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• See CLASSIFIEDS page 22

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...CLASSIFIED continued from page 21

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...BUDGET continued from page 1

may have to be replenished through rate increases for various services and possibly property tax or fire tax rate increases.

The major electric grid system upgrade and expansion from a two-circuit system to a four-circuit system which will take time and \$2,808,000 to get up and running will be paid out of the \$7.1 million Electric Fund Reserve fund which is quickly being depleted. Mayor Taylor said the time may soon come when electric fees need to be increased.

The second project was for Gibson Street and Sanitary Sewer improvements for a total of \$872,974.33. Of that, \$652,974.33 will come out of the Water/Sewer Reserve Fund Balance and the rest - \$220,000 will come from ARPA Funding. Town Manager Josh Ward said with so much coming out of that fund, the town may have to go up on water/sewer rates.

Presented was a scenario where water/sewer base rates for residential and commercial customers in town may each be increased by \$10 a month - \$36 to \$46 - and out-of-town customers' base rate by \$20 per month - \$72 to \$92.

In addition, increasing water line connection fees for new homes was discussed - \$1,000 to possibly \$1,300. Since the parts to complete those jobs have gone up by \$300, the town is actually losing money when connecting new homes to town water. Increases in sewer connections which stands at \$2,500 -- weren't discussed.

Another project, which was deemed extremely urgent during the March retreat was stabilizing Little Bear Pen Road for \$700,000 which will come out of the '23-'24 General Fund Balance. Public Works Director/Town Engineer Lamar Nix said work is about to begin on Little Bear Pen.

An item not initially budgeted for nor discussed at the March retreat is ductile iron piping that has to be replaced almost immediately at a force main on US 64 east and Cullasaja Drive to the tune of \$1,321,000. Gas and air are getting into the system where the joints meet and must be replaced with PVC pipe. The town is replacing all the ductile iron pipe in town as needed and as can be afforded.

Since the ductile iron pipe was not in the original '24-'25 budget discussion, to help pay for the project, two SCADA projects totaling \$80,000 were nixed from the upcoming budget with other adjustments likely coming.

Commissioner Jeff Weller said since the SCADA projects aren't critical, he would be for eliminating that item to help pay for the ductile pipe project which must be done sooner rather than later.

The SCADA projects were for the Ravenel and Hospital pump stations. SCADA is a control system architecture comprising computers, networked data communications and graphical user interfaces for high-level supervision of machines and processes. It also

covers sensors and other devices, such as programmable logic controllers, which interface with process plant or machinery.

The replacement of bear-resistant toters was a big topic. The town charges commercial entities \$6 per month per container. When they break, particularly the toters at restaurants which can weigh up to 350 pounds when full, the town replaces them with new toters. At \$6/mth per container the town is never in the black.

Commissioners discussed nixing the per month fee and letting customers keep the toters. However, if they need to be replaced it's on them.

The board agreed to give the 76 full-time employees a 5% COLA increase which will cost \$218,895.

The state-required grease-trap inspections are being budgeted - \$30,000 for two inspections per year per food establishment.

When discussed during the retreat, the town was going to absorb the cost but now the board is considering charging the food establishments, which is anyone preparing food including churches and the HF&R dept.

According to Nix, there are about 50 establishments who could be charged \$600 a year for the two inspections.

As Commissioner Amy Patterson is want to say, "It's the cost of doing business in Highlands."

More discussions will be had at the May 2 budget meeting.

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