

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Jan. 22, 2026

Town Board lays out plan to fill Commissioner Dotson's vacated seat

By Kim Lewicki

With the resignation of Town Board Commissioner John Dotson effective Dec. 31,

2025, the board is now faced with filling his vacated seat for the remainder of his term which runs through December 2027.

If not handled with a bonafide election, as was the case with Commissioner Brian

• See SEAT page 18

HF&W's Main Street event is under scrutiny

By Kim Lewicki

The ramifications of the Highlands Food & Wine (HF&W) Main Street event held on Saturday during the four-day lineup mid-November was the subject of the January work session prior to the regular Town Board meeting January 15.

Safety was the theme of the discussion which was initiated by Highlands Police Chief Andrea Holland at the December Town Board meeting and reiterated during January's work session.

"I am here to discuss the negative impact to public safety and the town's infrastructure," said Holland.

• See HF&W page 6



The Holt building at the corner of Main and 4th streets as it looks today.

A fond farewell to the historic Holt building

After more than 140 years of anchoring the corner of South 4th Street and Main Street, the historic Holt Building has reached the end of its structural life.

Following months of careful evaluation and exploratory demolition, it became clear that the building could not be safely restored, despite sincere efforts

and significant investment toward renovation.

"Given the building's long significance to the community, we felt it was important to clearly and thoughtfully explain how this decision was made about the Holt building and family and the businesses that occupied this corner for more than a

• See HOLT page 7



The Birches

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•INSIDE THIS ISSUE•

| | | | |
|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|----|
| Mayor on Duty | 2 | Letters | 9 |
| Weather | 2 | HS Sports..... | 9 |
| Snapshot..... | 2 | Spiritually Speaking | 14 |
| Hospital News | 5 | Police & Fire Report..... | 15 |
| Investing at 4,118 Ft..... | 6 | Classifieds | 17 |

Commissioner Shearl wants to change Macon County's 'election' map

Redistricting will dilute Highlands' and Nantahala's representation. Public hearing is set for Feb. 10

By Kim Lewicki

After discussion between commissioners advocating for transparency and public input, the Macon County Board of Commissioners is scheduled to hold a public hearing next month on Tuesday, February 10, 2026, to consider a major change to how county commissioners are elected.

The resolution, which was originally submitted by Commissioner John Shearl during the December board meeting, if ultimately approved by the North Carolina General Assembly, would restructure the board to include two at-large commissioners while reducing the number of commissioners elected from individual districts.

During the January meeting

Commissioner Shearl urged the board to move forward with the resolution without allowing the public to comment before sending the request to Senator Kevin Corbin and Representative Karl Gillespie, however Shearl eventually withdrew his motion to approve the resolu-

• See ELECTION MAP page 4

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Legislation that could hurt municipalities

At the start of the North Carolina Legislative session, several bills were introduced that would have curtailed municipalities' efforts to manage or implement land-use, zoning, and development policies. The North Carolina League of Municipalities staff sent alerts to all 500+ cities and towns about potential legislation that would be impactful and problematic.

Many towns and elected officials voiced concerns, and many passed resolutions opposing some of the most harmful proposed bills. The Highlands Board of Commissioners passed such a resolution and sent it to our legislative delegation. Let me provide an update about the fate of these harmful bills lobbied by developers.

The big bill that received a lot of attention was HB 765-The Save the American Dream Act. Like many proposed bills, this one had a noble title. Wouldn't everyone want to save the American dream? Who could be against that? But the devil was in the details, not the title.

HB 765 included provisions mandating



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

minimum residential densities at the state level. It also included allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), including tiny houses, in all residential zones. The concept behind these provisions was that the ADUs and higher densities would promote affordable housing for workers, a much-needed housing reform.

I am not against towns implementing ADU ordinances that allow higher densities and more units in certain residential areas. But the proposed bill did not prohibit ADUs from being rented as STRs, so their impact on workforce housing needs might have come for naught. The economic driver in this situation would be for property owners to maximize their investment returns by going for the short-term, not the long-term rental path.

My position is that these zoning decisions are best made at the local level by elected officials accountable to residents. A state-level one-size-fits-all is not a promising idea.

Also, HB765 included a provision to end parking requirements for residential and commercial developments. Put another way, a developer could build housing and commercial units without meeting any parking requirements imposed by town ordinances. I guess parking would simply be worked out some way or another.

A very disturbing provision of HB 765 was the penalties against elected officials for making routine land-use decisions. These penalties would put the personal finances of elected officials in jeopardy. A lot of my elected colleagues were prepared to resign if this provision became law.

Fortunately, HB 765 stalled in this past legislative session. There were attempts to attach certain provisions of HB 765 to other pieces of legislation, but those efforts also failed. Some would lament that municipal opposition to HB 765 is evidence of elected officials' indifference or resistance to addressing the housing crisis.

In a recent article, the NC League of Municipalities emphasized that the passage of HB 765 and other bills would not necessarily improve the affordable housing situation. The article stressed that there are other factors driving up housing costs and creating supply shortages. The article cited

• See MAYOR page 15

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\$10 per photo.

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• MILESTONE •

Maestro Fletcher Wolfe turns 94!



Front row from left: Daryl Dixon, Judge Jack Partain, Ricky Victrum, John Porter, Marco Seta. Back row from left: Cameron Horne, Tom Underwood, Fletcher Wolfe, Will McLarty, Mike Dillworth and Cliff Brown.

Surrounded by friends and past members of the Atlanta Boy Choir, Fletcher Wolfe celebrated his 94th birthday at his home on Saturday. Ten "boys turned men" celebrated their camaraderie remembering old times with the Atlanta Boy Choir choral group. The choir in its present form was founded in 1959 by Maestro Fletcher Wolfe and his wife Roberta Kahne Wolfe. The 10 alumni present Saturday traveled the world with Fletcher and Bobbie, singing before presidents, popes, foreign dignitaries, crowned heads of state, and U.S. soldiers in America, Greece, England, Scotland, Wales, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Morocco, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Russia, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Canada, and Mexico.

• WEATHER •

| Thu, 22-Jan | Fri, 23-Jan | Sat, 24-Jan | Sun, 25-Jan |
|--|---|---|---|
| 47°F 32°F | 43°F 33°F | 37°F 24°F | 39°F 17°F |
| Sunshine and a few clouds RealFeel® High: 50° Low: 32° | Cloudy with a passing shower RealFeel® High: 41° Low: 33° | A wintry mix RealFeel® High: 35° Low: 18° | Snow and ice RealFeel® High: 35° Low: 24° |
| Highlands NC 4-Day Forecast By AccuWeather.com | | | |

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TESTIMONIALS

Pat Allen is very good to work with. She is kind, honest, caring, dependable. I have been using her for several years. She knows what she is doing and always has my best interest in mind. She is the kind of person I love to work with.

-William S. O.

Julie Osborne is the best realtor we have ever worked with in NC. She went far beyond what was necessary to be sure both parties were satisfied with the purchase and sale of our house. We highly recommend her to anyone looking for a true professional—honest and hard working. She is also a delight to work with.

-Linda C.

My wife and I had a very pleasant experience with Pat and her Daughter Julie Osborn. Pat is so knowledgeable about the market and because of this we were able to sell our property in Highlands when there are about 160 other lots available. It was a pleasure during every one on one meeting and phone calls. I can't think of a more friendly person that I have ever met.

-Michael B.

We Care ... We Share

...ELECTION MAP continued from page 1

tion to allow for a public hearing in February.

The resolution has been framed as a way to create broader opportunities for citizens to run for office and to ensure countywide representation, however the practical effects of the change would fall unevenly across Macon County.

District 1, commonly referred to as the Highlands District, and District 3, commonly referred to as the Nantahala District, stand to be the most impacted, as the district boundary lines would need to be redrawn substantially, altering both

population makeup and long-standing voting precinct alignments.

Under the amended resolution proposed by the board, Macon County would move to an election system consisting of three geographical districts, identified as Highlands, Franklin, and Nantahala. Each district would elect one commissioner, and two additional commissioners would be elected at large, with staggered terms.

All five seats would continue to be elected by countywide vote in both primary and general elections. Importantly, the resolution specifies that no current

commissioner's term would be affected and that the changes would not take effect until the 2028 election cycle.

This proposal represents a significant departure from the system Macon County has used since 1978. Currently, the five-member board is elected entirely from districts, with representation weighted by population.

District 1, which includes Ellijay, Flats, Highlands, and Sugarfork, elects one commissioner. District 3, made up of Burningtown, Cartoogechaye, Cowee, and Nantahala, also elects one commissioner. District 2, which encompasses Iota, Millshoal, North Franklin, East Franklin, South Franklin, Union, and Smithbridge, elects three commissioners with staggered terms due to its larger population.

North Carolina law allows counties to redraw electoral districts if there is a substantial inequality of population among them. The law further requires that when districts are redefined, the population per commissioner must be as nearly equal as practicable and that each district must consist of contiguous territory. These legal requirements are central to understanding why the proposed change would trigger widespread redistricting.

According to the 2020 Census, Macon County has a population of 37,014. If the county were divided into three districts with one commissioner each, every district would need to contain approximately 12,338 residents to comply with state law.

District 1 currently has a population of about 7,297. To reach the target of roughly 12,338 residents, the district would need to add approximately 5,041 people. Those residents would almost certainly come from areas that have historically been part of the Franklin-based district. Because district boundaries must remain contiguous, potential additions could include Millshoal and portions of Cowee, Iota, East Franklin, or some combination of those areas.

Such an expansion would significantly alter the character of District 1 and would further dilute representation for Highlands residents.

Although Highlands accounts for more than half of the county's tax base, the proposed redistricting could leave Highlands voters with little practical influence in a district dominated numerically by Franklin-area precincts.

District 3 faces an even steeper change. With a current population of ap-

proximately 6,837, it would need to nearly double in size to reach the required 12,338 residents. That would require absorbing large portions of what is now District 2, most likely including Smithbridge. This shift would greatly expand the geographic footprint of District 3 and would bring in voters from areas with different priorities and needs.

For residents of more rural communities such as Nantahala and Burningtown, this change raises concerns about losing representation and having a diminished voice at the county level. As the district grows geographically and demographically, the specific issues facing those rural areas could become harder to elevate in county decision-making.

District 2 would also be affected as a result of these changes. If Millshoal were moved to District 1 and Smithbridge to District 3, District 2 would still have a population of roughly 15,700. That would require additional precincts to be shifted out of District 2 to achieve population balance, further reshaping district lines and voting patterns across the county.

The remaining two seats under the proposal would be at-large positions, meaning candidates could reside anywhere in Macon County and would be elected by voters countywide.

Commissioner Shearl, who is running for re-election to represent District 1, argues this would give all voters a voice in selecting a majority of the board and would allow strong candidates to run without being limited by district boundaries.

Critics counter that at-large seats often favor more populous or better-funded areas and can reduce meaningful representation for smaller or rural communities like Highlands and Nantahala.

The February 10 public hearing is expected to be a key moment for residents to weigh in on these potential impacts. Although the resolution has already been presented to the board, it will not vote to adopt it until after the public hearing, which could influence whether the proposal moves forward as written or is reconsidered.

For voters in District 1 and District 3 in particular, the hearing represents an opportunity to speak directly to how the proposed changes could reshape their districts, alter long-standing community alignments, and affect their ability to be represented on the county's governing board for decades to come.

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• HOSPITAL NEWS •

Take charge of your health for a brighter and better 2026

The New Year is a time of fresh starts and new beginnings. This is why we often make a list of resolutions — goals we hope to achieve in the coming year. Often, they have to do with becoming a better person, whether that means working harder, spending more quality time with family, or vowing to volunteer some free time to a nonprofit organization.

Almost all of us include a health-related resolution or two, since there's usually room for improvement when it comes to preventive self-care. Often, it has to do with improving our diet, exercising more, or working in strategies to balance our work and personal life better.

I too, have taking good care of my health on my mind for 2026, but what does this mean? Really, it involves being proactive about our health and making good on our commitments to ourselves.

Two of the most important pillars of health are diet and exercise — and both are surrounded by ever-changing recommendations and dubious advice. What's the bottom line? In terms of eating, we should simply aim for eating as many whole, unprocessed foods as possible. You're more likely to succeed at this if you cook from scratch most nights, but you don't have to sacrifice taste or spend time that you don't have in the kitchen ensuring you're getting all the necessary nutrients from what you eat.

There are entire websites dedicated to cooking recipes that feature fruits and vegetables, legumes like peas and beans, whole grains, and good-for-you proteins like fish and eggs, that can all be ready to eat within 30 minutes.

Likewise, you don't have to spend hours a day engaging in physical activity, either. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), you should be getting a minimum of 150 minutes of activity per week, which works out to 30 minutes a day for five days per week. This is doable, and even enjoyable if you choose activities you enjoy, like biking, hiking, walking, swimming, or playing pickleball.



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

Next, getting enough rest is critical. To ensure you get a good night's sleep, develop a good nighttime routine by relaxing with a book when getting ready for bed, enjoying a cup of tea, and say "no" to tech use in the final hours before bed.

All of these good health habits go a long way toward taming a challenge we all deal with: stress. Work worries, family responsibilities, financial concerns, and many other complexities conspire to get us

off kilter, but eating well, moving every day, getting good rest, and going outside are all potent stress busters. I also place a strong spiritual relationship with God among my top priorities. It's also important not to succumb to unhealthy habits that people often turn to deal with stress, including overeating, drinking too much alcohol, and smoking.

The other pact I am asking you to make with yourself this year is to be responsible about scheduling your annual wellness exam and any health screenings you need, depending on your gender, age, and personal health history. Developing a good relationship with your primary care provider is essential, as they can observe what, if anything, changes over time with your health, treat chronic conditions, and refer you to a specialist if needed.

Don't delay if you should be putting your mammogram, colonoscopy, prostate cancer screening, or bone density screening on the calendar. These preventive tests are important, and those that screen for cancer are critical because the earlier cancer is found, the sooner a person can get treated. This makes for better outcomes.

Finally, for a healthier 2026, make sure you schedule all the vaccinations you or your children should be up to date on. Unfortunately, we are seeing an uptick in disease outbreaks that were previously eradicated because people aren't vaccinating their children. These include measles and chickenpox. Adults, depending on their age should be getting their pneumonia, RSV, and shingles vaccines. Babies six months of age and older, children, and

• See HOSPITAL page 15



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...HF&W continued from page 1

She said the number of people on the 4th to 5th block of Main Street during HF&W's signature Main Street event made it impossible for police officers to properly monitor the event.

"The Highlands Food & Wine event brings significant tourism and visibility to our town, and we recognize the value it brings to a segment of our community however it is equally important to address the event's negative impact, particularly regarding public safety," said Chief Holland. "Hosting the event on Main Street may seem festive and beneficial for businesses but the narrow space becomes dangerously congested when large crowds gather, especially when combined with alcohol consumption."

Though Jack Austin, chairman of Highlands Festival, Inc., which sponsors the event said the number of tickets issued in 2025 was the same as in 2024 – 1,200 – Chief Holland said due to the congested nature, attendance appeared higher than in previous years with patrons packed shoulder to shoulder throughout the event.

In addition, though not intended or the responsibility of Eleven Events, the

event planners, she said the event invited outside spectators who congregated on area properties and town sidewalks outside the cordoned area with officers observing alcohol consumption outside the event footprint on public streets, sidewalks and private property, including the Presbyterian Church grounds.

"Offsite consumption further increases risks and questions the suitability of the current location," she said.

Holland said the impact on residents and businesses was also significant.

"Hotel guests reported late night noise during setup and breakdown, storefronts were obstructed and staff had to remove intoxicated individuals from establishments for safety and for the protection of property," she said.

Evidently, police officers and 1st responders had trouble getting to two individuals who had fallen within the confines of the event due to crowd congestion and barricades.

Numerous attendees were extremely intoxicated, staggering along Main Street and side streets. Citizens reported public vomiting and at least two individu-

• See HF&W page 10

• INVESTING AT 4,118 FT •

Highlands-Cashiers plateau real estate reclaims its momentum as investors look back to the mountains

By any measure, 2025 was a year of transition for real estate across the country. Higher interest rates cooled many markets, inventory stacked up in suburban corridors, and buyers grew cautious. But high above the noise of national headlines, something different was happening on the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau.

Here, the mountain market quietly did what it has done for decades — it held its value, attracted serious capital, and reminded investors why Highlands is not a trend, but a legacy.

By December, the average list price in Highlands and Cashiers had climbed to just over \$2.24 million, edging up from the prior year and reinforcing a pattern that has become unmistakable. Homes were not only holding their value, but they were also gaining it. The average sale price for 2025 reached nearly \$1.6 million, continuing a multi-year rise that has seen values increase almost 30 percent since 2022.

What makes that growth even more impressive is the backdrop. Total sales have been declining steadily since the pandemic boom — from more than 1,100 annual closings in 2020 to 550 in 2025. Yet during that same period, average prices have nearly doubled.

In Highlands, fewer deals no longer signal weakness. They signal strength.

This is the evolution of a true luxury destination. As the market matures, it trades volume for value. Inventory rose in late 2025 as more owners chose to test the waters, with active listings up roughly 20 percent year-over-year. Still, buyer demand held firm. December posted more closed sales than the prior year, and more than 60 properties went under contract — proof that interest remains deeply rooted.

Perhaps the clearest sign of renewed momentum is how quickly homes are selling. Days on market fell sharply to 114



Doug Treadwell
Mountain Life Properties
828-239-8814

days in December, down from 146 a year earlier. That is the fastest pace Highlands has seen in five years. Buyers are no longer watching from the sidelines. When the right home appears, they are moving.

For investors, this combination is powerful: rising prices, shorter marketing times, and limited long-term supply. With strict development controls, finite buildable land, and growing demand from buyers in Atlanta, Florida, the Carolinas and Texas, Highlands continues to offer what few

resort markets can — both lifestyle and financial resilience.

This is not a market driven by speculation. It is a market built on scarcity, beauty, and trust. Cool summer air, quiet mornings on the golf course, waterfalls hidden just beyond the walking trails — these are not commodities that can be manufactured when supply runs short.

As 2026 begins, the message is clear. The Highlands-Cashiers Plateau is not simply weathering the national real estate cycle. It is quietly outperforming it, offering investors a rare mix of stability, appreciation, and something far harder to quantify: confidence in the long view.

In a market like the Highlands and Cashiers Plateau, you deserve an advisor who takes the time to understand your goals, and then responds with insight shaped by data, experience, and genuine care.

• Doug Treadwell and the team at Mountain Life Properties, specialize in the luxury mountain market, helping buyers and sellers navigate a landscape defined by scarcity, appreciation, and long-term opportunity. You're always welcome to stop by the firm's iconic log cabin office at 134 Maple Street in Highlands, visit MountainLifeRE.com, or reach the team directly at 828-239-8814 to begin a thoughtful conversation about your next move on the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau.



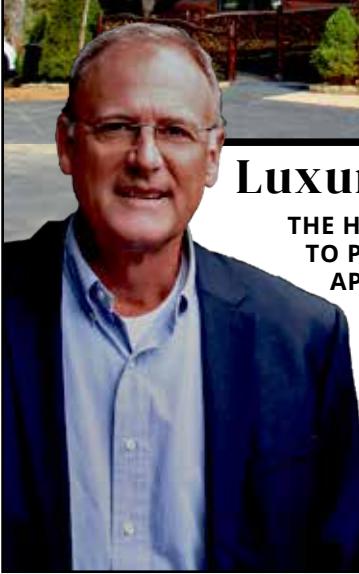
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...HOLT continued from page 1



Bill's Soda Shop in the 1960s.

century," said owner Joe Nisbett.

A building interwoven with Highlands history

The structure was originally built in 1883 as C. L. Martin's Meat Market and later served the town as an early convenience store, post office, phone company, and town hall. In 1913, Gus Holt established the family's store here, beginning a decades-long legacy that shaped the community's memory of the corner.

The building's most iconic era came with Bill's Soda Shop, opened in 1939. Generations of Highlands residents remember 5-cent fountain cokes, cherry smashes, milkshakes, jukebox music, pinball machines, and curbside service—an era of community gathering that defined downtown life for decades. Bill's closed in 1972, and the building later housed realty offices, gift shops, and, most recently, Sweet Treats, echoing its soda shop past.

Attempts to restore the structure

When the Nisbett family purchased the property in 2022 from the Holt family, who had owned it since 1913, their intention was to renovate and preserve the existing building. Substantial resources were invested in architectural designs, consultations with structural engineers and contractors, investigatory demolition, and discussions with the town to explore every possible path toward restoration.

However, once interior walls were opened, structural conditions emerged that made rehabilitation impossible. Experts identified:

- Severely deteriorated wood framing due to age and moisture
- Uneven and sloped floors that could not meet safety or accessibility standards
- Misaligned slab and second-floor heights, preventing code-compliant circulation
- Foundations unable to support a rooftop or third floor
- Exterior siding and structural

members in poor condition, unsuitable for reuse

- Outdated electrical, plumbing, and mechanical systems requiring replacement
- Lack of any existing ADA accessibility or elevator capacity

Contractors and architects agreed that bringing the building to modern code would require rebuilding nearly every component. By the time unsafe materials, failing foundations, and deteriorated framing were removed, there would be virtually nothing left to restore.

A Difficult and Thoughtful Decision

The decision to remove the Holt Building was made only after extensive due diligence and careful conversations with experts and longtime Highlands friends. It was not the path the family expected to take when the corner was first acquired.

"I spent considerable time and money with the going-in goal of working with the existing structure. Unfortunately, the age and condition of the structure is such that it didn't make sense," said Nisbett.

Preserving the Memory, Honoring the Legacy

While little of the physical structure could be salvaged, the Nisbets recognize the history the building represents.

"We will be sharing more in the coming months showing a new redevelopment plan that reflects WNC's architectural heritage and honors the importance of this corner for downtown Highlands, including final floor plans and elevation renderings of the new building," said Nisbett. "While still working through the final design with the town and the architects, when the new building is complete, it will have ground-floor retail space on both Main and 4th streets, second-floor office space, and luxury residences for nightly rental on the third floor."

Demolition is slated to begin in February.

— Submitted



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| 10 of our 12 investigators have completed their Criminal Investigation Certificate Program | Successfully completed 2 nuisance abatement actions, improving quality of life for our citizens | Accomplished all this while adding five new positions without increasing the budget |

For additional questions about the campaign, please call me at 828-421-7240.

I humbly ask for your vote on March 3, 2026, so we can keep moving Macon County forward.

—★—

Sheriff Brent Holbrooks

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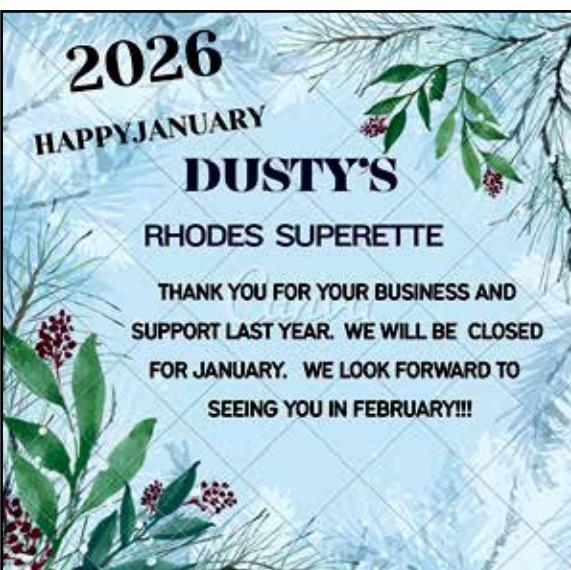


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•LETTERS•

Walking for peace

Dear Editor,

Last week I had the opportunity to travel to rural Georgia with a friend to see the Venerable Monks on their Walk for Peace. It was the same day that we awoke to the news of the United States invasion of Venezuela to arrest Nicolas Maduro. It was an abrupt end to the peacefulness of the Christmas season, making my head spin and bringing me back to chaos that is the hallmark of this administration. Sadly.

Hailing from Buddhist monasteries across the globe, nineteen monks began their 2300 mile walk in Fort Worth, TX at the Huong Dao Vipassana Bhavana Center. Their intention has been to raise awareness of peace, kindness and compassion across the United States. It is something that many of them have done before in other countries.

The Walk for Peace began on October 26th of last year with the hope of reaching Washington DC by mid-February. Along the way they stop at small towns for midday breaks and overnight camping. In each of those places they share their wisdom teachings and engage in dialogue with interested visitors.

My experience was one of welcoming them into the small town of Bishop, GA with offerings of flowers and thanks. It was brief but powerful despite the rain. As their midday gathering was indoors due to the weather, my friend and I did not have the opportunity to hear them speak. I continue to follow them on Facebook as they have moved across Georgia,

The Sloan's legacy of kindness lives on

Dear Editor,

This letter to the editor is a thank you to Wiley and Sarah Sloan in heaven. If you knew them, you understand; if you never met them, you have still benefited from their great love for us and this community.

At the Rotary Club of Highlands meeting this week, Rick Trevathan stood up to announce a generous gift from the Sarah Sloan estate to the Community Care Clinic of Highlands and Cashiers. Then Lance Hardin stood up to announce a generous gift from Sarah Sloan to the Highlands Cashiers Land Trust. The announcements went on - a

generous gift to the Highlands Historical Society and a generous gift to the Highlands Performing Art Center.

Their legacy of kindness and generosity serves as an inspiration to all of us, reminding us of the profound impact that a single family can have on countless lives. As we move forward, may we strive to honor Wiley and Sarah's memory by supporting one another and giving back to our community with the same warmth and compassion that they showed every day.

Kathy Smith
Highlands

• See LETTERS page 10

•HS SPORTS RECAP•

Highlanders battle through grueling week of action

It was a packed week for Highlands Athletics, featuring a heavy slate of conference basketball and a standout performance in the pool at Rabun Gap. While the high school hardwood saw mixed results, the middle school programs continued their dominant run, and the swim team made waves across state lines.

High School basketball: tough road trip, strong home response

The Highlanders faced a difficult environment last Wednesday as they traveled to Murphy.

- JV Boys: The young Highlanders fell 40-52 despite a monster performance from Jonathan Carpenter, who posted 15 points and 7 rebounds. Sam Conner added 9 points and 8 boards in the effort.

- Varsity Girls: In a defensive battle, the Lady Highlanders narrowly missed a comeback, falling 33-37. Hunter Conner led the charge with 15 points and 8 rebounds, supported by Jordyn Borino (10 points) and Charlotte Westendorf (8 points, 9 rebounds).

- Varsity Boys: The Bulldogs proved too much for Highlands, handing them a 35-73 loss. Bryan Jarquin was the bright spot for the offense, tallying 13 points.

The Highlanders returned to the mountain on Friday to host Nantahala, where the Varsity Girls secured a dominant 56-14 victory. Jordyn Borino exploded for 25 points, while Hunter Conner recorded a massive double-double with 18 points, 14 rebounds, and 5 blocks. Taylor Hays chipped in 8 points.

The Varsity Boys played a nail-biter against the Hawks, ultimately falling 43-49. Paolo McRae turned in a stellar performance with 20 points and 9 rebounds, followed by Isaiah Vilardo (10 points, 8 rebounds) and Bryan Jarquin (9 points).

Middle School: Dominance at home

The Middle School programs protected their home court with authority this week.

Vs. Blue Ridge:

- Girls: Won 33-9
- Boys: Won 51-29

Vs. Summit:

- Girls: Lost 33-13
- Boys: Won 59-24



Brett Lamb
Highlands School
Athletic Director

The Middle School Boys continue to be a force to be reckoned with, showcasing a high-octane offense that averaged 55 points over the two-game stretch.

Swim: McKim sweeps at Rabun Gap

The Highlands Swim team traveled to Rabun Gap on Friday, delivering several podium finishes against stiff competition. Anaih McKim was the star of the meet, taking 1st place in both the 200 Free and 400 Free.

Other notable finishers included:

- Ian Batista: 2nd in 200 Free, 2nd in 400 Free.
- Trinity Fernandez-Faust: 3rd in 200 Free, 2nd in 400 Free.

As a unit, the Girls finished 3rd overall and the Boys finished 4th, proving that Highlands can compete with the larger programs in the region.

The Week Ahead

Get out and support your Highlanders at these upcoming events:

- Friday: HS Basketball vs. Hiwassee Dam (Home)



Lillian Rutter takes aim.

...LETTERS continued from page 9

Are we a country of laws or chaos?

Dear Editor,

It's increasingly evident that a leftist minority in this country is deeply committed to an anti-American ideology. They cannot be reasoned with. Video evidence and genuine truth mean nothing to them. They are not interested in laws or decency. Their primary belief system revolves around violence, ghoulishness, and intense jealousy/insecurity. Just as the Bolsheviks, Maoists, and Nazis began their radical movements as a minority, so too are these leftists. As they gain influence in places like Minnesota, New York, and California, all of America should be on guard and ready to oppose their extremism they have cloaked in self-righteousness behavior. Disagreeing with these ideas is not hate or fear; it's people pushing back on delusion that doesn't belong in a civilized society. We either have a country of laws and abide by them, or we have chaos.

The left keeps saying diversity is under attack, but what's really being challenged is an ideology that blurs reality.

Diversity means different backgrounds, culture, and viewpoints--NOT rewriting biology or forcing policies that go against democracy and laws. The woman in MN who tried to run over someone doing their job is dead because she was fully gripped by years of media indoctrination that falsely told her she was living in 1930s Germany. She was gaslit into defending illegal immigrants who have broken the law and don't give a tinker's damn about her or any other do-gooder roaming the streets with whistles. The billionaires out there are laughing at their ability to indoctrinate these impressionable souls into doing their bidding. The brainwashing happens at universities and media outlets they control which rob people of balance in thought and ideas. This poor woman is a product of a destructive larv mentality that has failed her and others like her. No one was able to convince her to abandon her destructive alternate reality.

This nation has witnessed previous examples such as the assassination of Charlie Kirk and the untold numbers

of constitutional justice inconsistencies. Leftists have clearly caused the ongoing controversies. It's time to have an honest discussion calling out politicians and media (even local press) to take responsibility for dividing Americans with false narratives and attempting to humiliate those who support rule of law and consistency. Sanctimonious identity politics won't work on the generation that came of age under COVID tyranny, autopen authoritarianism, open fraud by unaccountable bureaucracies, and woke cultural insanity. The buzz words of racist, fascist, and homo-

phobe won't work anymore on a thinking society who values peace and decency. Leftists have pushed people to the brink, even while claiming, "it's time for unity." Well, it's time for careful reflection and change on all sides. It's time to ask ourselves as a nation where do we want to be in 10 years? 20 years? The silent majority cannot remain silent anymore. We must defend America from those who seek to tear it apart with deception, manipulation, and law breaking. God help us.

Jim Gaston
Franklin, NC

...HF&W continued from page 6

als were so impaired they had difficulty communicating and recognizing questions," said Chief Holland.

She and Austin said that the signature band The Wallflowers' hour-late arrival which pushed the opening of the event back an hour, caused people to congregate on town sidewalks, and at the intersection of Main and 4th streets waiting to be let in which created hazards for drivers and pedestrians.

She also voiced concern about the overserving of alcohol. NC law limits the amount of liquor in a single-mixed drink to one ounce to promote responsible serving but due to the congestion, officers couldn't monitor servers.

"Increased intoxication in a confined space heightens the likelihood of falls, fights, injuries, property damage and impaired driving and at that point liability also becomes a concern," she said. "Over-served individuals who cause accidents can later implicate servers, organizers, permit holders or the town, particularly if emergency response is delayed."

Holland said the reality is the Highlands Police Department is small and can't safely manage a crowd of 1,200.

"I believe we owe it to our community to keep events to a size our department can handle," she said. "A manageable event means safer streets, officers who can do their jobs effectively and a community we can all feel good about."

She suggested relocating the event out of the confined Main Street area to a venue that can accommodate crowds and where law enforcement and EMS can act quickly and effectively. She noted walking through dense crowds with guns on their hips is very unsafe and if there was someone in the crowd with a gun, he or she could open fire and have a deadly impact.

"The Highlands Police Department

believes the HF&W event can continue to thrive but only in a location that prioritizes safety for attendees, residents and businesses," she said.

Highlands Fire & Rescue Asst. Chief Robbie Forrester said getting access into the venue due to barricades, narrow ingress and egress points and the large crowd was a real concern.

"If someone had a heart attack, we would have to get the ambulance to them or block Main and 4th to get all the equipment off the ambulance -- which is a lot in that kind of situation -- while attempting to roll a stretcher through the crowd," he said.

Chief Holland said if there was an emergency requiring everyone to leave immediately through the narrow egress area between the porta-potties and the stage or even at Main and 4th streets, there could be the possibility of a stampede.

"There are other communities where people have been killed due to being trampled on during a stampede," she said.

Mayor Pat Taylor voiced concern about the lack of security when entering the event area.

"Someone could have entered with a weapon," he said.

Kirk Moore of Oakleaf Flower & Garden suggested the town conduct a fiscal, emotional and infrastructure audit to determine how the festival affects businesses downtown.

"During this prime weekend, the town is basically shut down for this," he said. "How does the for-profit company that puts this on compensate our town in a direct way for us hosting this event? I suggest they find another small town to pick on," he said.

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...HF&W
continued from
page 10

Austin said Saturday's Main event is the signature event of the festival, which was conceived 10 years ago to bring well-heeled shoppers right to the doorstep of local businesses -- shops, restaurants and hotels.

"To move it even to the park, would defeat that purpose and we would very much like to keep the event on Main Street," he said.

This year the VIP area was enlarged which decreased the General Admission area which added to the congestion, but Austin said the number of tickets issued was the same as last year. He suggested decreasing the number of free working passes to sponsors/vendors/volunteers which over the years has stood at 200.

"We understand there was some congestion this year, but what we see is a vast sea of happy affluent people enjoying our iconic downtown, listening to good music, and enjoying good food and wine," he said. "The demographics were people who make \$250,000 a year who are affluent and highly educated. The ideal demographic to bring to Highlands. These are basically responsible people who have a good time. They are not rabble rousers."

He did suggest unexpectedly delaying the event by an hour due to the late arrival of the signature band, likely added to people waiting and drinking before the event, which may have caused more intoxication than in year's past.

For next year he suggested halting alcohol service 20 minutes prior to the end and scanning people with a wand prior to entrance to ensure weapons aren't brought in.

He said an economic impact study conducted two years ago indicated \$2.5 million was injected into the local economy during the 4-day event.

• See HF&W page 12

CANDIDATE FOR MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS - DISTRICT 2

My name is Nick Lofthouse and I am running for one of the two open seats for District 2 on the Board of Commissioners because I want to make sure Macon County remains a place where my children -- and other families -- can build a life worth living.

With a career in public service, experience as a small business owner serving Western North Carolina, unique insight as a county employee, and a heart for volunteering to make our community better, I would be honored to represent you on the Board of Commissioners.

I grew up in the Echo Valley community on land owned by my grandparents, Phil and Maysel Hazazer. I was raised by my mother Kate, who as a single mother I credit for instilling in me a fierce work ethic that she demonstrated on a daily basis by working long hours as a lineman for Verizon and a dental hygienist.

I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to call many corners of Macon County home, living on the Eastside of town and attending East Franklin Elementary School before moving across town to Skeenah when my mother remarried and where I finished out elementary school at Union Elementary.

I am a proud product of Macon County Youth Sports, playing soccer, football, and baseball in the county rec leagues and where I spent my summers at the community building for summer adventure camp.

I attended Franklin High School and was proud to represent the Panthers as a member of the Future Business Leaders of America, a member of the Football Team and as a Wrestler. I have always had a love for finding out how things are engineered to work, which lead to me attending college in Florida where I completed technical training in electronics and earned my journeyman certification. I returned home to work in communications technology, including positions as a repair technician and later with a local two-way radio communications company.

I have always believed that you do not have the right to complain about a problem, if you are not willing to put in the work to find a solution, so after watching so many friends and family members struggle with addiction and go down paths of self-destruction, I made the decision to pursue a career in law enforcement as a way to try to make a difference in my community.

I put myself through Basic Law Enforcement Training at Southwestern Community College and was fortunate to be hired by Sheriff Robert Holland after graduation to work in the detention center. While working part-time for the Sheriff's Office, I founded my first small business specializing in radio installation and repair, which later grew and was acquired by a larger company, where I worked full-time as a service manager overseeing operations, budgeting, and forecasting.

Once my contract with the radio company was up, Sheriff Holland offered me a full-time position at the Sheriff's Office working on patrol where I have worked ever since.

I worked my way up from deputy, to K9 handler, to sergeant, to lieutenant to now serving as the Captain of Crime Prevention which comes with the responsibility of the day-to-day operations such as community outreach and education as well as maintaining the unit's budget and ensuring we are being good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

I believe education and training is a commitment and not an end-goal, which is why as Captain of Crime Prevention, I have prioritized setting up pathways for sheriff office employees to further their education through a partnership with Southwestern Community College.

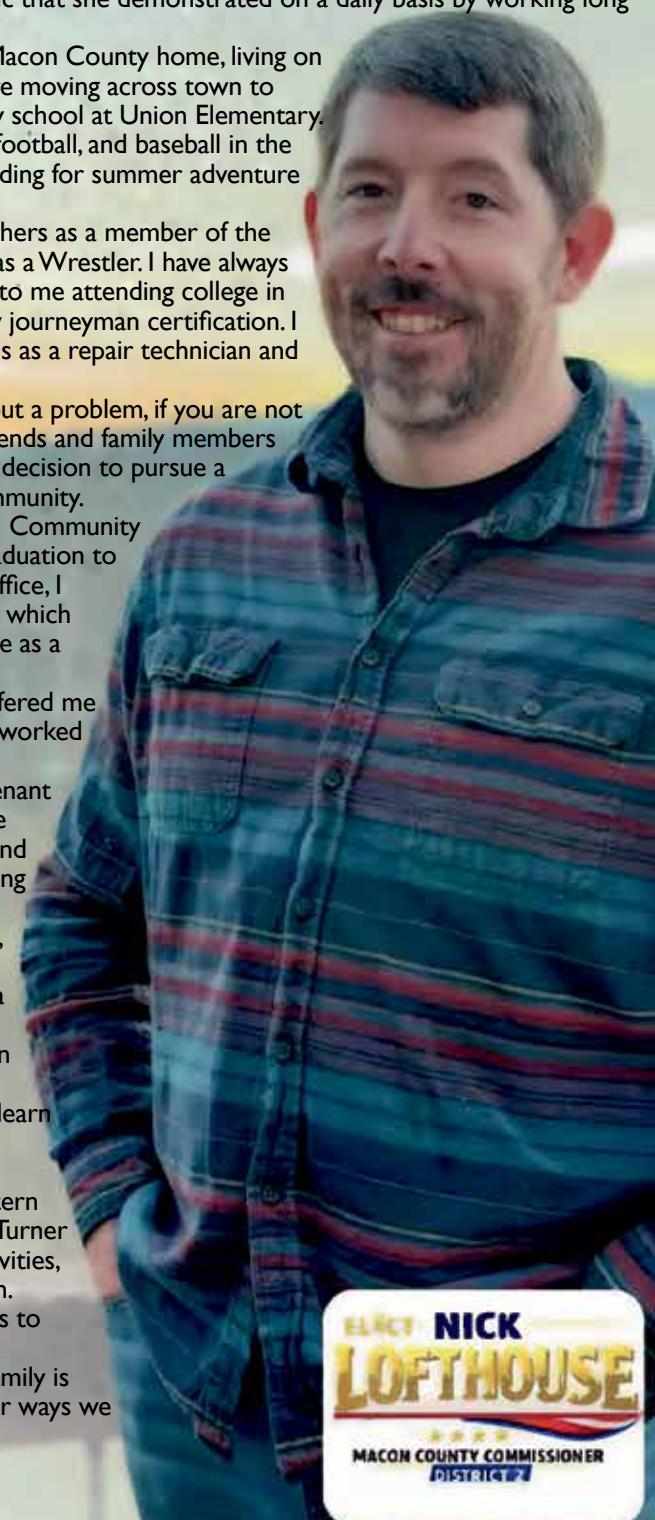
Aside from the various certifications and trainings I have completed in law enforcement, I am currently enrolled in SCC to complete my criminal justice degree. I believe that you should always try to better yourself and learn as much as you can.

I am married to my wife, Brittney, and together we own Public Safety Services, a vehicle outfitting service with customers spanning across Western North Carolina and Northern Georgia. Our children - Kyler, Sawyer, and Turner - all attend Macon County Schools and participate in local sports and activities, which despite not being the most qualified, I enjoy volunteering as a coach.

I enjoy all things community, whether that be helping with fund raisers to support organizations such as Reach of Macon County or KIDS Place or volunteering to play the Grinch throughout the holiday season, and our family is committed to serving this incredible community we call home in whatever ways we are called to do so.

Nick Lofthouse

Paid for by Friends of Nick Lofthouse Campaign Committee



**ELECT NICK
LOFTHOUSE**
MACON COUNTY COMMISSIONER
DISTRICT 2

...HF&W continued from page 11

Commissioner Amy Patterson, who read the report which wasn't disseminated to the public due to proprietary information, said figures could be manipulated.

"We originally allowed this event on Main Street to see how it would work and the stated goal was to bring more business during the shoulder season. If it doesn't do that, then there is no reason to have it and particularly on Main Street," she said. "18% of those polled said the event increased their business and 21%

said it hurt their business. If it's not actually helping everyone then the balance is more not helping than helping."

One citizen asked where the money raised goes.

"I understand there is a scholarship for someone to learn to cook but what to area nonprofits get?" she asked. "Where does it all go? It must be millions."

Austin said the festival was never designed to produce income for charities.

"We do contribute to local and regional nonprofits and now have fully en-

dowed the Culinary Institute of America scholarship with preference given to local students who apply. It's a food and wine festival and it honors that program," he said.

As per its website, Highlands Festivals, Inc. is a 501c3 non-profit organization that produces the annual Highlands Food & Wine and Bear Shadow festivals in Highlands. The goal is to promote Highlands as an inspiring place to visit and live by producing world-class events that showcase, enhance, and support The Highlands-Cashiers Plateau's vibrant culinary, visual, and performing arts organiza-

zations while contributing funds and resources that directly benefit similar local initiatives.

"The goal was to make a profit for local businesses which we have done. Any leftover money is rolled over for the next year," he said.

Through ticket sales and sponsorships, Highlands Festivals is able to hire Eleven Events production and operations marketing company from Greenville to produce the festival.

Board members of Highlands Festivals are: Jack Austin, David Bock, Debi Bock, Tricia Cox, Thomas Craig, Marjorie Deal, Stephanie Edwards, Drew English, Pat Gleeson, Liz Harris, Bryan Lewis, Sam Lupus, Steve Mehder, Drew Townes, Mary Adair Trumbly, and Hilary Wilkes.

Blye Hunsinger, Human Resource Director for Old Edwards Inn said HF&W is a world-class event held during an important time of year.

"It highlights what Highlands is all about. And for OEI, with hotels and restaurants, it is important to us and we benefit greatly. We should absolutely consider the ideas brought forth tonight, but we don't want so many restrictions to take the fun out of it," he said.

"There are always a few bad players but the vast amount of people otherwise are having a great time."

He said he personally knows two people who came to the festival and subsequently bought homes in Highlands.

"That's a direct successful impact to the community," he said.

Representatives from Highland Hiker and Highland Hatter said the festival has initiated sales that kept pace with October sales during a time when retail sales and business in Highlands in general typically dropped Halloween until Thanksgiving.

"The festival has put Highlands on the map as a multi-generational place and fostered many relationships," they said.

Sabrina Hawkins, owner of Highlands Inn whose venue butts up against the Main Street confine said the festival may bring business to some sectors of Highlands but not hers.

"It does more harm than good for me. The noise is particularly bad, and I have a hard time renting my rooms along the front. It starts Friday night and doesn't let up until Saturday evening. Plus no one can use that part of Main Street until after 8:30 p.m.," she said. "They



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Dr. Erica McVey, Audiologist
University of Texas

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• See HF&W page 15

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SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING



Establishing New Things

**Sr. Pastor
Gary Hewins**
Community Bible Church

New beginnings can be exciting — but they can also be intimidating. Starting something fresh often stirs up a mixture of hope and fear: hope because we can envision something better, and fear because we don't know how it will turn out. Whether you're launching a new ministry, beginning a new season of life, pursuing a new career path, or rebuilding after disappointment, Scripture offers a steady principle for establishing what is new.

Proverbs 16:3 gives us that principle in one clear sentence:

"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." (Proverbs 16:3, NIV)

This verse is more than a motivational phrase—it is a spiritual blueprint for starting well and building wisely. It teaches that the stability of our future does not depend first on our talent, resources, or timing. The most important factor is who we entrust our work to.

The Desire for Something New

It's normal to want new things. God Himself is the author of newness. He creates, restores, and renews. Throughout Scripture, the Lord introduces "new" realities: new mercies every morning, new songs of praise, a new heart, a new covenant, and a new creation in Christ. So the longing to begin again, to build something different, or to step into a fresh assignment is not automatically selfish or worldly. It can be the Spirit stirring the heart toward growth and obedience.

But new beginnings also come with risks. We can build them out of pride instead of faith. We can pursue them for identity instead of obedience. We can chase "new" because we are restless rather than called. This is why Proverbs 16:3 is so important—it reorders our starting point. It reminds us that a strong foundation matters more than a strong launch.

What Does It Mean to "Commit"?

The word "commit" in Proverbs 16:3 is stronger than it may appear at first glance. It means more than simply starting something while hoping God supports it. It carries the idea of entrusting something—placing it into someone else's hands.

To commit your work to the Lord is not merely to mention God in your plans. It is to transfer the weight of your work — its outcomes, pressures, fears, and expectations—onto Him. It is surrender with action.

When we commit our work to the Lord, we're saying:

- "God, this is Yours — not mine."
- "I will obey You more than I will trust my instincts."
- "I want Your will more than I want my results."
- "I will measure success by faithfulness, not applause."

That kind of commitment brings freedom. It removes the crushing burden of trying to control everything. It replaces anxiety with trust.

• See SPIRITUALLY page 18

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

BLUE VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Oliver Rice. Pastor 706-782-3965

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

Sunday night services every 2nd & 4th Sunday at 7 p.m.

BUCK CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

828-269-3546 • Rev. Jamie Passmore. Pastor

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

CASHIERS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Aryn Williams-Reubel. Pastor 828-743-5298

Sundays: School at 9:30; Worship 10:30 a.m.

GRACE CHAPEL ON HIGH HOLLY

9615 Dillard Rd Scaly Mountain, NC 28770

Pastor Steve Kerhoulas. <http://www.Graceonhighholly.com>

Sunday School 9:45; Worship 11 a.m.; Prayer Service Wed 5:30 p.m.

Men's and Women's Bible Study throughout the week

CHRIST ANGLICAN CHURCH

The Rev'd Dr. Marc Robertson & Rev. Nick McGee

464 U.S. Hwy. 64E, Cashiers, NC

CAC@christanglicancashiers.org • 828-743-1701

Sunday: Adult Christian Ed, 9:15 a.m.; Holy Eucharist, 10:30 a.m.

Fellowship 11:45 a.m.; Wed: Bible Study/Contemplative Prayer, 5 p.m.

CHRIST CHURCH OF THE VALLEY. CASHIERS

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

www.cashiers.church

Sun. 10:45 a.m.; Wed Study 5:15 p.m. supper and childcare.

CLEAR CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Jim Kinard

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

1st & 3rd Sunday night Service: 7 p.m.

Wednesdays — Supper at 6 p.m.

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH

www.cbchighlands.com • 526-4685

3645 Cashiers Rd. Highlands, NC • Sr. Pastor Gary Hewins

Sun: Service 10:45 a.m., Children's 10:30 a.m.

Wed.: Youth 5:30-7 p.m.; Women's Bible Study: Mon. 4:30 p.m., Tues.

10 a.m.; Men's Bible Study: Wed. & Thurs. 7 a.m. @ Zookeeper

Bistro

EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION

Rev. W. Bentley Manning, Rector • 526-2968

5th and Main streets • www.incarnationwnc.org

Sunday: Rite I, spoken, 8 a.m. in Chapel, Rite II with Choir 10:30 a.m. in Sanctuary, Wed: Healing Eucharist 12 p.m. in Chapel,

Morning Prayer: Mon-Thurs 8:30 a.m. in Chapel

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HIGHLANDS

828-526-4153 • www.fbchighlands.org

Dr. Mark Ford, Pastor • 220 Main Street, Highlands

Sun.: Worship 10:45 a.m.; Sun.: Bible Study 9:30 a.m.

Wed.: Men's Bible Study 8:30 a.m.; Women's 10:30 a.m.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Emily Wilmarth, pastor, Rev. Kelley Connelly Asso. 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. Chancel Choir: 5:30 p.m.

GOLDMINE BAPTIST CHURCH

(Off Franklin/Highlands Rd)

Sunday School: 10 a.m. Worship Service: 11 a.m.

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF CASHIERS

Non-Denominational-Contemporary Worship

242 Hwy 107N. 1/4 miles from Crossroads in Cashiers

www.gracecashiers.com • Pastor Steve Doerter 743-9814

Services: Sundays 10 a.m. - Wed. - 7 p.m.; Dinner - Wed. 6 p.m.

HAMBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Hwy 107N. • Glenville, NC • 743-2729 • Nathan Johnson

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

HIGHLANDS ASSEMBLY OF GOD

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

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

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 9 a.m. & 6 p.m. Wednesday Worship is 6 p.m.

HIGHLANDS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Dr. Randy Lucas. Pastor 526-3376

In-Person and live-streamed Worship Services

909a Bluegrass and 11 a.m. Traditional

www.highlandsmethodist.org

HOLY FAMILY LUTHERAN CHURCH: ELCA

2152 Dillard Road • 526-9741

Rev. Ken Langsdorf

Worship/Communion: 10:30 a.m. All are welcome.

Visit our website: [Holy Family Lutheran Highlands NC](http://HolyFamilyLutheranHighlandsNC.com)

Macedonia Baptist Church

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

Pastor Zane Talley

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

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

Mountain Synagogue

Franklin • 828-634-1312 • mountainsynagoguewnc.com.

Services: 1st Fri. and 3rd Sat. and Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur.

Mountain Bible Church

743-2583 • Independent Bible Church

Sun: 10:30 a.m. at Big Ridge Baptist Church. 4224 Big Ridge (4.5 miles from NC 107)

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

Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic Church

Rev. Fr. Jason K. Barone — 526-2418

Sat. 4 p.m. 5/24/25-10/25/25; Sun. - 11 a.m.

Scaly Mountain Baptist Church

Rev. Marty Kilby

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

Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

Scaly Mountain Church of God

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

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

Shortoff Baptist Church

Pastor Rev. Richard Salmonson

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

St. Jude's Catholic Church

Mass: Sun. 9 a.m. (English); Mon. 9:30 a.m. (Vatican II in Latin); Tues.

7 p.m. (Spanish); Wed., 9:30 a.m. (English)

The Church of the Good Shepherd

1448 Highway 107 S.. Office: • 743-2359 • Rev. Rob Wood

Sunday Service (summer): 9 a.m. & 11 a.m.

Visit our website: www.goodshepherdofcashiers.com

Our Bazaar Barn supports outreach in the community.

Open Fri & Sat. 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

85 Sierra Drive, Franklin • uufranklin.org

Sunday Worship - 11 a.m.

Whiteside Presbyterian Church

Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers • 828-743-2122

Sunday School: 10 a.m. Worship Service: 11 a.m.

• See SPIRITUALLY page 18

• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Jan. 7. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a summons/citation, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or those of public officials have been used.

Jan. 7

• At 6:59 p.m., officers received a call about someone threatening to shoot people. At HF&R.

• At 11:48 a.m., officers responded to a call for service at the Highlands Emergency Council regarding an assault.

Jan. 9

• At 6:04 p.m., the dept. po-

...HF&W continued from page 12

need a different venue, something bigger than Main Street from 4th to 5th. Shutting off Main Street for 24 hours hurt me. It doesn't belong on Main Street."

Commissioner Jeff Weller

...HOSPITAL continued from page 5

adults should also all be receiving annual flu and COVID-19 immunizations. Despite recent controversy, the science behind vaccines remains solid and they have been proven safe and effective in protecting us from disease. In the US, we have been using vaccines since the Revolu-



Accident on the Cashiers Road.

lice received a false report about

explosive devices at the Episco-

tion. We all need to get together and discuss how to improve and yes, the location will be part of that discussion," he said. "Tonight, we listened. We didn't solve anything, so another meeting is necessary."

your family is the best investment you can make for your health in 2026. I and the entire staff at Highlands-Cashiers Hospital and Eckerd Living Center are dedicated to partnering with you for better health this year — and every year.

Taking care of yourself and

...MAYOR continued from page 2

construction prices, workforce shortages, and high interest rates as major drivers of the housing crisis. And I might add that in some metropolitan areas, there are investment groups developing or buying subdivisions for the sole purpose of charging high rents to maximize their profits. Until these factors are addressed at a national level, I worry the housing crisis will especially affect young people striving to launch careers and start families. They will face the tremendous challenge of becoming homeowners, which is truly the American dream.

Now, towns, cities, and counties have new concerns about

state legislation that would inhibit them from providing services to their constituents. As the legislature prepares to go into the short session in mid-April, public hearings are underway about limiting counties and municipalities from using property taxes as sources of revenue for such vital services as law enforcement, education, and other areas. On average, about 60% of a county or town's revenue comes from property taxes. Elected officials across the state worry that any limitation or prohibition through state law would impair the operation and maintenance of local public services.

The North Carolina League of Municipalities and the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners have both shared concerns with the House Property Tax Panel about property taxes being a key source of local government revenue. Both organizations will carefully monitor the developments as the next legislative session approaches.

pal Church.

Jan. 17

Accident:

Vehicle-1 was backing from a parking spot on Main Street.

Vehicle-2 was traveling east on Main Street.

Vehicle-1 pulled into the path of Vehicle-2, causing a collision and resulting in damage to both vehicles.

Note: The collision occurred the prior day and information recorded is based on driver's testimony

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Jan. 14

Jan. 14

• At 9:13 a.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on US 64 east (Cashiers Road).

Jan. 15

• At 3:03 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on US 64 west (Franklin Road).

Jan. 16

• At 6 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Winterberry Court.

Jan. 17

• At 4:57 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Happoldt Drive.

• At 10:01 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Ridgewood Drive.

• At 11:11 a.m., the dept. responded to a call of a possible gas leak at a residence on Mt. Lori Drive.

Jan. 18

• At 10:23 a.m., the dept. was first-responders at a location on Main Street.

Jan. 19

• At 6:37 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a possible structure fire at a residence on Upper Lake Road.

• At 3:45 p.m., the dept. helped locate lost hikers on Ranger Falls Trail.

• At 7:15 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on VZ Top.



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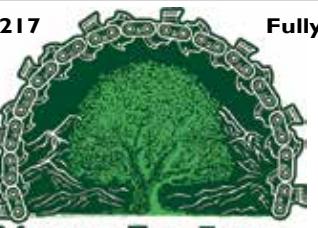
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PICKLE BALL

• At the Recreation Dept. every Monday - Friday 10am-1pm indoors for the winter (notice the days and time has changed),

MOUNTAIN FINDINGS

Winter Hours: Friday & Saturdays. Open: 10 am - 1 pm. Spruce Street. www.mountainfindings.org

ICE SKATING IN PARK

• Thurs., 3:30-8p; Fri. 3:30-10p; Sat. 1-10p, Sun. 1-5p Hours will be extending during Thanksgiving and Christmas vacations. \$8 with or without skates.

ALL WEEK

• Scaly Mountain/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 at Scaly Mountain @ Grace Chapel, 9915 Dillard Rd., Scaly Mountain each Tues at 5:30 pm and 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 also held in Cashiers @ the Albert Carlton Cashiers Community Library, 249 Frank Allen Rd. on

Sunday at 5pm, on Tuesday @ 7 pm, on Friday at 5 pm and on Saturday at 9 am. 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

Fri., Jan. 16

At PAC's MLT, the movie Rental Family, 2 and 5:30 p.m. For tickets, call 828-526-9047.

Sat., Jan. 17

At PAC's MLT, the movie Rental Family, 2 and 5:30 p.m. For tickets, call 828-526-9047.

Sun., Jan. 18

At PAC's MLT, the movie Rental Family, 2 (with captions) and 5:30 p.m. For tickets, call 828-526-9047.

Sat., Jan. 17

• At Highlands Mercantile on Main Street, Eyebrow Lifting and Shaping Event. 11a to 2p. RSVP:828-482-0818 Limited appointments available. Call today to reserve your spot!

Sun. Jan. 25

• Grand Reopening of Don Leon's. 1-4pm. Come meet DonJuan and Ivanet (Eva)There will be free food and music. IT will be a time to celebrate our retirement and their new ownership.

Fri. & Sat., Feb. 13-14

• PAC Outreach Theater Camp -- How to Audition Join us for a two-day theater camp designed for young performers ages 7-18. 10a to 3p. For tickets, call 828-526-9047.

Wed., March 4

• At PAC, Paces Live Presents: A Taste of Ireland at 7:30 p.m. For tickets, call 828-526-9047.

...SPIRITUALLY continued from page 14

"He Will Establish Your Plans"

The second half of the verse contains a promise: "and he will establish your plans." In other words, when our work is placed in God's hands, our direction becomes secure. This does not mean that every idea we have will automatically succeed exactly as we imagined. Proverbs is wisdom literature: it teaches us how life functions when lived under God's order.

To be "established" means to be made firm, steady, and durable. Established plans are not flimsy fantasies. They are not built on hype, emotional energy, or impulsive ambition. Established plans are anchored in God's wisdom, strengthened by God's provision, and guided by God's timing.

Sometimes God establishes our plans by blessing them and allowing them to flourish. Other times, He establishes our plans by refining them—removing what doesn't belong. And sometimes, He establishes us by redirecting us toward a better path altogether. Either way, the promise remains: when our work is truly surrendered, God will not leave us drifting.

Establishing New Things the Right Way

So how do we apply Proverbs 16:3 when stepping into something new?

1. Begin with surrender, not strategy.

A common mistake in new endeavors is starting with a blueprint before starting with prayer. Many people ask God to bless what they have already decided, rather than asking God what to decide. Commitment means prayer isn't an accessory—it's the foundation.

Before writing your plan, ask:

- "Lord, is this what You want?"
- "Is my heart pure in this?"
- "Am I trying to prove something—or obey You?"

2. Invite God into your motives.

God cares not only about what we do, but why we do it. Two people can start the same "new thing," but one does it for God's glory and the other does it for recognition. Commitment includes exposing motives to God's light.

A new ministry, business, relationship, or personal goal must pass a simple test:

Can God be glorified through this—and am I willing to lay it down if He says no?

3. Take faithful steps without worshiping outcomes.

Committing your work doesn't mean doing nothing and waiting for miracles. It means doing the work faithfully while trusting God fully. There is a holy balance between effort and dependence. We work diligently, but we depend completely. We plan wisely, but we trust deeply.

4. Be willing to adjust.

When God establishes your plans, He may also reshape them. The committed life is flexible—not because it lacks conviction, but because it trusts God's wisdom more than its own. Sometimes the "new thing" God establishes isn't the project itself, but the character He forms in you: patience, humility, perseverance, courage, and deeper faith.

A New Thing That Lasts

Many people start new things, but few establish new things that endure. Proverbs 16:3 shows us why: endurance requires spiritual alignment. What is birthed in pride eventually collapses under pressure. What begins without prayer eventually wobbles. What is built for applause eventually feels empty.

But what is committed to the Lord becomes stable. God strengthens it. God guides it. God makes it lasting. And even if the outward plan changes, the inward work of God remains established.

If you are standing on the edge of a new season, hear the wisdom of Proverbs: don't carry the weight alone. Place your work in the Lord's hands. Trust His leadership. Then move forward with faith—because God loves to establish what is surrendered to Him.

...SEAT continued from page 1

Stiehler who vacated his seat in August of 2025 in time for the November 2025 election, vacancies are filled with a vote by sitting commissioners.

Unlike county commissions or boards which have 60 days to fill a vacated seat, there is no deadline or specific procedure to fill vacated Town Board seats under state law or the town's charter or code of ordinances. The only stipulation is the candidate must be an eligible voter residing in the town limits and the election procedure must be done in open session.

At the January Town Board meeting, Town Attorney Nick

Tosco suggested following the UNC School of Government's recommendation to use the Nomination/Ballot method for appointing Dotson's replacement which first requires a culmination of applications.

The mayor and commissioners agreed to formulate an application including an affidavit verifying name and address but also space for a brief resume and perhaps the reason why the person would like to serve.

"Not a complete resume, but we need to know what they think about Highlands and how they would like to see it in the future," said Commissioner Amy Patter-

son.

It wasn't clear when the application will be ready, or how long applications will be accepted — Commissioner Jeff Weller suggested a couple of weeks -- but anyone interested in filling the seat is encouraged to call Town Hall and request an application.

Once the applications are collected, the Town Board will vote in open session with the majority vote winning.

"If a majority vote isn't realized during the first round, the board must decide how the lowest vote-getters will be re-

moved for subsequent rounds of voting," explained Tosco. "For instance, the board may decide that after the first round of votes, all candidates who receive zero votes would be removed. And then after the second round, if necessary, all candidates but two will be dropped so the third round would be between the two highest vote getters."

Tosco said the vote must taken in open session, and even ballots are marked in secret, the ballots must contain the commissioners' names so that when the vote is counted, the minutes of the meeting indicate which board

member voted for which candidate.

"In other words, the marking of the ballot can be secret, but the announcement of the vote must be public session and the ballots themselves are public record," said Tosco.

Though there in no deadline for the process, commissioners agreed they didn't want the process to drag on.

The next municipal election is November 2027. Elected board members are sworn in during the December Town Board meeting following the November election.

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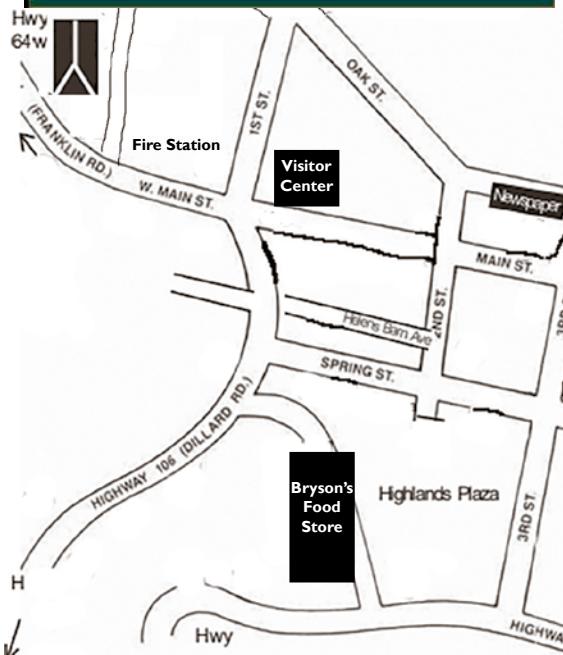
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