

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Jan. 29, 2026

CNBC report uses different metrics than ELC to rank NC education funding

By Kim Lewicki

Early in January, The Education Law Center released its "Making the Grade" report that

rates public education funding nationwide and then breaks it down state by state. (See <https://www.highlandsinfo.com/PDFs/26jan15.pdf>)

Around the same time CNBC released its report which

• See EDUCATION page 6



Public Works Director Lamar Nix with Town Manager Josh Ward and Mayor Pat Taylor at Nix's retirement celebration – June 1994-Dec. 2025.

— Photo by Kim Lewicki

Town says good-bye to Nix

By Kim Lewicki

Highlands Public Works Director and the town's first engineer Lamar Nix's retirement after 31 1/2 years was celebrated, Friday, Jan. 23 at the Community

Building.

It was a packed house with Town Board members, town employees representing every department – family and friends.

• See NIX page 4



The Birches

New Luxury Townhomes at Wildcat Cliffs Country Club

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BOC District 1 candidates take stance in Q&A



John Shearl



Don Willis



Joey Wilson

By Kim Lewicki

Anyone interested in occupying Commissioner John Dotson's vacated seat on the Highlands Town Board has until noon Feb. 16 to submit an application.

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

The only stipulation outlined by NC General Statute is the candidate must be an eligible voter residing in the town limits and the election procedure must be done in open session.

• See APPLICANTS page 7

most of my life. Since 1983 I have been dedicated to this amazing community not only as a property and business owner as well as a taxpayer (including city taxes), but also as a husband of a native Highlander who I married in 1986. Our three sons are all graduates of Highlands High School. I am a retired Highlands firefighter and former President of Highlands Little League for 20 years. I was also fortunate to be Highlands baseball coach and booster club member for many

John Shearl

1. *Why do you think you are the best person to represent the citizens of Highlands and District 1 as a whole?*

I'm thankful to have deep ties to the Highlands area for

• See Q&A page 5

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

What Highlands is today

Dollywood, a monumental tourist venue, does it, but we no longer do it. Highlands is no longer closed for the winter season. Starting after Christmas, Dollywood is shut down until the middle of March; the town pretty much stays open.

Their closure is due to several factors: weather, tourist volume, and the need for preparation. Many of their outdoor attractions would not see much use by visitors in cold temperatures. They also must repair and upgrade many of the rides and Dollywood's classic features. And of course, they plan and develop new attractions for the upcoming season during this downtime.

Highlands used to see a winter shutdown in both our business and residential areas. At one point, many stores on Main Street would paper their windows and remain closed from around November to the first of May, while many shop owners traveled during the winter or went to their second homes in warmer climates. There would be days, even on weekends, when



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

no vehicles would be found in any numbers on Main and 4th streets.

In addition, neighborhoods had a similar pattern of vacancy. Most seasonal residents left no later than November and did not return until around May. I remember seeing Buick Road Masters with mostly Florida tags coming into Highlands in the spring, almost dragging the rear bumper, since the vehicles were filled to the ceiling with

all the essentials for running a household. Sometimes they even had a luggage rack on the roof with stacks of baggage. Not anymore, the new all-terrain SUV makes Highlands accessible all year round. While many SUVs have roof racks, they can also tow, via a trailer hitch, those little square metal contraptions where even more stuff can be tied down. When this load formation occurs, the name of these vehicles morphs into Stuffed Up Vehicles!

For several years, our utility system has been transformed by this back-and-forth seasonal migration. Our peak water demand used to take place around July Fourth, and similar patterns occurred in electric usage. Now our peaks tend to occur around Christmas, and those low-demand winter months are pretty much outdated. Water, sewer, and electric usage have leveled out over the year, albeit overall demand has increased dramatically, thus the pressure to upgrade our water and electric systems.

As mayor, I embrace the technique of MBWA, that is, managing by wandering around. Almost every day, I drive around neighborhoods and downtown, making observations and finding small problems, like an American Flag at the park becoming ragged at the edges, or a pothole here and there.

I also notice traffic, parking, and pedestrian patterns in the downtown area. On most days, the downtown area wakes up, and not much activity happens until around noon. What is also interesting is that back in the old days, there was a significant thinning out of crowds and parking around 5 pm or so. Not so anymore, especially on weekends, the parking areas are full well into the evening hours with restaurant customers and hotel guests.

• See **MAYOR** page 6

• MILESTONE •

Highlands Police Chief Holland named 'First-Responder of the Year'



Each year, a member of each division is named – Law Enforcement, EMS, Firefighter. For the 2nd year in a row, a member of the Highlands Police Department was named "First Responder of the Year." For 2024, Captain Leah McCall was awarded the title and for 2025, Highlands Police Chief Andrea Holland was named.

• WEATHER •

Thu, 29-Jan	Fri, 30-Jan	Sat, 31-Jan	Sun, 1-Feb
36°F 16°F	36°F 17°F	24°F 2°F	31°F 6°F
Mostly sunny and chilly	Mostly cloudy and chilly	Snow or flurries possible	Cold; windy in the morning
RealFeel® High: 37° Low: 14°	RealFeel® High: 36° Low: 24°	RealFeel® High: 24° Low: -17°	RealFeel® High: 22° Low: -19°
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Offered for \$1,695,000

LOT 3



Highlands newest subdivision with plans for 15 elegant cottages! Superb quality with exemplary details from doors to floors! Spacious rooms, outdoor fireplaces, and windows galore! The latest bells and whistles to ring in the New Year. Natural landscapes and gated, only a 5 minute drive to downtown.

Offered for \$3,200,000.

Build it Your Way in Desirable Brushy Face



This gentle 2.05-acre in-town lot is tucked within the prestigious Brushy Face community, just minutes from the shops, dining, and amenities of downtown Highlands. The homesite has already been thoughtfully prepared, with a cleared building site and roughed-in driveway for easy access. A 4-bedroom septic system is in place, and connections to town water and high-speed internet are available, streamlining the building process. Enveloped by native flora and fauna, with a charming stream meandering through the property.

Offered for \$245,000



Nestled in one of Highlands' most coveted in-town communities, this expansive 2.20± acre in Brushy Face offers the perfect canvas for your mountain dream home. Gently rolling topography, paired with native rhododendron, plants and lush flora, creates a private and serene setting just minutes from downtown. The home site has already been thoughtfully prepared—with selective clearing and a 5-bedroom septic system installed! Town water and high-speed fiber optic internet are available, providing modern convenience without sacrificing mountain charm. The seller has house plans available and is willing to share them with the next fortunate owner.

Offered for \$399,000

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...NIX continued from page 1

Attendees feasted on rib-eyes grilled by the water department crew, salad, rolls, baked potatoes with all the fixings and a signature cake and cupcakes.

With Nix at the helm of the Public Works Department and aided by his crew that never gives up, Mayor Pat Taylor said, Nix has helped construct the town people know today.

"Because of his dedication, commitment and his professional credentials his positive service has advanced the public works infrastructure needs of the Town of Highlands," said Taylor.

The evolution of the Public Works Department – which encompasses, the water, sewer, electric and sanitation departments – over the last 30+ years has made Highlands what people expect from an affluent town.

But an electric grid that doesn't go out every time a couple of birds sit on a wire; clear, clean water from faucets turned on without a thought, an almost town-wide sewer system that has eliminated hundreds of septic tanks while preserving Highlands' water source; intricate drainage systems under the ballfield and KH Founders Park which enables play and leisure to continue regardless of temperate rain forest weather; upgraded roads, sidewalks; upgraded subdivision regulations that will ensure structures and infrastructure lasting into the future – not to mention Highlands' signature downtown area with brick sidewalks and

utility lines hidden from view – are all things the citizenry takes for granted but have been made possible due to 5-, 10-, and 20-year plans laid out and performed by the Public Works Department under Nix's guidance.

During his acknowledgement of Nix's legacy in town, Town Manager Josh Ward ticked off just the major projects Nix and his crews completed over the years – capital projects Nix said he considered the most memorable and impressive.

"The first project Lamar was involved with when he started in 1994 was completion of the wastewater treatment plant that was underway when he started," said Ward.

"In the mid-'90s, the installation of new sewer lines through the current River Walk development and down Cullasaja Drive, diverted sewer from the main lines directly to the new sewer plant which separated the flow from that part of town which included the newly constructed hospital;

"The water crew's installation of a sewer line down Arnold Road which sent sewer from Highlands Mountain Club, Shelby Place and Highlands Country Club – previously each with their own sewer treatment plant – to the new sewer plant;

"Assisting, developing and overseeing the town crews' installation of a complex drainage system under the town's ballfield to assist with the drying process



After a meal of grilled rib-eyes, salad, rolls and baked potatoes with all the fixings, attendees enjoyed a themed "retirement" cake and cupcakes.

after rainfall events," said Ward.

Ward said that project included installation of 300 tons of engineered soil, as well as 12,000 linear feet of herringbone drainage pipe which culminated with a drainage system that starts at home plate and ends at outfield fence.

"At the time it was the only system of its kind in the area besides Turner Field where the Atlanta Braves play," he said.

Nix and his crews also assisted, developed and oversaw the town's installation of the first soil-nail installation project on Chowan Drive to repair a slope failure onto the Franklin Road.

"The cost was a mere \$60,000 as compared to a second soil-nail repair conducted by a contractor in another area that cost well over \$300,000," said Ward.

Shortly after being hired, Nix recruited and hired a new electric line crew that included Yogi McCall, Greg James, David Leffler, and Clay Tally that served the town for 30 years upgrading the system step-by-step.

Other projects Nix oversaw included the 1996 water treatment plant renovations, the 1999 Main Street Beautification Project, which included rerouting power lines off Main Street between 3rd and 5th streets and upgrading the drainage system.

In the early 2000s, it was the widening and paving of Maple Street from a narrow gravel road; the installation of sewer lines in the Mirror Lake and Harris Lake areas which has protected Highlands' water quality; the storm water storage system underneath KH Founders Park that prevented flooding on 5th Street; and the replacement of almost all the storage tanks

within the town's water system including the latest and largest which is the Buckhorn tank on Satulah Mountain.

"There are many, many more but those are the highlights," said Ward. "I just want to thank Lamar for the years he has served the town and we already miss him. I am having to text him and call him from time to time and will in the future," he said.

Mayor Taylor said Nix and the town crews go above and beyond for the citizens of Highlands.

"During Hurricane Helene Lamar had to chainsaw his way out of his house to get up here to start restoring the utilities and that's what he has been doing during his whole career. He has always been dedicated to this community," said the mayor. "We will fill Lamar's position but we can't replace him," he said. "He brings an institutional memory to this whole Public Works construct that we have here in Highlands. And he has shaped and guided and developed what we view as our current modern Public Works Department."

In saying thanks to the crowd, Nix said 31 1/2 years pass by really quickly.

"It takes a whole outfit to make something work. From the mayor to the board to the manager, administration, the public works department, the police department, fire department, the tech division – a whole village to make any of these projects work. It's not one person, one department, one anything. It takes a whole team. I thank you all and appreciate it."

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...Q&A continued from page 1

years. I was the recipient of the highest honor that Highlands School awards to a citizen as voted on by faculty and staff.

My first term as your District 1 Commissioner speaks for itself. The following examples are just a small sample of the many improvements I and my colleagues have been able to accomplish specifically for Highlands and surrounding communities in District 1 by working together putting citizens first: 1.) Highlands School expansion and renovations. 2.) Funds for free lunches. 3.) Highlands School soccer field soil study. 4.) Increased funding to all Macon County schools without raising property taxes. 5.) \$400k for Highlands Rec Park playground. 6.) \$550k towards the Highlands Rec Park operations. 7.) Funding for Zachary Park. 8.) Assistance for the Scaly Mountain Community Center HVAC system. 9.) After hearing from Scaly Mountain residents and business owners, we were able to get the alcohol sales initiative on the upcoming 2026 general ballot. 10.) Saved the historic Pine Grove school by turning it over to the Sugarfork Community Club nonprofit and helped with repairs.

Across the entire county, I have supported and accomplished many other improvements as your District 1 Commissioner without raising taxes. 1.) HVAC and fire alarm system was upgraded at the courthouse. 2.) 911 call center was renovated to allow for more dispatchers and upgraded HVAC. 3.) Improvements to the courthouse square including the clock tower restoration. 4.) Shooting range for Macon County Sheriffs Dept. 5.) Full body scanners and HVAC upgrades at the Detention Center. 6.) New sewer pump and new vehicles for the Sheriffs Dept. 7.) Contracts for all Fire Departments. 8.) New Fire training facility. 9.) Renovation of old Armory Building. 10.) Renovations including a new shelter and vehicle for Macon County Transit. 11.) Began the Macon Transit route to Asheville to assist our citizens.

Furthermore, to improve the lives of Macon County residents while still being a good steward of taxpayer money, I have also led in the following county business: 1.) Sold county properties such as the old Gulf Station to the private sector for economic growth. 2.) Reactivated EDC. 3.) Crafted a new FRL interlocal agreement. 4.) Major renovations to the Franklin library and its operations to pro-

vide a better experience for patrons. 5.) Repairs at Macon Early College. 6.) New monitoring system installed at LBJ Corps. 7.) Realignment of the Health Dept. and consolidation with Animal Services along with new HVAC system at that facility. 8.) Helped ease severe back log in permitting by changing land disturbing to state standards while still protecting the environment. 9.) New "Moller Roller" for children to get quality dental care. 10.) Began sub-contracting for certain county maintenance to save on costs. 11.) Restructured Macon County Planning Board to serve the citizens better.

I am also proud to list some ongoing and upcoming county improvements I have supported: 1.) Overhaul of Macon County Rec Park to include amphitheater, pickle ball, all-inclusive playground, covered swimming pool, covered outdoor basketball courts, new tennis courts, beach volleyball, grills and picnic tables, etc. 2.) Repairs to the Greenway, Parker Meadows, and Cullasaja Park. We have been successful and will continue to seek out grants to help keep expenses down for the county. I have been plugged in to all of these efforts and will continue to work for Macon County residents without any interruption as an incumbent commissioner.

A new face in the mix from any of my opponents would only slow down the progress we have made because it would require a learning curve for a new commissioner. I remain committed to improving Macon County in the most cost-effective manner possible and without raising taxes. Macon County has seen countless accomplishments while I have been your commissioner. I will not use generic vocabulary to describe county business. My conservative values and dedicated experience with specific achievements speak for themselves.

2. How do you feel about the county's move to redistrict?

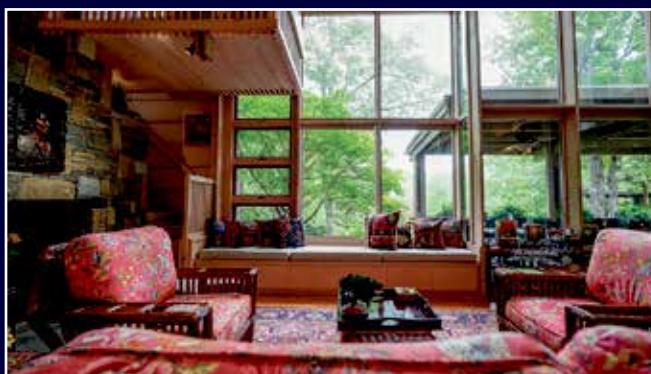
Citizens, voters, and candidates in Districts 1 and 3 are NOT treated fairly in the election process. If an individual resides in Districts 1 or 3, he or she may only seek office every four years. However, if an individual lives in District 2, he or she may seek office every two years because of staggered terms. Districts 1 and 3 only have an opportunity for one representative of their district while District 2 has three commissioner seats. Elections

• See Q&A page 12



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Let the "H" in Highlands be your guide

There's a great movie entitled "A Good Year" I watched recently. Russell Crowe plays Max who's contemplating his next move in life. He's unsure whether the small French town where he inherits his uncle's chateau and vineyard is for him and he's considering selling it. He's contemplating his lifestyle long-term because he's a stressed-out, stock broker in London. Opposite Max is Marion Cotillard playing Fanny Chanel, a wise and beautiful local waitress. Max says to Fanny one night; "this place

...MAYOR from page 2

Another observation is that now on weekends we have people shopping downtown, of course December, but also in the other winter months. It was once thought that keeping stores open in the off-season wasn't practical, but Highlands has transitioned to a year-round season with peaks and valleys.

I am just an observer. I do converse with shop and business folks regularly. What is needed is a longitudinal business study of the downtown economy. What if the Chamber or some other organization commissioned a study that examined shopping and business patterns over a yearly period? That information may be helpful for long-term planning of events and activities designed to support a vibrant economy in Highlands. Simply a thought

doesn't suit my life." Fanny's quick reply is "No Max, it's your life that doesn't suit this place."

This got me thinking about the "H" in Highlands. The Chamber of Commerce calls it the "Height of Happiness" a great alliteration. Let's look closer at the "H," and consider what else it might mean to you, if you're thinking about Highlands:

- Haven: It's Heaven, without the "e." One visit, and you will feel it, no matter your age.

- Hallowed: Highlands is on hallowed

ground, to be revered and respected.

- History: We have a rich and successful past, and an even brighter future in Highlands.

- Heart: The heartbeat of Highlands is its people. Come say Hello, Howdy, or may I Help you?

- Humble: Not haughty, arrogant, or assertive (aka: no jerks). Come as you are to serve others.

- Home: We live here, and maybe you should, too. Come for the weekend, stay for a lifetime!

- Habitat: One of the best on earth, and must be preserved, protected, restored, and respected.

- Hymns: You hear them as you're hiking – "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains" Ps. 121.

- Harmony: With all others, honoring opposing opinion with civility. No haters please. As MLK famously said; "Hate is too great a burden to bear...I have chosen to love."

- Health: You will sleep better here! The air is clean, the water is cold, and the

trout are biting!

- Humor: We laugh a lot, mostly at ourselves, and we smile constantly because we know what we have in Highlands.

- Hallelujah: "Praise, thankfulness, and pure Joy" ...according to the dictionary. In Highlands, we shout it out every day!

Ask yourself if Highlands fits your life, or if your life doesn't fit Highlands...yet? Let your Heart be the guide to your next move. Hug a Real Estate Broker today who can consult with you professionally

ly about the next steps, the next chapter, and everything beginning with "H!"

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contradicts the "Making the Grade" report.

The "Making the Grade" report ranked states on funding level, the spending per student, and funding effort, and how much funding is invested relative to the state's economy but according to the CNBC annual report takes into account the impact funding has on student outcome data.

Regarding NC, the "Making the Grade" report claims that without adequate funding, school systems struggle to recruit and retain high-quality educators; and have limited resources for students – especially those with high needs. It says NC ranks at or near the bottom in all funding categories which threatens NC's standing as a business-friendly state by undermining the workforce's education.

However, according to the CNBC report, under the Cost of Doing Business category, NC ranks 21st in the nation earning a B; for Business Friendliness it ranks 4th earning an A; Overall Economy it ranks 3rd with a A-.

Consequently, NC Senator Kevin Corbin (Rep) who represents Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain, and Transylvania counties says The Education Law Center's "Making the Grade Report" is bogus.

"Bottom line, the report is full of half-truths and misleading statements," said Senator Corbin. "Also, the NCAE (NC Association of Educators) spreads false information like it's a stick of butter. They are nothing but an illegal political action committee that does nothing but

...APPLICANTS continued from page 1

The Nomination/Ballot method will be used to appoint Dotson's replacement which first requires a culmination of applications.

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 removed for subsequent rounds of voting," explained Town Attorney Nick 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 be taken in open session, and even if 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.

Application for Appointment to the Town of Highlands Board of Commissioners

Thank you for your interest in the current open vacancy (1), on the Highlands Town Board. The appointment will be for a two (2) year term ending in December 2027, and is up to the sole discretion of the Town Board of Commissioners.

To apply, you must meet the following criteria:

- Must be 21 years old as of the signed date of this application.
- Must reside within the corporate limits of Highlands, North Carolina.
- Must be registered to vote in North Carolina as of the signed date of this application.
- Must be qualified to vote in the Highlands municipal election.

Applicant Full Name _____

Current Address _____

Contact Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Has a formal Adjudication or determination of professional misconduct or criminal conduct ever been entered against you in any jurisdiction? Yes No

If yes, please explain:

For your application, please provide the following:

1. This completed application cover sheet.
2. A Letter of Interest (2 pages or less) with the following information:
 - (a) Explain why you are seeking appointment to the Town Board.
 - (b) Describe any professional experience that would be relevant to serving on the Highlands Town Board.
 - (c) Describe any committees, organizations, boards, or education background that may be relevant to serving on the Town Board.
 - (d) Tell us anything else about yourself that would be beneficial for the Board to review.
3. A copy of your professional resume (optional).

Please submit the above information no later than February 16, 2026, by 12:00 PM via email to Gibby Shaheen, Town Clerk at gibby.shaheen@highlandsnc.org or drop off in person at the front desk at the Town Hall, located at 210 N. 4th Street, Highlands, North Carolina. You will receive an email acknowledgment of receipt of your application or a copy of the signed cover sheet if you drop your application off in person.

By signing below, you confirm that all information provided above is accurate and complete. All information contained in this application is considered to be a public record that may be shared with the press and citizens.

Signature _____ Date _____

If dropped off in person:

Received by _____

Received Date and time _____



VOTE for CONTINUED RESULTS ←
IN THE PRIMARY! Tuesday, March 3rd

Since taking office in 2022, Sheriff Brent Holbrooks and his team have delivered proven results. Here's a snapshot of our progress in the Investigations Division:

Trained four new investigations analysts	Expanded the narcotics unit from 1 to 5 officers	Strengthened federal partnerships
Created a Criminal Interdiction Unit, including adding a K-9 team	Deployed 16 license plate readers to assist with narcotics investigations	Conduct weekly K-9 training sessions
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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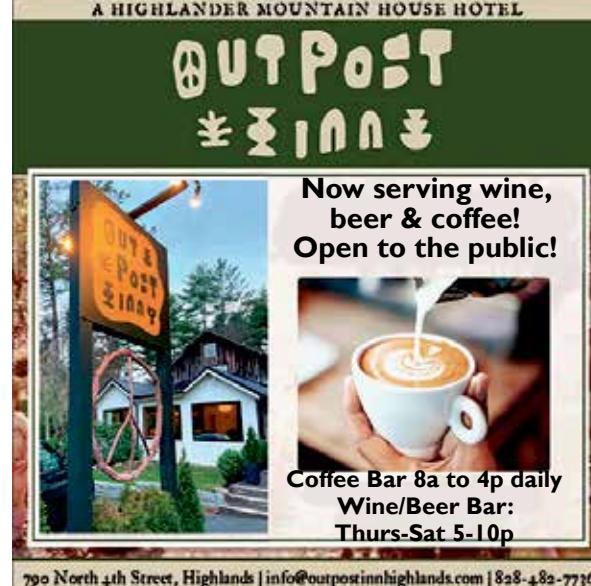
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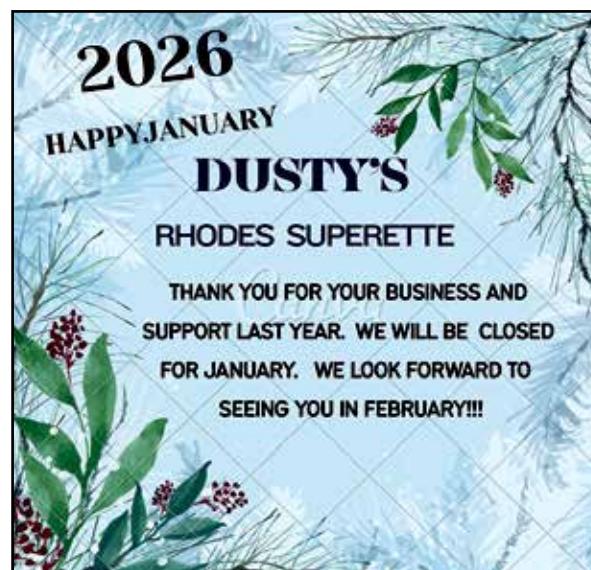


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• LETTERS •

Enough!

Dear Editor,

Today's article about the Holt building is so sad. I imagine a photographer heading to the land fill to take pictures of Highlands history. From the Playhouse to the Holt Building to the old Bank of America — they all will be dumped on that spot south of Highlands where the past is laid to rest. Maybe someday there

will be a limit to what can be left there. Enough is enough.

The Food and Wine Festival had a pretty good thing going until they beefed up the crowd and overserved. It seemed that there needs to be some sort of limit to serving alcohol and that hopefully is before people start barfing in the street in front of a preschool. Enough already.

Our descent into a Facist State

Dear Editor,

So now we've reached another point in our national history that unequivocally demands adherence to the Rule of Law that has made our democracy possible for 250 years. Over the course of that time our nation has managed to rise to the ideals set out in our Constitution and Bill of Rights...sometimes kicking and screaming but eventually coming to terms with the remarkable concept of freedom and justice for all.

Right now all of us must put aside our respective animosity long enough to recognize that without collective intervention, our common ship of state is going down.

As overly simplistic as it may sound, too many of our troubles are a result of the deliberate exploitation and the demonization of various aspects of popular culture, the personal expression of which is protected in our free and open society. The deliberate misinformation hyped and disseminated by so-called news sources, (right AND left leaning) stir up a boil-

ing pot of grievance and rage. Right and Left have played us one against the other for the inexplicably satisfying entertainment of being perpetually pissed off at one thing or another. Ratings soar. I get it. But the differences among us that are perceived to intolerably affect the whole of society must be resolved by established law, not by tossing the Constitution and not by marginalizing targeted groups.

The failure of Congress to demand Constitutional accountability; the failure of our courts to follow up on rulings, the failure of our lawmakers to assure an honest, unbiased Supreme Court, and the willingness of too many of us to form our opinions and to vote according to our emotional responses to hyped cultural issues and to outright lies has, little by little, loosened the constraint of law. The criminal fringe, especially in our leadership, becomes emboldened and we continue our descent into a Facist State.

Mase Lucas
Scaly Mountain

...EDUCATION continued from page 6

endorse democrat candidates."

According to the report, NC's public-school funding started declining around 2008-2009, with inflation-adjusted per-student funding dropping sharply after the Great Recession, continuing under subsequent legislative actions that reduced state revenue and investment, leading to lower funding efforts and a greater reliance on local funds by the 2020s.

Statistics Macon County Schools Superintendent Josh Lynch believes are true.

"The report highlights a long-standing issue in North Carolina," he said. "Education funding has not kept pace

* See EDUCATION page 11

Many of us have read about pet overpopulation. Evidently there is money in letting your pets have multiple litters. What happens to those unwanted, unadopted animals? Guess. Read the pleas from our humane societies for people to please foster or adopt. We have more than enough animals who are homeless.

Sometimes I think maybe we have enough people living on this fragile spot in the mountains and at some point we will run out of water and land. We have enough cars and enough paved roads and enough shops and enough houses. We count on our town planners to temper growth. We ask them to figure out what

is reasonable growth for this particular place. We hope their wisdom will guide them to stop when we have enough before we have too much.

Is this too old fashioned an idea? Is the new world all about growth and fabulous fortunes and there is never too much? Or is there a time when we really do each individually have enough? That lovely letter Kathy Smith wrote about the generosity of Sarah and Wiley Sloan makes me believe that there are those who know when they have enough and what they do have they share.

Glenda Bell
Highlands NC

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• BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NEWS •



Attorney Walker explains endowment meant to support MountainTop Rotary

Andy Walker, was our honored guest at MountainTop Rotary recently. We heard about a special endowment Andy and George have worked on to benefit Mountaintop. George Kimberly is the Development Officer for the western region of the North Carolina Community Foundation. Among other things, he works with nonprofits to establish endowments that support their work. George is a licensed attorney and was in private practice before devoting his time to serving many nonprofit organizations. He described how endowments through NCCF are benefiting Western North Carolina.

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From left: Steve Yuzzi and Lori Lacy, Owners, Appalachian Growers; Lou Rosebrock, Rotarian and Meeting Host; Josh Bryson, President, Rotary Club of Highlands.

Appalachian Growers describe the benefits of hemp-based CBD products

Lori Lacy, co-owner of Appalachian Growers, gave an educational talk about the benefits of organic hemp-based products, complete with samples, to the Rotary Club of Highlands on January 13.

Cannabidiol (CBD) is one of the hundreds of phytocannabinoids that are produced in the hemp plant. CBD is not psychoactive, so it won't get you high or intoxicated.

Marijuana, on the other hand, contains THC – the psychoactive component. Research suggests that phytocannabinoids may in fact be beneficial since CBD users report a sense of relief, relaxation, improved sleep, reduction in arthritis and muscle pain, and a better

quality of life.

Lacy and her partner Steve Yuzzi, began growing hemp on their 13-acre organic farm in Franklin in 2017.

After harvesting the crop it is dried in a 4,000 square foot barn and then cured for a month. It is then sent off to an extraction lab and processed by organic manufacturers.

Appalachian growers sell the resulting tablets, gummies, skin lotions, and salves online and wholesale to wellness centers, spas, and health stores.

For more information or to place an order, see www.appalachiangrowers.com

Rotary honors January 'Students of the Month'



From left: Nicole Lui, Highlands School Counselor; Vladyslava Klymenko, 8th grade; Skylar Crawford, 2nd grade; Jaylin Raby, 12th grade; and Josh Bryson, President, Rotary Club of Highlands;

• HOSPITAL NEWS •

Join us for Toxaway Tuesdays: Kickstart your new year with expert guidance on diet and exercise

Take a proactive step toward wellness with **Toxaway Tuesdays**, a free Health Talks Series at Toxaway Health Center. Hosted by Mission Health, these sessions will be led by Toxaway Health Center provider, Vicky Cooke-Thornton,

ANP-C. Vicky has 28 years of experience as an adult primary care nurse practitioner and is a cardiovascular clinical specialist. She is also a certified health coach, and passionate about helping individuals achieve healthier lifestyles through nutrition,

exercise and stress management.

The first talk in the series will be *Diet and Exercise – Your Roadmap to Success (Part 1)*. Participants will learn practical strategies for weight loss and fitness, in addition to tools to keep you motivated throughout the year.

Mission Hospital is first in Western North Carolina to offer Leadless Pacemaker

Mission Hospital has successfully implanted a new type of pacemaker that can help significantly more patients with slow or irregular heart rhythms — making it the first hospital in Western North Carolina to offer this advanced treatment.

Unlike traditional pacemakers, which require wires (called leads) and a surgical pocket under the skin, this new system is leadless and placed directly inside the heart using a minimally invasive procedure. For patients, this means fewer complications, less discomfort, and a faster recovery.

This technology is especially important because nearly 80% of people who need a pacemaker require support in two chambers of the heart — the upper chamber (atrium) and the lower chamber (ventricle). Until now, leadless pacemakers were typically limited to treating only one chamber. This new system can coordinate both chambers, allowing many more

patients to benefit from a leadless approach.

"This advancement allows us to help many more people who need pacing in both chambers of the heart, while also reducing risks that can come with traditional pacemakers," said Dr. John Brandt, who specializes in Clinical Cardiac Electrophysiology at Mission Health's Asheville Cardiology Associates. "Being the first hospital in Western North Carolina to offer this option means our patients can receive cutting-edge care close to home."

The system works using two very small pacemakers, each about one-tenth the size of a traditional device. One is placed in the upper right chamber of the heart and the other in the lower right chamber. The two devices communicate with each other inside the body, allowing the heart to beat in a more natural, coordinated way. This communication happens through the body's natural conductive properties,

without wires or external signals.

For patients, the benefits can include:

- No visible pacemaker bump under the skin,
- No leads that can break or cause infection,
- Fewer movement restrictions after surgery,
- A shorter recovery time.

A minimally invasive procedure with no chest incision

Mission Hospital plans to use this technology for patients who need dual-chamber pacing and are good candidates for a leadless approach, particularly those who may be at higher risk for complications from traditional pacemakers. The system is also designed so it can be retrieved or replaced in the future if a patient's needs change.

By offering this new option, Mission Hospital continues its commitment to expanding access to advanced heart care and improving quality of life for patients across Western North Carolina.

towards your health goals.

Future topics will include cardiovascular health, coronary calcium screening and more. These sessions will provide actionable tips, motivation and insight into wellness best practices and medical options for those who want extra support.

Call 828-885-5755 to reserve your spot. Light healthy snacks and beverages will be provided.

The first session is Tuesday, January 27 from 5-6 pm at Mission Health's Toxaway Health Center, 16825 Rosman Hwy, Lake Toxaway.

The second session, and Part 2 of *Diet and Exercise – Your Roadmap to Success (Part 2)* will be Tuesday, February 3 from 5-6 pm. During this talk, participants will learn additional practical strategies for weight loss and fitness while you continue to work

Macon County “Redistricting” Public Hearing is Tuesday, February 10 at 6p Courthouse Boardroom 5 W. Main St. Franklin

Let the Board of Commissioners know how you feel about changing representation for District 1 – Highlands, Flats, Elijay & Sugarfork

For story, see

“Commissioner Shearl wants to change Macon County’s ‘election’ map”

in the Jan. 22 edition.

Go to:

<https://www.highlandsinfo.com/PDFs/26jan22.pdf>

...EDUCATION continued from page 9

lobbied for and gotten large grants to build schools in six of my eight counties amounting to over \$300 million in the past two years alone — \$62 million for the new Franklin High School — with similar numbers for Jackson, Clay, Swain, Graham and Transylvania counties.”

Sen. Corbin says those

numbers are not reflected in the “Making the Grade” report.

According to the report, NC Education Funding Level – Grade F (Rank – 50th) – \$12,193 which is \$5,660 under national average of \$17,853. The funding level measure analyzes between-state funding equity by ranking states on their average cost-ad-

justed per-pupil funding levels. For Funding Effort NC got an F (Ranked – 50th) with 2% of NC GDP spent on Education when the national average is 3.1%. Funding Distribution – Grade C (Ranked – 17th) – High-Poverty districts receive about 105% of what low poverty districts re-

• See EDUCATION page 18

• HS SPORTS •

Highlanders split week in action-packed slate



Brett Lamb
Highlands School
Athletic Director

It was a week of highs and lows for Highlands athletics as the Highlanders navigated a grueling stretch of conference and non-conference matchups. From dominant individual performances on the hardwood to weather-related shifts in the pool, the Highlands faithful had plenty to cheer about.

Highlanders Topple Maroon Devils

The week kicked off on Tuesday, January 20, as Highlands hosted Swain County. While the night was a mixed bag for the boys' programs, the Varsity Girls stole the show with a commanding 53-35 victory.

Entering the fourth quarter with a slim 3-point lead, the Lady Highlanders ignited for a 28-13 run to bury the Lady Devils. Jordyn Borino was the catalyst, exploding for a game-high 31 points, with a staggering 22 coming in the final frame alone. Hunter Conner anchored the interior, recording a double-double with 10 points and 10 rebounds.

On the boys' side:

- Varsity Boys: Fell in a narrow 62-72 contest despite Isaiah Vilardo's double-double (22 points, 10 rebounds). Paolo McRae contributed 15 points, while Jayven Alvarado dominated the glass with 10 boards.
- JV Boys: Dropped their matchup 30-43, led by Jonathan Carpenter (14 points) and Nate Wright (8 points).

Conference Clash with Hiwassee Dam

bound performance from Sam Conner.

The Varsity games proved more difficult:

• Varsity Boys: In the "thriller of the night," the Highlanders mounted a furious late-game comeback but fell just short, 51-50. Paolo McRae led all scorers with 20 points, while Isaiah Vilardo added 11.

• Varsity Girls: Struggled with a cold shooting night, falling 49-24. Hunter Conner again led the way with 10 points and 6 rebounds.

Middle School & Individual Standouts

The Middle School teams traveled to Rabun Gap on Wednesday the 21st for their lone appearance of the week. Both squads fought hard but came up short, with the girls falling 33-15 and the boys 43-52.

In the water, Saturday's high school swim meet in Asheville was cancelled due to inclement weather. However, the program celebrates two major milestones: Aniah McKim and Ian Batista have officially qualified for the NCHSAA Regionals in Charlotte, scheduled for this coming Saturday, January 31.

On the Horizon:

Friday, Jan. 30, HS Basketball at Summit at 5 p.m.

Read

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...Q&A continued from page 5

are held county wide; not district only. This type of makeup in Macon County is known as single member districts and multi-member districts. Many courts in NC and throughout the country have ruled this type of makeup to be unconstitutional.

Currently in Macon County, since each district representative is voted on by the entire county, this method basically gives District 2 an unfair advantage for choosing representation to the commission board. We need a solution to protect the integrity of democracy that we all cherish.

3. What do you think the county should focus on for the citizens of District I and the whole county over the next four years?

Keep taxes low and be mindful of our lower income folks and people on a fixed income who cannot afford to pay more.

Operate an effective and efficient government representing all voters without intrusion from special interests.

In Highlands, the only thing we really have on the books is how do we correct the issue with the soccer field without costing millions of dollars?

As far as the rest of the county is concerned, we are still identifying properties that need repairs.

We are in discussions about a possible new Senior Center, new jail, new justice center, economic development, Rec Park, new East Franklin school, landfill studies, library, and relocating the veterans' office.

4. How can the county help offset the decrease in state and federal funding allocated to the school system?

As I stated earlier, the Macon County Board of Commissioners has increased funding to the school system over the last three years. The budget from Macon County to the school system was flat for years. However, since I've been on the board, the budgeted amount to the school system has increased significantly.

With the enormous debt on the taxpayers' back for the new high school construction, I am not sure how much more the taxpayers can afford to send to the school system at this time.

The government and the school system will have to operate just like any American family when there is a shortfall of monies for desired projects. We all, especially county government, will have to tighten our belts and sharpen our pencils to make the revenue we have work. Everyone would like to have as many nice things as possible, but at the end of the day, we must be able to afford them and not punish the taxpayers that are footing the bill. I believe in striking a careful balance and have proven that approach with my leadership during this past term as your commissioner.

Don Willis

1. Why do you think you are the best person to represent the citizens of Highlands and District I as a whole?

I have spent 35 years serving Macon County and working directly with county government, which gives me a strong understanding of how the county operates and how decisions affect our communities. I began my career as an Emergency Medical Technician, then served as Macon County Fire Marshal, where I worked closely with county commissioners and prepared annual budgets. I finished my career with the Macon County Sheriff's Office as a Lieutenant and Chief Investigator, again working with commissioners and managing budgets for my unit.

That experience matters because being an effective county commissioner requires understanding public safety, budgeting, and collaboration. It also requires time and availability. Being retired allows me to be accessible to the residents and responsive to their concerns.

As I've traveled throughout Highlands and District I, I've heard from many residents who feel their voices have been lost in county decisions. I will work

constructively with the Town of Highlands and my fellow commissioners to ensure District I has strong, consistent representation and a clear voice at the table.

2. How do you feel about the county's move to redistrict?

Redistricting is something that should be carefully considered, but the pace of this proposal concerns me. Commissioner Shearl presented the redistricting resolution to the Commissioners in December and was pushing to have this resolution sent to the general assembly for consideration and he claimed that once they approved it, the resolution would be returned to Commissioners and then Commissioners would discuss it further. However, that is not the process and had resolution been sent to Raleigh, it would have become law. This is a major change that affects every voter in Macon County, and it should not be rushed and before proposing such a significant change, it is important to at least understand the process. The initial discussion moved forward before there was meaningful public input or a clearly defined plan.

Transparency is critical, especially when changes impact representation and elections. Voters deserve the opportunity to understand how district lines would change, how the terms would be staggered, and if the proposal would benefit the county as a whole.

I agree that if redistricting is pursued, it should be done thoughtfully, with a well-developed plan and ample opportunity for public discussion before any final action is taken.

3. What do you think the county should focus on for the citizens of District I and the whole county over the next four years?

Over the next four years, the county should focus on economic opportunity, public safety, infrastructure, and fiscal responsibility.

Economic development is critical to keeping our children

• See Q&A page 13

...Q&A continued from page 12

and grandchildren in Macon County after they finish high school or college. That means working with the Economic Development Committee to attract businesses that offer competitive wages and stable jobs, and using incentives strategically to support responsible growth.

Public safety and communications must also be a priority. There are still areas of the county where firefighters and law enforcement cannot reliably communicate with 911. Improving county-wide communications and continuing to support our volunteer fire departments and emergency services is essential.

Infrastructure needs will continue to grow, including school facilities, a law enforcement facility, senior services, and recreational spaces. These are long-term investments that require planning and coordination.

As we address these needs, we must remain fiscally responsible by balancing the budget and maintaining a low property tax rate. Careful planning and prioritization can allow us to move forward without overburdening taxpayers.

4. How can the county help offset the decrease in state and federal funding allocated to the school system?

The county should continue to pursue multiple strategies to support schools while protecting local taxpayers. This includes seeking grants such as the Needs-Based Public School Capitol Fund, like the \$62 million grant awarded for the Franklin High School project.

The county can also responsibly use portions of the fund balance and interest revenue to support capital projects and operational needs when appropriate. Any use of these funds should be strategic and sustainable to preserve long-term financial stability.

Additionally, the county should advocate at the state level for funding formulas that recognize the challenges faced by counties with low population density and a high percentage of national forest land, which increases operating costs. With careful planning and continued fiscal discipline, the county can support its schools while maintaining a strong financial footing.

Joey Wilson

1. Why do you think you are the best person to represent citizens in Highlands and District 1 as a whole?

I'm the best person to represent District 1 because I understand it from both sides — I've lived in different parts of

the county, and now that I live up here, I use District 1 county facilities and services every day. I see what's working and what needs attention in real time.

On top of that, I bring practical, problem-solving experience: I've built projects as a contractor and I've managed reliability and infrastructure work as an engineer for the Duke power company. That combination means I'm prepared to make the critical thinking decisions required to represent District 1 and the county as a whole — listening first, working together, and delivering common-sense results on

roads, facilities, public safety support, and responsible growth.

2. How do you feel about the county's move to redistrict?

I'm not opposed to redistricting if it's truly about fairness and equal representation — but I'm cautious about any plan that fixes one problem by creating a bigger one!

Right now, the strongest argument I hear is that District 2 voters can effectively influence the commission every two years, while Districts 1 and 3 don't have that same opportunity. That's a legitimate concern, and the county should address it.

But I don't support making Districts

1 and 3 larger in population just to "balance" that issue. Districts 1 and 3 already cover unique communities with different needs, geography, and infrastructure challenges. If you grow them too much, you dilute local representation and make it harder for residents to feel heard — especially in our mountain and rural areas.

My position: any redistricting should protect communities of interest, keep districts compact, and preserve strong local representation — especially for District 1 and District 3 — while still improving fairness in how often voters have a meaningful voice.

• See Q&A page 15

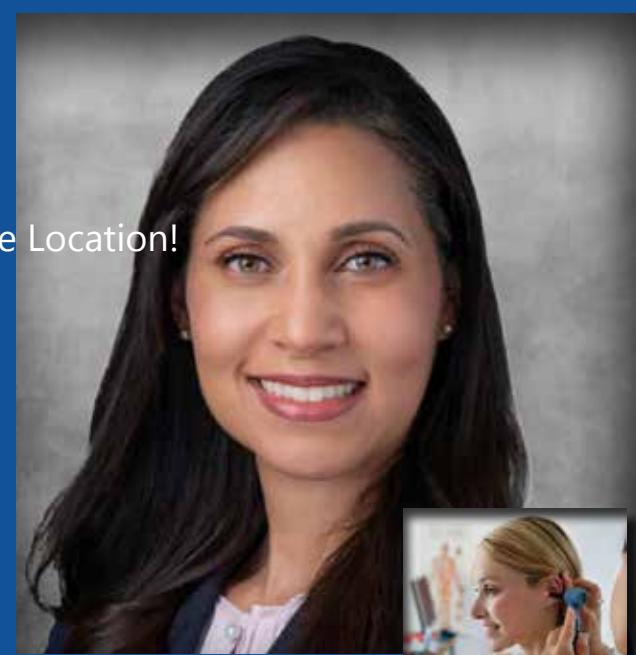


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SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING



Epiphany IV

Psalm 37:1-11 /
1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Rev. Dr. Marcus B. Robertson is Interim Priest in Charge of Christ Anglican Church, Cashiers.

These are interesting times. Some of the most absurd thinking is out there, parading as truth. It seems like hatred and violence is the first recourse in public discourse, not the last. Things which we were taught as right and wrong have been completely flipped: what was once considered right is now wrong and what we were taught is wrong is now deemed right. Many of us are deeply troubled over the state of this world, and rightly so. But did you know Holy Scripture gives us specific instruction on how to live in such times as these? We're going to look at Psalm 37 and 1 Corinthians chapter 1, both of which give us not only solid advice on how to understand these times, but also how the Gospel invades our lives in such situations as these.

The psalmist begins with these words, "Fret not yourself because of the ungodly..." Anytime we read the news, anytime we encounter human sin and violence, anytime we feel overwhelmed with the sorry state of the world in which we live, let's remember these words. We are to "fret not." We are not to worry. We are not to be gripped with anxiety. We are not to be sucked into the false story of fear and despair. Instead, we are to maintain perspective.

Funny thing, perspective. The first definition of "perspective" is essentially this: to draw a two-dimensional object in such a way that its three-dimensional elements can be determined – its height, width, depth and position in relation to each other. In the context of our texts, it is profound. One could say we live in a two-dimensional world. Given human sin and the fall, we don't see things as they really are. We are missing a dimension – the divine viewpoint. We struggle through life, trying to make sense of a life full of sin and brokenness. The rest of the world is doing the same: we see it on the internet, on TV, in books and films and all sorts of media. It's a hodge-podge of personal opinions, some with a bit of wisdom here and there, others with nothing more than hatred, vitriol and darkness. No wonder young people today are suffering from anxiety and depression like never before. We older folks aren't far behind. But the perspective of Holy Scripture takes us to a two-dimensional world and adds God's point of view. It is the only way to navigate life faithfully. The only way.

The psalmist then gives us some practical advice on how to live in a world where the wicked seem to flourish and evil seems to rule the day. Look at verse three:

• 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.

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

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CHRIST ANGLICAN CHURCH

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

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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.

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

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HIGHLANDS

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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

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HAMBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

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

HIGHLANDS ASSEMBLY OF GOD

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

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

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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

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Pastor Rev. Richard Salmonson

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

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Jan. 20. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a summons/citation, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or those of public officials have been used.

Jan. 20

- At 9:15 a.m., officers received a report of an identity theft that occurred Nov. 22, 2025 was reported. A forged NC driver's license was used to purchase a vehicle.
- At 4:23 p.m., officers received a report of the forging and cashing of a check for \$8,195.84 on Nov. 12, 2025, was reported by a citizen.

Jan. 21

- At 9:31 a.m., officers responded to a call of an unattended death of a 43-year-old

male at a residence on S. 4th Street.

Jan. 22

- At 1:20 p.m., officers received a report of a resident on Split Rail Row receiving harassing phone calls.

Accident

Vehicle 1 was parked in parking stall and had crashed into bollard. The passenger of vehicle 1 spoke to a gas station employee and left his contact information. The accident was reported by gas station manager the next day. Failed to report accident to law enforcement by the quickest means.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Jan. 20

Jan. 20

- At 8:55 p.m., the dept. responded to a

fire alarm at the hospital.

Jan. 21

- At 4:58 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Helen's Barn Ave.
- At 9:09 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on S. 4th Street.

- At 12:38 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Country Club Drive.

Jan. 22

- At 6:21 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Log Cabin Lane.

Jan. 23

- At 11:50 p.m., the dept. provided mutual aid to the Scaly Fire and Rescue Dept.

Jan. 24

- At 6:30 p.m., the dept. responded to a possible motor vehicle accident on Buck

Creek Road.

Jan. 25

- At 11:43 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Broadview Circle.

- At 6:20 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Main Street.

Jan. 26

- At 6:58 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on VZ Top Road. It was cancelled en route.

- At 9:53 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Bee Gum Road. It was cancelled en route.

- At 11:25 a.m., the dept. performed a welfare check at a residence on Holt Road.

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

...Q&A continued from page 13

Much more discussion and community input is needed to make this fair to all of the county and all five seats.

3. What do you think the county should focus on for the citizens in district 1 and the county as a whole over the next four years?

Over the next four years, Macon County needs to focus on the basics that protect quality of life — reliable roads and drainage, strong public safety coverage, and well-maintained county facilities — especially in District 1 where geography makes infrastructure and response times matter. County-wide, we must get serious about long-term landfill planning. The county is already talking about new cells, debt service, and a solid-waste capital plan, and I want that plan to be transparent, financially responsible, and built around long-term capacity and liabilities, so we're not forced into emergency decisions. Finally, we should keep using a disciplined capital improvement plan — fix it first, fund it wisely, and keep the public informed on progress.

And we need to keep a watchful eye on the new high school project and all capital funding projects. I support investing in our kids, but we owe taxpayers strong oversight — clear timelines, change-order accountability, and making sure we're building the right facility the right way, without surprises. A new building is important, but it has to come with a plan to support the people inside it — our educators and staff — so we're improving outcomes, not just adding square footage.

4. How can the county help remedy the decrease in state and federal funding allocated to the school system?

The county can't replace every lost state/federal dollar, but it can soften the impact with a mix of smart budgeting, new recurring revenue, and cost control — without putting schools in a year-to-year crisis.

- Create dedicated local revenue streams for schools. If the county is willing to talk about new revenue, options include a targeted 1/4-cent sales tax increase (if pursued, tie it to a clear purpose and public reporting) and other recurring sources that don't rely solely on property taxes.

- Pursue revenue-producing county assets. A solar field for example on suitable county property (like capped landfill acreage where appropriate) can generate predictable long-term lease or power-purchase revenue. Even if it doesn't fully fund school operations, it can help offset costs and free up general fund dollars for classrooms.

- Use a "stability fund" approach. Build an education stabilization reserve so when state/federal funding dips, the county can smooth the drop instead of cutting mid-year.

- Be disciplined with the capital plan. Keep close oversight on big projects — especially the high school building — so change orders and overruns don't squeeze operating dollars that should be supporting teachers, programs, and student services.

- Go after grants aggressively — but don't depend on them. Grants should be "extra" for projects and programs, not a substitute for dependable operating money.

Bottom line: we need predictable lo-

cal support, new revenue where it makes sense, and tight accountability on big spending, so schools aren't the first thing cut when outside funding declines.

Note:

Early Voting for the March 3 primary is Feb. 12-28.

Both Early Voting locations at the Highlands Civic Center and the Carpenter

Community Building in Franklin will be open 8a to 7:30p Monday-Friday and 8a to 3p on Saturdays.

Photo ID is required to vote.

Calvin Lunn is the only Democrat candidate running for District 1. He will face off with the Republican who wins the primary March 3.



THE TOWN OF HIGHLANDS

Please publish January 29, 2026, February 5, 2026 and February 12, 2026

TOWN OF HIGHLANDS BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS VACANCY

The Town of Highlands Board of Commissioners is now accepting applications to fill the Town Board vacancy.

Applications must be completed and received by Monday, February 16, 2026, at 12:00pm, and can be found on the website, www.highlandsnc.org, and should be returned to:

Gibby Shaheen
Town Clerk
PO Box 460
210 North Fourth Street
Highlands, NC 28741

FAX 828.526.2595
gibby.shaheen@highlandsnc.org

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Town Clerk

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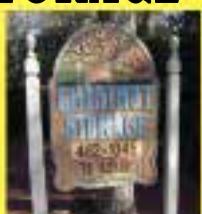
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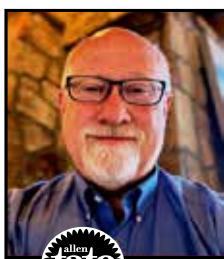
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• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

NOTE:

• No Senior Luncheon at Rec Park the month of February.

MOVIES

• At PAC's MLC, Song Sung Blue. Showtimes: Fri, Jan 30 & Sat. Jan. 31 - 2 & 5:30 PM; Sun, Feb 1 - 2 (with Captions) & 5:30 PM

POOL SCHEDULE

• Lap Swim: Mon.-Fri. 6am-9:45am, and Saturday 10am-11pm - 6 lanes. Water Aerobics: 18 y+ Mon.-Fri. 10-11am with Karen Chambers. Adult Swim: 18y+

Mon.-Thurs. 11am-3:30pm, Friday 11am-1:30pm. Public Swim: Mon. thru Thurs. 3:30-7pm, Saturday 11am-6pm and Sunday 1-6pm

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. & 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

"Put your trust in the Lord." We do not trust the Republicans or the Democrats (or the in Independents, for that matter). We do not trust conservatives or progressives. We don't trust the United States, or any other state, for that matter. When all is said and done, when the battle is being fought and the consequences are dire, we trust God, and God alone. On that basis, you and I can do good, dwell in the

land and be fed. In other words, we can flourish, regardless of the circumstances around us, for we have the divine perspective.

The next verse tells us to "Delight yourself in the lord, and he shall give you your heart's desire." Too often we interpret this verse in this manner: "Delight in God and He will give you what you want." That's a popular interpretation, but it's inaccurate.

...EDUCATION continued from page 11

ceive (with the National average at around 102%).

However, all of NC's educational statistics aren't bad.

The report also ranked NC as "Progressive" since funding by the NC General Assembly has leveled the playing field for rich and poor counties.

NC funds its highest poverty districts proportionality higher at \$612 per pupil more than low poverty districts.

"Since Republican leadership has been in place, substantial efforts have been made to narrow this gap and support high poverty districts," reads the report.

The report goes on to rank Funding Streams and Low Percent of Local Funding Share.

According to NEA the funding streams for the education budget in NC breakdown is: Federal: 16% - 11th Rank in the country; State: 53% - 19th Rank in the country and Local 31% - 38th Rank in the country.

"When taking the full education funding model into consideration and being ranked 19th highest in the nation in per-pupil funding from the state, it's clear there are challenges at the local funding level," reads the report.

Lynch said districts like Macon County Schools have limited flexibility at the local level, so meaningful improvement will require renewed and sustained investment at the state level, along with stable federal support.

"Local efficiency is important, but it cannot resolve a systemic funding gap," he said. remedying the situation will require action at multiple levels. At the state level, it means a renewed commitment to adequately funding public education in alignment with the state's economic capacity, increasing per-pupil expenditures, and addressing inequities between districts."

CNBC's education rankings are part of its annual "Top States for Business" study, where states score on K-12 metrics (test scores, class size, spending) and higher ed (colleges, HBCUs, career training).

In its 2024 study, Virginia ranked #1 in Education, with North Carolina close behind, while for 2025, North Carolina led overall business, scoring 6th in education, highlighting strong workforce and economy as key drivers.

There are many ways to rank states, but at minimum any sound ranking should account for the results of the appropriated funding, reads the CNBC report. "The "Making the Grade" Report fails to be a reliable and credible source for citizens interested in how well the state is doing in K-12 education and the impact on student outcome data.

"More funding doesn't necessarily equal better student outcomes. The Education Law Center Report focuses

narrowly on funding inputs while fully ignoring outcomes.

The purpose of state funding should be to drive student outcomes," it reads. "Many states that rank above NC in these funding ratings under-perform in student outcomes, comparatively. For example, when examining NEAP scores adjusted for demographics, NC ranks 13th in 4th grade Math, 32nd in 4th Grade Reading, 12th in 8th Grade Math and 32nd 8th Grade Reading. This would suggest that North Carolina's educators perform well overall and the state is being a good steward of tax dollars and ensuring that every dollar drives positive student outcomes."

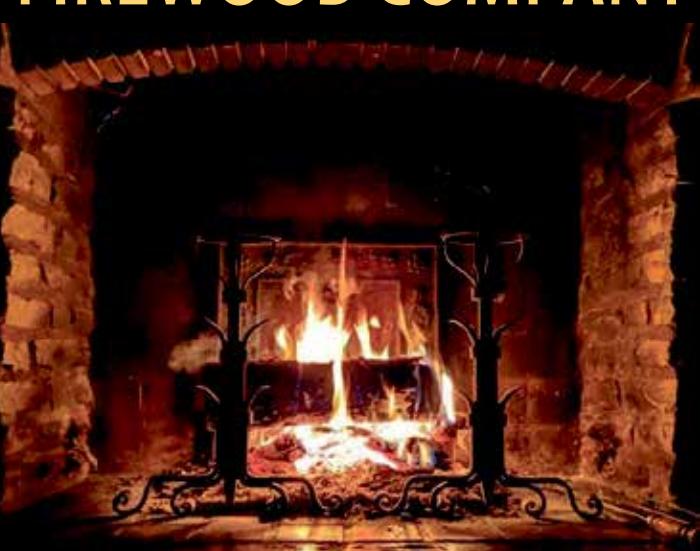
Sen. Corbin says the CNBC report ranks NC 6th in the Nation in Education using all metrics, and gives it an A-.

Though The Education Law Center report doesn't mention student outcomes as it relates to funding, it does say it's incumbent on advocates to fight for fair school funding on all fronts. This requires advocating for meaningful investments in public education at the federal, state, and local level, it reads.

Sen. Corbin said people can choose to pay attention to which ever report fits their narrative.

"There are clearly areas that we should, could and will do better, but spreading misleading information like the NCAE does is not helpful and does nothing to assist in the work to get positive change which I am all about."

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A blue wooden building with a white trim porch and a central entrance, identified as the Highlander Mountain House & The Ruffed Grouse Tavern.

An advertisement for the Highlands Newspaper. On the left, a woman with long brown hair and blue eyes is smiling. Two circular seals are overlaid on the bottom left of her portrait: one for 'BRKSHIRE HATHAWAY REAL ESTATE' and another for 'TOP 2% OF THE NETWORK'. The background is a dark, textured image of a forest. On the right, the text 'COVETED HIGHLANDS LOCATION' is displayed in large, white, serif capital letters. At the top, the newspaper's name and contact information are listed: 'Highlands Newspaper - Thurs. Jan. 29, 2026 - 828-200-1371 - Page 19'.

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The image contains two distinct sections. On the left, the Highlands Sotheby's International Realty logo is displayed, featuring the word 'Highlands' in a large serif font, a vertical line, and 'Sotheby's INTERNATIONAL REALTY' in a serif font. Below this, the address '114 N. 4th Street • Highlands, NC' is shown. A horizontal line separates this from the tagline 'Local Expertise, Global Connections.' Another horizontal line separates the contact information from a portrait of a woman on the right. The woman, Denise Boothby, is wearing glasses and a dark blazer, smiling. To her right, the text 'Live Love Highlands' is written in a cursive font, followed by 'Mountain Life' in a larger, bold, serif font. Below 'Mountain Life' is the word 'PROPERTIES' in a smaller serif font. The phone number '828-482-2434' and the website 'www.LiveLoveHighlands.com' are also present.

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