

Highlands Newspaper

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TB hears 2017-'18 budget 'wish lists' from dept. heads

At last Tuesday's annual retreat, the Highlands Town Board took the first step in formulating the 2017-'18 budget by meeting with town staff to hear the state of affairs in each department and to consider their wish lists.

First up was Town Manager Josh Ward.

He said as of February 2017, property tax collections had decreased \$56,035.23 compared to February 2016 but said the decrease had a lot to do with Jackson

County's recent reval.

"Property values in Jackson County dropped \$16 million which meant a loss of property tax to Highlands of \$30,000," he said.

There are several tracts of property off Bowery Road and in

the country clubs off US 64 east that are either in the Highlands town limits or within the Highlands Township that are either completely or partially in Jackson County.

•See BUDGET page 10

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Group to develop bicycle touring in WNC counties

Input from citizens requested: Macon County bike plan event is March 23 at 6 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church in Franklin.

Bicycle tourism is on the rise in Western North Carolina, and communities in the seven western most counties are looking to cash in.

A 2015 study conducted by Don Kostelec of Kostelec Planning, looking at Bicycle Tourism in Haywood County and the other seven westernmost counties, estimated that the industry generated \$14 million each year as an economic impact for the region.

The Southwest Commission, a regional council of government serving as a technical, economic, and planning resource for local towns and counties in the region, is hosting a series of planning meetings to begin developing the regional Southern Blue Ridge Bike Plan for Cherokee, Graham, Clay, and Macon counties.

"The meetings will be a time for folks to provide input on this new plan currently in develop-

ment," said Sealy Chipley with Chipley Consulting, the firm developing the plan. Specifically, we will have boards with bicycle routes (and cue sheets) in each of the counties we developed with public input. We will also present results of the economic impacts of bicycle tourism. Folks will have the opportunity to provide their input."

The first public meeting was held Monday night in Cherokee County. Graham County's public input meeting is scheduled for March 20, Clay County's is scheduled for March 21 and Macon County has an event scheduled for March 23 at 6 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church in Franklin.

Chipley founded Chipley Consulting to offer communities professional planning and communication services that combine insightful analysis with meaning-

• See BICYCLE page 14



From left: Highlands Fire & Rescue Chief Ryan Gearhart, retired firefighter "Grandpa" James L. Ramsey and Emily Shuler.

Photo by Merritt Shaw

Shuler is 2nd female at HF&R Dept.

By Merritt Shaw

When you think of a fire fighter, you probably imagine a young man wearing turnout gear and helmet, carrying an axe and

wielding a fire hose; but today's firefighters – even here at the Highlands Fire & Rescue Department – are male and female, with various skills who collectively have what it

takes to be a fire fighter and first-responder.

New member Emily Shuler – a 20-year-old Highlands native

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Citizens reminded of trash dumping etiquette

The March meeting of the Highlands Town Board is tonight at the Highlands Conference Center. The meeting starts at 7.

The Mountain Top Rotary Club will request sponsoring two art shows in Founders Park. The dates for the shows are the weekends of June 24-25 and August 26-27. I am glad to see the art shows returning to the park. I'm returning to the park. I'm returning to the Mountain Top Rotary Club will do an outstanding job in sponsoring the event that will benefit nonprofit groups.

The board will also hear a request from Phil Potts for the town to recognize and support the "National Wreaths Across America Day," which is scheduled for December 17. Community volunteers will place wreaths on veterans' graves at the Highlands Cemetery.

Other agenda items include a subdivision request for a property on 4 1/2 Street, approval of the town audit contract, a fund balance apportion to purchase a Bear Pen tract, and final approval of the Verizon Antenna Contract. The



Mayor Pat Taylor

board will also go into closed session to continue discussions of the possible business expansion for the public body, namely the solicitation request for a private partner in creating a fiber optic, utility network.

In discussing trash problems last week, I called folks who dump trash "Bozo Heads." Several readers have suggested other names. One

name was AHs. Use your imagination, I can't repeat the full words. Another suggestion was "SLUGs," short for Selfish, Lazy, Unappreciative Goons. Both sound good to me.

We all need to be aware of where and what garbage should be placed in trash containers. Soon there will be signs on the large dumpsters around the business district stating these are commercial dumpsters that have been leased. These dumpsters are not for residents to dump household garbage. That practice is illegal dumping in violation of NC GS. 14-399.

Local residents can take household garbage to the county recycling and convenience center located on Buck Creek Road, or at the county transfer station on Rich Gap Road. Also, old florescent lights can be taken to Rich Gap for proper disposal. Biohazard items, like used syringes, can be taken to Rich Gap, so long as they are in a secure container and labeled as a biohazard. Town sanitation workers have been stuck before with needles that were simply thrown into garbage bags.

Let me stress the importance of what is placed in trash containers.

A few weeks ago a sanitation worker was seriously injured while unloading a large commercial dumpster. He was using the mechanical hoist to tilt and unload the dumpster into the back of a garbage truck. The dumpster broke loose, swung sideways and hit the worker.

The cause of the accident was construction debris that should not have been placed in the dumpster. A 2x4 fell forward and lodged against the truck bed causing the dumpster to break loose while being unloaded. Being a sanitation worker can be a very hazardous job. Thankfully the worker recovered and is back to work.

• LEGISLATIVE UPDATE •

The summary below was written by the Congressional Research Service, which is a nonpartisan division of the Library of Congress, and was published on Feb 7, 2017.

This measure has not been amended since it was introduced. The summary of that version is repeated here.)

This joint resolution nullifies the "Teacher Preparation Issues" rule finalized by the Department of Education on October 31, 2016. The rule implements requirements related to assessing the quality of teacher preparation programs under Title II (Teacher Quality Enhancement) of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

Sen. Burr [R-NC]: Yea

Sen. Tillis [R-NC]: Yea

• LETTER •

Public health takes a back seat to coal industry

Dear Editor,

Western North Carolina Congressional representatives, Mr. Meadows, Mr. Burr and Mr. Tillis voted to repeal, and Mr. Trump signed the repeal of the Stream Protection Rule, ostensibly to save 77,000 coal miners' jobs, according to news reports. The National Mining Association actually anticipated a loss of 281,000 coal-related jobs because of the rule (Tom DiChristopher, CNBC, Feb 16, 2017).

Those estimates turn out to be a bit of a stretch. The Stream Protection Rule applied only to mountain top removal (MTR) mines. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA) identify approximately 35,000 direct jobs in MTR mines, and an additional 38,000 indirect jobs in coal transport and power plants, for a total of 73,000 jobs. Math is not my strong suit, but I can't figure out how repealing a regulation that affects 73,000 jobs will save from 77,000 to 281,000 jobs.

On the other hand, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) estimated the Stream Protection Rule would reduce coal-related employment by an annual average of 260 jobs but would generate an average of 250 new jobs annually, for a net loss of 10 jobs (Tom DiChristopher, CNBC, Feb 16, 2017). The average age of coal miners in West Virginia is 55 (http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Coal_and_jobs_in_the_United_States), so one would expect the net loss to be met by retirements or deaths.

It is true that coal mining is a dying industry. The CRS expects the coal industry to lose 15,000 jobs by 2040 (Tom DiChristopher, CNBC, Feb 16, 2017). Oddly, the demise is not because of onerous environmental protection regulations but because electric utilities and large manufacturing facilities are switching to other fuels, including natural gas, which is cheaper than coal, and renewables, such as wind and solar, which are also becoming more cost-effective than coal.

One purpose of the Stream Protection Rule was to protect public health. The rule would have prohibited the disposal of toxic mine wastes in streams, many of which are the

•See LETTER page 14

• WEEKEND WEATHER •



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Letter Policy:

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• OBITUARIES •

James Willard Keener

James Willard Keener, 84, of Highlands, NC, died Tuesday, March 7, 2017.

Born in Macon County, he was the son of the late James Robert Keener and Grace Talley Keener. James was a US Air Force veteran.

He is survived by his wife Lois Marie Potts Keener; son, James Keener, Jr. (Leslie) of Brevard; daughter, Tammy Hall (Sandy) of Tuscon, AZ; two sisters, Ruby Watts of Satolah, GA and Eleanor Blankenship (Harold) of Franklin; three grandchildren, Terri Keener, Chris Keener and Cory Hall; one great granddaughter, Faith Bryson; two step grandchildren, Jonathan Childers (Nikki) and Melissa McKinna (Shawn) and step great grandchildren, Mason Childers Nathaniel Childers, Oakley Childers and Weston Childers.

A Memorial Service will be held at 2 p.m., Thursday, March 23 at First Baptist Church of Highlands. Rev. Randy Reed and Rev. Scott Holland will officiate.

Macon Funeral Home is in charge of the arrangements. Online condolences can be made at maconfuneralhome.com

Lena Childers Garren

Lena Childers Garren, 84, of Highlands, passed away Wednesday, March 8, 2017.

Born in Glennville, NC, she was the daughter of the late Hayes and Lou Stewart Childers. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband Harold Earl Garren and five brothers and sisters, Aldon, Neal, Jessie, Mary "Hurple" and Lucille. Lena was a member of Ridgecrest Baptist Church.

She is survived by her son, Gary Garren and wife Cathy of Highlands;



sister, Dixie Moses of Franklin; brother, Douglas "Doug" Childers of Gastonia, NC; one granddaughter, Meredith Garren and niece, Carolyn Sanders and her husband Dennis and their daughters, Erica Moore and Cheryl Vernon.

Funeral Service was held Sunday, March 12 in the Chapel of Macon Funeral Home. Rev. Tommy Fouts officiated. Burial was in Woodlawn Cemetery.

Macon Funeral Home was in charge of the arrangements. Online condolences can be made at maconfuneralhome.com

• ENGAGEMENT •

Hedden and Watson

Mr. and Mrs. Clyde "Bud" Hedden of Highlands, NC, announce the engagement of their daughter, Sarah E. Hedden to Justin Watson, son of Lamar and Melanie Nix of Clayton, GA.

Sarah is employed at Highlands Pharmacy and Justin is employed at Reeves Hardware in Highlands.

The wedding is planned for June 11, 2017 in Scaly Mounain, NC.



Community action needed by Monday, March 20

The Nantahala Forest Service has proposed THE SOUTHSIDE PROJECT, to cut timber in the Chattooga East Fork Headwaters area of Bull Pen, Granite City, Brushy Mountain, and the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Extension. If implemented, this cut will disqualify these areas for further protection under the new draft of NC Forest Revision Plan. To protect these Highlands treasures and prevent herbicide (which will be used indefinitely to keep open the logging access) and timber harvest in these sensitive areas, public comments are needed by end of day Monday, March 20.

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...SHULER continued from page 1

who is the second female firefighter in the history of the Highlands Fire & Rescue Department -- is also a generational member.

Her grandfather, James L. Ramey, became a member of the Highlands Fire Department in 1988 and retired in 2008; her uncle Travis Ramey has been in the department since 2004.

When Shuler first graduated from high school she wanted to get into the paramedic program at Southwestern Community College (SCC) because she felt it fit her personality.

"I could picture myself doing this. And I'm pretty good at calming people down and letting them to talk to me," she said. She also felt that being in the medical field was a good paying job and it was exciting. "It gets your adrenalin going."

But Shuler's road to becoming a firefighter has not been an easy one. When she graduated high school,

she was accepted into the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) program at SCC but soon felt it was too much for her. She decided to take a break. Then her advisor suggested she spend some time at her local fire department to see if being an EMT was something she really wanted to do.

"So, I started going on calls and I thought 'this is pretty awesome. I want to do this,'" she said.

Next Shuler decided she wanted to get back into the paramedic program at SCC but found it was hard to get back into the program a second time.

"They didn't know if I was going to quit again; but they did let me back and it's hard, but I feel this is something I really want to do," she said.

Chief Gearhart has known Shuler since she was at Highlands High School and knew she could be a first-responder.

"I coached Emily in softball when she was in high school so I know she can handle the physical stuff needed to be a first-responder and she's got the mental and emotional strength to do it, too."

Shuler said the department is behind her all the way, even though her class schedule means she can't make all the meetings or respond to all the calls.

"I told her that the EMT Program is a priority right now and once you get that done, then we'll start with the fire department," said Gearhart.

Everyone has a different reason for wanting to be a fire fighter. But whether it is to help people, to give back to the community or the excitement of it, it is a service that is needed and much appreciated by the whole community.

Fire Chief Ryan Gearhart, who is originally from Oklahoma, has been a member of the Fire Department since 1999. Members voted him Assistant Chief in 2011 and Fire Chief in 2013.

Gearhart said members' skills and training vary throughout the 30-member volunteer force.

"It just depends on your availability and how gung-ho you are. If you had the money to miss work and go straight through all the training, it would take nine weeks," Gearhart said.

• See SHULER page 5

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...SHULER continued from page 4

He said there are members who have been in the fire department almost 20 years who don't have all of their training yet and there are a few who have been in the department four years who have their Fire Two Certification.

Shuler is also training to become an emergency dispatcher in Franklin. She works with kids at the Highlands Development Center, attends classes at SCC in the Emergency Medical Training curriculum and in her spare time goes on calls when she is available.

She made it through her six-month vote – a department stipulation on the way to being fully initiated -- and graduates from the EMT program next spring.

In 2014, the first female firefighter, Lea Dallmann, earned her way on to the force after being denied entry by the members when they didn't vote her in on her first try. That didn't stop her. She continued and completed the required training, applied again and made it in.

She is just a few classes away from getting her Firefighter Two Certification. The next level is instructor.

"She has done very, very well with getting her qualifications," said Gearhart.

The Highlands Fire Department was established in 1953 but didn't have a female member until 2014 when Dallmann joined. When Shuler started, Dallmann took Shuler under her wing.

Gearhart said 10 years ago a female on the fire department would not have even been considered.

"I think it was a mindset -- and granted it wasn't everybody that felt that way. I guess attitudes have changed in the last 10 years." Gearhart said.

Gearhart said when Dallmann applied, the fire station was at a point where it needed members. The procedures were in place if she wasn't serious about the job or wasn't working out for some reason. But Dallmann fit in well socially and she started to prove herself. The other members saw she was doing well in her fire training and soon the attitude was that they would just as soon go into a burning house with her than with anybody.

"It's the same procedure we would do for a male. We

treat her like one of us. And when I see someone who is gung-ho, wants to get their training and wants to be here, that says a lot to me," Gearhart said.

The process of getting on the fire department takes time and dedication. Once an application is submitted, the membership votes. If the applicant passes the vote, a one-year probationary period starts. They must go through a rigorous physical test, take fire and first-aid training, then after six months of spending time with the members and voluntarily going on calls, the members vote a second time. It is done with a rudimentary white ball/black ball system. If they don't feel you fit in or can't handle the work physically or mentally, then the applicant may not be voted in.

To qualify to be a member of the fire department applicants must complete a state required 36 hours of training, a physical test, background check and drug screening. There is a meeting every Tuesday night and at those meetings training for pre-planning, learning where fire hydrants are, knowing where water points are, knowing the procedures when going on a call are offered.

On the 2nd Tuesday of the month, fire training is offered either through SCC class or officers go over the equipment and trucks to refresh members on their skills.

The other kind of training is medical.

Highland Fire & Rescue Department is a fire and first-responder department but only 60% of the members on the first department are first-responders. First-responders are not EMT-Basics, but they know first aid, how to take vital signs and how to stabilize a patient.

According to Gearhart, all members of Highlands Fire Department are technically town employees, even though they are volunteers.

However, he as Fire Chief and Robbie Forester as Assistant Chief, are full-time paid employees. Other members are paid a stipend. If they make 40% of the calls in six months, they get \$1,200. If they don't make the 40% of calls, they get \$15 per call whether it's 15 minutes or four hours.

In addition, the department pays 100% of the dues for the state pension fund. If a member puts in 20 years and retires from the department, they get a minimal monthly payout from the state pension fund.

"We did this as an incentive to get people to come to calls. At one point in time we got real low on people showing up for calls. It's better now," said Gearhart.

Highlands Fire & Rescue is one of Macon County's 11 fire departments. At full roster there are 30 members -- currently there are 29. Seven of the members are officers: Chief, Assistant Chief, Captain, 1st and 2nd Lieutenant, Rescue Captain and Rescue Lieutenant.

Two years ago a substation opened at the Meadows off US 64 east. Though Gearhart said the Highlands Township could use another substation, the numbers don't work right now but there has been talk of increasing the roster to 35.

"By state law you have to have eight members and two trucks per substation and right now we are at 29 members and we are lacking the trucks we would need for another substation."

Gearhart said the biggest recruiting program is the Junior Fire Fighter Program for 14- to 18-year-olds through word of mouth and the school system. The program is flexible and takes students' schedules.

Keeping the ranks full has always been a challenge

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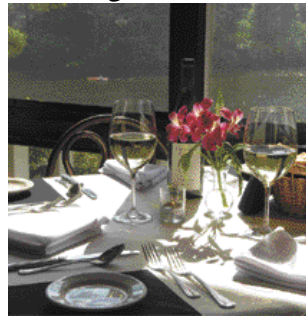
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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

Will you have a "Rent-a-Preacher" at your funeral?

By Pastor Dr. Gary Hewins
Community Bible Church

I recently had the privilege of overseeing a funeral at Community Bible Church. Long time resident Tom James went on to be with the Lord. The funeral was very well attended. Tom obviously was a loving part of the fabric of the community. Two other pastors/friends of Tom's and I were involved in the service.

As funerals go, it was an easy one to do. Tom sought not to be a great man; instead he lived as a good man. He loved his wife, Hilda, and his family and he walked with integrity, worked hard and brought others up in success. Tom helped many people along the way. Because Tom lived a good life, in my opinion, he was a great man. So many people seek greatness and fail to be good. Tom sought goodness and lived a great life.

Tom served his family and served his church, his community and his nation. We need more men like Tom James. Many see the need to emulate such men and that is a good thing but there is more to this story than simply doing what others have done in like manner. It is one thing to live a good life and it is another to live for and worship Christ with your life. Tom lived in and through and for Christ.

Tom owned a wrecker service. Christ is in the wrecker business as well. Tom came to people's rescue when they needed help the most. Christ comes to people's rescue when they need help the most, when their lives are a wreck. Tom would take calls in the coldest and darkest hours of the night. Christ takes calls in the coldest and darkest hours of the night as well. Tom's headlights coming up behind a fearful and stranded driver was certainly a comforting sight. Christ brings light to fearful people as well.

I shared one thought for a minute or two at the funeral. Tom James had three pastors share at his funeral that represented different seasons of his life. When some people die, their families hire a "rent-a-preacher" to oversee their service. A total stranger giving a canned message of dying and hopefully living again to a group he likely does not know is not attractive to me. I recently heard of a "rent-a-preacher" who had to be reminded of the first name of the deceased during his "message" from the Lord. I have no issue with such ministers, they fill an important role, but isn't it the ideal for a man or woman to live out their faith in relationship with their church as the body of Christ? Isn't it better that someone who knew the deceased and hurts because of their loss ministers to the family and community.

Two things are certain. Those reading this article are going to die and each person's death will likely precede some sort of recognition of their life. Are you in relationship with the body of Christ, the church? Do you have a pastoral presence in your life? Do you know Christ and the eternal life he has for you or are you going on your own, alone and outside of community?

My grandmother came to a belief in Christ late in life. She had a "rent-a-preacher." While the funeral was heart-felt among those who came to grieve, it too was fabricated for a lack of connection with the church and those shepherding the flock. May I encourage you to get connected with a local church that preaches and teaches the Bible and may I encourage you to continue to live a good life as did Tom. But, while we are at it, let's do so in the incredibly inexplicable relationship with Christ.

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

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Pastor Nathan Johnson

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

Wed. Kidsquest 6p.; Worship 7p.

HIGHLANDS ASSEMBLY OF GOD

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

Sundays: Worship: 11

HIGHLANDS CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Dan Robinson

670 N. 4th Street (next to the Highlands Civic Center)

Sun.: Morning Worship 10:45 a., Evening Worship, 6:30 p.

Wednesday: Prayer Service, 6:30 p.

HIGHLANDS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Pastor Randy Lucas 526-3376

Sun: School 9:45a.; Worship 9:09, 10:50.; Youth 5:30 p.

Wed: Supper: 5:15; youth, & adults activities: 6; Handbell

rehearsal, 6:15; Choir Rehearsal 7. (nursery provided); 7pm

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HOLY FAMILY LUTHERAN CHURCH: ELCA

Chaplain Margaret Howell • 2152 Dillard Road • 526-9741

Sun: School and Adult discussion group 9:30 a.m.;

Worship/Communion: 10:30

HEALING SERVICE on the 5th Sunday of the month.

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Pastor Troy Nicholson, (828) 526-8425

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

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

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Sun: 10:30 a.m. at Big Ridge Baptist Church,

4224 Big Ridge Road (4.5 miles from NC 107)

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

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Rev. Marty Kilby

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

Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

SCALY MOUNTAIN CHURCH OF GOD

290 Buck Knob Road; Pastor Jerry David Hall • 526-3212

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

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Pastor Rev. Andy Cloer

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

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

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Rev. Rob Wood

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June-Sept: Sunday Services: Rite I, 8a, Rite II, 9:15 & 11a

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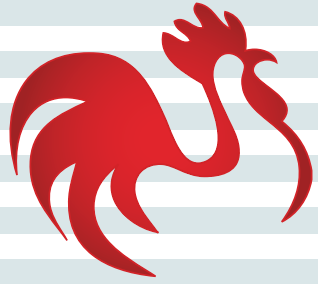
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Houstons celebrate 60th wedding anniversary!

Bob and Sammie Houston celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on March 14, 2017. They were honored with a luncheon at the home of their daughter and son-in-law Joe and Karen. They have been blessed with two children, Karen and Tim, four wonderful grandchildren, Danae, Trent, Matt and Melissa and five precious great grandchildren, Adisyn, Charlotte, Camden, Lucas and Emma. Attending the luncheon were family members and dear friends. Their grandson, Matt, sang some favorite hymns as he played his guitar. A close and special friend, Jim Kinard, shared fond memories and sang a special hymn with Sammie. Their legacy of their love and faithfulness to

the Lord is the greatest gift to their family who love them with all of their hearts.



Sammie and Bob Houston.

...SHULER continued from page 5

particularly since it's a volunteer department.

"They aren't doing this for the retirement," said Gearhart. "I've talked to Mayor Pat Taylor and he is writing a letter to our Congressman Kevin Corbin to see if we can get an incentive for people to

join. People risk their lives every day and if they are willing to risk their lives every day for 20 years they should get a little more."



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Every day from 11:00am - close
 Authentic Neapolitan and NY deck oven pizzas made from scratch. Pasta bowls, daily specials and weeknight dinner specials.
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Mon-Sat 11:00am - close
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Weekday Lunch Special

Monday - Friday 11am to 2pm
 Pizza, pasta, soup and salad bar
 Continuous fresh pizza from our pizza ovens, pastas, fresh breads from our bakery, plus the entire soup and salad bar... \$9.99 each (dine in) or \$9.99 a pound (to go)

SUNDAY SOUTHERN BRUNCH BAR

Every Sunday from 11am - 3pm
 Skillet fried chicken, country angus steak, skillet corn, biscuits & preserves, mashed potatoes, veggies, cobbler, plus the entire soup & salad bar.
 \$11.99 (dine in) or \$9.99 a pound (to go)

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A different full dinner every night.
Serves four serving Monday through Saturday from 4:30 until we sell out - Call ahead to reserve.

Monday: choose either:

Four chicken and four cheese enchiladas, refried beans, monterey rice, homemade tortilla chips, salsa, shredded lettuce, tomatoes, sour cream.

Or...

24 buffalo wings or 2 lbs chicken tenders and hand cut fries.
 \$21.95 serves four.

Tuesday: Made in-house Italian sausage lasagna and a large house salad.
 \$21.95 serves four

Wednesday: Chicken or steak pot pie and a large salad.
 \$21.95 serves four

Thursday: Roasted meatloaf with mashed potatoes, gravy and a large salad.
 \$21.95 serves four

Friday: Wild caught fried shrimp, baked potatoes, hush puppies & coleslaw. \$24.95 serves four

Saturday: In-house smoked bbq, coleslaw, apple and bacon-baked beans, and yeast rolls. \$21.95 serves 4

Weeknight Pizza Special:

Available Monday -Thursday 4:30 to close
 16" NY style pizza with up to 5 toppings. Comes with garlic bread & salad \$21.95

or

Baked Linguini: Meatballs, tomato sauce & cheese. Comes with garlic bread and salad \$21.95

or

Baked Penne Pasta: Italian sausage, onion, bacon and mushrooms in white sauce. Comes with garlic bread & salad \$21.95

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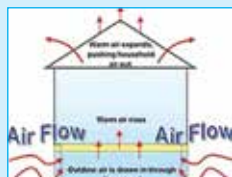
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...BUDGET continued from page 1

Sales tax revenue as of February 2017 has increased \$93,753.06 compared to February 2016 which represents the upswing in the economy everyone has been feeling.

“Despite talk of changing the formula, which would have adversely affected many towns in North Carolina, the change that did occur has been beneficial. There has been an upward trend rather than a decrease all over North Carolina,” said Ward.

General Fund revenues -- money collected from taxes, fees, and state and federal allocations -- in February 2017 (exclusive of a \$22,164 in donations for Police Department projects) was \$102,748.34 more compared to General Fund revenues collected as of February 2016.

“We anticipate meeting the budgeted revenue for the General Fund with 79% currently collected with only 58% General Fund expenditures spent as of February 2017,” Ward said.

The town’s “rule” is that all utility funds should be at or below 66.6% of budgeted revenue as of February 2017.

The Water Fund is at 74%, Sewer is at 70%, Sanitation is at 67% and Electric is at 38% spent as of February 2017.

Water is at 74% due to the Helen Barn project where water and electric lines are being separated from their current configuration along that artery.

“But all utility fund expenditures will be closely monitored so as to stay within budget,” said Ward.

He said the Sanitation fund has balanced out now that the new rates have been levied.

Mayor Pat Taylor said there is still an issue with residents using commercial dump-

sters. The town plans to put labels on the dumpsters reminding people that it is illegal for residents to use commercial dumpsters as per G.S. Statute 14-399.

He said it’s the same old problem, even though people out of town – living in the county – can use the Buck Creek recycle center and the center on Rich Gap Road it’s more convenient to use dumpsters in town. He said the issue must be addressed.

Capital Improvement Projects

Public Service Director/Town Engineer Lamar Nix updated the board on the Capital Improvement Projects slated for 2017-’18. Projects are projected outward five to 10 years.

“This plan changes on a regular basis as priorities change, but this is what is in the pipeline for this next budget year,” he said.

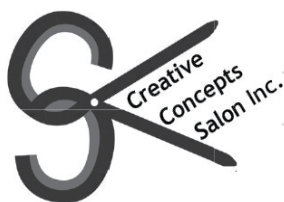
As always, \$50,000 is set aside for sidewalk repairs. This includes curb and gutter repairs. He said town sidewalks suffer regularly from corrosion due to salt. Though \$50,000 is allotted annually, last year only \$30,000 was used.

The Oak Street wall between Town Hall and the Fire Department lost out last year but is up for consideration again this year.

Both the wall along the street and the wall at the Fire Department need to be replaced with a poured concrete wall. The wall along the street will then be faced with rock as elsewhere in town. The cost is \$110,000 for the Oak Street wall and \$30,000 for the Fire Department wall.

Though the walls don’t represent a safety issue, Mayor Taylor said it’s an appearance thing now.

• See BUDGET page 13



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Big Bearpen Mountain in Highlands City limits with 3 br/3ba. Meticulously maintained log home offers all the warmth of Old Highlands Charm, yet it is bright and open bringing in natural sun light. \$850,000. MLS # 83797



On the 7th hole at HFCC. This 4br/4.5ba home has vaulted ceilings, stone fireplace. Wrap around covered & open decks, lower level family room & guest suite. Attached 2 car garage. \$545,000. MLS# 84474



2012 remodel with an enlarged master suite, porte cochere and a double carport. Rustic mtn feel with wood walls, floors. 3br/3ba, great mtn views, and located in town. The partial basement could become a workshop. \$697,000 MLS# 84941



Great lot in prestigious, gated Ravenel. Long summit views spanning from town to Short-off to Whiteside and beyond. This easy laying homesite is the perfect place to build the home of your dreams right in town within a easy walk to everything. \$799,000 MLS #85383



Great buy!! Wonderful home in prestigious Wildcat Cliffs CC. Just a two minute golf cart ride to the club house. Fantastic views from the back porch of Whiteside Mountain and Cullasaja Club golf course. MLS#82872 \$350,000



Best condo value in Highlands Falls Country Club! Lovely 2br/2ba overlooking the 13th fairway with vaulted ceilings, stone-face fireplace, sunroom plus an open deck. \$224,000. MLS #83675



In exclusive HIGHGATE, only 4 minutes to downtown Highlands. 5br/6.5ba home with open floor plan with high ceilings and a "walk-out" terrace level w/ separate entrance. 'his' and 'hers' baths and closets. \$1,195,000. MLS #83155



Highlands Country Club expanded and architecturally redesigned by acclaimed Atlanta architect, Norman Askins. This 4br/4ba home features wrap around decks and mountain views! \$895,000. MLS #84686



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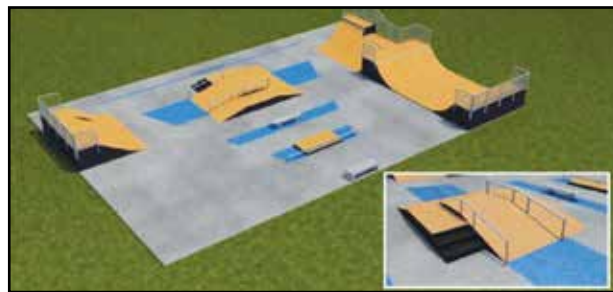
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...BUDGET from page 10



Proposed Skateboard Park plan.

Paving and patching streets will take place as the budget allows. Patch jobs on Spring, Sherwood and Leonard streets were mentioned, as well as Oak and Pine Street Alley since K-H Founders Park will be completed this year. Paving could take place this fall.

The old centerline paving truck is on its last legs and businesses and citizens have complained about the noise it makes. Nix said it's due to parts nearing their end.

Dumpsters are being replaced annually and he said there is still a need for a recycle convenience center in town.

The water line on NC 28 by Old Orchard Road needs to be replaced. There was some talk about cost to the town since the people the line services aren't in the town limits and contribute nothing for the repairs and upgrades.

Citizens serviced by town water pay the minimum \$55 a month versus \$35 in town but that isn't enough for upgrades.

"Even if we doubled the minimal charge, it wouldn't help," said Nix. "By state law we can't put back a 2-inch line for more than 1,000 feet; it has to be a 6 inch line after that."

Six-inch lines are the norm now and are of course much more expensive.

Mayor Taylor said this is one of many cases in town where previous boards allowed services out of town without regard for taxpayers.

"It's the contrary tale of one board over another," he said.

The Buckhorn water tank on Satulah needs to be replaced with one that has 50% more capacity. Once that's done the road will be paved likely in December up to the Worley property. Beyond that is private property.

Rec Park

Rec Park Director Lester Norris began his presentation by reminding the board that the 3-year .015 Ad Valorem tax that was passed in the 2014-2015 budget to be used for Capital Improvement projects within the Recreation Department is set to sunset June 30, 2017.

The funds were used to renovate the Rec Dept. gym; the upper level restrooms; complete the new pool; the addition of the pool dome; renovations at the ballfield; and to build the public restrooms in Founders Park.

During 2015-2016 the entrance sign at the Recreation Department was added, the ball field fence was replaced and the Ice Rink was added in Founders Park.

During 2016-2017 the windows were replaced in the Civic Center and Christmas decorations were ordered for Founders Park.

But Norris said more needs to be done so he would like to see the Ad Valorem tax continued.

"In order to move forward with the remaining capital projects within the Recreation Department estimated to cost \$1,169,498, the Ad Valorem tax needs to be extended."

On the wish list for 2017-'18 is the gym stage and lower

level renovations which have been discussed but put on the back burner year after year.

The estimated cost for these renovations is \$427,763.

"If approved, I need to start putting together plans, bid documents and get the project bids back and ready to be awarded at the July Town Board Meeting so that the renovations can begin in August," said Norris.

The remaining capital projects are the main level and exterior renovations to the Civic Center, replacement of Ball Field lights and the construction of a Skate Board Park.

Norris said with town funds and PARTF grants the Skate Board Park could become a reality.

Altitude Broadband

GIS/MIS Director Matt Shuler said Altitude Broadband currently has 130 customers with 20 of them getting fixed fiber because they were unable to get fixed wireless beaming from towers and water tanks on Big Bear Pen, Brushy Face and Satulah.

The department is currently building out fiber as fast as it can and connecting new customers – moving down NC 106 now.

House Bill 129 is back in affect which says that municipalities can offer broadband but must seek public/private partnerships.

"The town wants to find that partner and we are considering options now," said Shuler.

The board went into closed session to discuss options but no decisions were made.

Tuesday's retreat was an "information only" affair with input to be used to formulate the budget. No votes were taken on any subject.

— Kim Lewicki

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EXPERIENCED ELECTRICIANS

NEEDED. Call 828-526-5147. (st. 11/22)

WANTED

...BICYCLE continued from page 1

ful stakeholder input. It provides a range of economics, planning and communications services. The firm “helps groups chart their future and build better places.”

The Southern Blue Ridge Bike Plan’s goal would be to do just that and with the input of the community providing input on draft routes, the Southwestern Commission hopes to develop a plan for Macon, Graham, Clay, and Cherokee counties.

With North Carolina’s westernmost counties looking at ways to attract new tourists, the 2015 study developed by Kostelec noted that there are several advantages to investing in the promotion of bicycle-related tourism over investment in other tourist activities. One main point noted in the study is that the average stay in the region for a bike tourist is 3.7 nights, which can generate more spending on amenities than the average tourist, who stays 2.5 nights.

The economic impact of bicycle tourism goes beyond the tourism aspect and boosts the economy through job creation. According to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation, work on greenways, sidewalks and bicycle facilities, on average, creates the most jobs — 17 jobs

per \$1 million spent, generating 4.5 more jobs than the next-most productive categories, new highway construction and pavement widening.

The Southwest Commission isn’t alone in its vision of focusing on bicycling, not just for tourists but for residents, too.

The Town of Franklin adopted a comprehensive master bike plan last week. The BikeWalk Plan is a master plan developed in partnership with J.M. Teague Engineering & Planning and the citizens of Franklin to make the town more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. The master plan identifies 22 projects throughout the town ranging in cost from a 225-foot bridge being placed on Wells Grove Road crossing over the Little Tennessee River at a cost of \$8,000 to a \$4 million project to construct a 3.7 mile Southwest Loop multi-use path for both bicyclists and pedestrians separated from motor vehicles around Franklin.

For more information Southern Blue Ridge Bike Plan and to learn what you can do to make this happen in Macon County, attend the public input meeting on March 23 at 6 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church’s Tartan Hall at 26 Church Street, Franklin, NC

HOUSEKEEPER NEEDED – 5 bedroom house, call Larry – 773-220-8622 (st. 3/9)

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...LETTER continued from page 2

headwaters of rivers that supply drinking water to downstream communities. Therefore, repealing the regulation will ultimately pollute those communities’ drinking water sources.

Rather than pretending to resurrect a dying industry with the repeal of regulations that protect public health and the environment, legislators should embrace the reality of 21st century US energy production and provide funding for resources to help displaced workers settle into new careers.

Wouldn’t it be better, and more realistic, to enact legislation to provide training and infrastructure to bring new, clean industries to old coal communities than to repeal rules that have no positive effect on jobs, and demonstrably negative effects on public health and the environment?

Karen Patterson
Highlands and Aiken, SC

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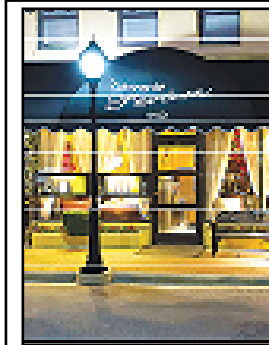
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