

Highlands Newspaper

FREE Every Thursday

Volume 11, Number 5

Real-Time News, Weather & WebCams: HighlandsInfo.com

Thurs., Jan 30, 2014

Econ. development group behind Scaly name change

Suggestion pushes emotional 'buttons' of families who have lived there for generations

A group of people who live, work and have businesses in Scaly Mountain have been meeting monthly for three months now to discuss ways to improve the

lifestyle for Scaly residents and to make the area more attractive to visitors and potential businesses.

Calling itself an "economic development" group, of which

Realtor/builder Bill Futral is the president, the group has come up with a list of 10 points it feels would improve Scaly Mountain:

- Acquire enhanced internet

and cell phone capabilities.

- Improve the appearance and services in the business area.

- Establish a Visitors Center

- See NAME CHANGE page 4

Board of Ed considers three options to identify top 25%

By Brittany Burns

Macon County's Board of Education is one step closer to identifying the district's top performing teachers. After the state voted to do away with teacher tenure, local districts were directed to formulate a system to identify the top 25% of teachers and then award those employees with a four-year contract and a \$500 raise per year.

While the mandate came from the state level, the criteria used to identify the top 25% was left up to the districts, something that Macon County officials have been struggling with. "This is a difficult process that has created a great deal of stress for all parties involved," said Director of Personnel Dan Moore. Moore updated the board Tuesday night

• See Board of ED page 9

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Cold brings back favorite pastime



On Saturday and Sunday of last week families braved the cold to skate on Harris Lake ...an outdoor activity last seen in Highlands about four years ago.
Photo by Kim Lewicki

Reval tax rate likely to be about .38

County to go after delinquent taxpayers; said to affect tax rate/2014-'15 rate likely to stay the same

At the annual Macon County Commission worksession held Saturday, Jan. 25 at the SCC campus in Franklin, commissioners heard from various departments concerning budgetary needs for 2014-'15.

Director of MC Tax Department Richard Lightner was first up and discussed the collection of outstanding tax bills, updated commissioners on the revaluation and explained increased budget requirements peculiar to the reval.

Delinquent Tax Collections

Of immediate concern is the collection of taxes delinquent 2004 through 2013. As of January 8, 2014, delinquent property taxes amounted to \$4,757,645 – of that amount \$3,068,938 is from the 2013 tax year, which Lightner expects will be coming in soon.

But, \$2,631,705 – from 2004 to 2012 – has been delinquent more than one tax year. By law the county can't collect taxes that are more than 10 years delinquent.

"Whatever the county's collection rate is, that is the amount the county can spend. So if you come up with a budget of \$50 million and your collection rate is 97% you have to factor in the 3% in delinquent taxes and that means your tax rate goes up 3%," he said.

Even though the Macon County Commission passed a resolution in July 2004 directing the tax office to start forced col-

• See TAX RATE page 3

• INSIDE •

Letters.....	2
Obituaries.....	3
Dining.....	4
Investing at 4,118 Ft.....	7
Spiritually Speaking.....	10
Service Directory.....	12
Police & Fire Report.....	13
Classifieds.....	14

Board of Elections embezzlement investigation ongoing

By Brittany Burns

Macon County Board of Elections Director Kimberly Bishop has been placed on administrative leave pending an investigation into possible embezzlement.

The board of elections office was closed on Friday, January 17 and the keys were handed over to the State Bureau of Investigation for further review. Since the office's closing, with the assistance of Macon County Sheriff's Office, the SBI has been probing into documents and financial records.

Superior Court Judge Bradley B. Letts issued a search warrant for the Macon County Board of Elections. According to the search warrant, Assistant Special Agent in Charge T.D. Ammons of the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation is heading the investigation and has "probable cause to believe that the Office of the Macon County Board of Elections has been used to commit the offense of embezzlement."

Ammons met with Macon County Finance Director Lori Hall to discuss irregularities in financial records at the board

• See INVESTIGATION page 11

• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• LETTERS •

Don't kill the messenger

Dear Editor,

I do not like the idea of having the government involved in the sale of alcohol or anything else that private enterprise can do. I do not think it is a good idea.

Now the spat between the ABC board members comes up and we find that the benefits package the employees are getting is unbelievable. If what was quoted in the paper is true, then maybe the other commissioners that are not upset should be replaced not the guy that has raised all of the questions.

Next - North Carolina should join the rest of the states around them and let private enterprise sell booze. The grocery stores are already selling wine and beer and seem to be doing a good job. Question - are the parts of the benefit package quoted in the paper correct. If so, then the board or previous board or boards responsible for giving these sort of benefits to anyone must have been out of their mind.

If this is a package only available to the ABC store employees. The benefit package - if what was quoted is true -- is totally out of line even for government employees.

Jim Rogers
Yellow Mountain

The environment and unemployed correlation

Dear Editor,

The drought in California points out the conflict between the environmentalist and the unemployed people who live in the bread basket of California. The unemployment rate in this area is extremely high. This problem has to do with deciding how to divide up the water supply between the farmers and a little fish called a smelt. Currently the smelt is winning the war and thousands of farmers and unemployed migrant workers are losing. The US Government is backing the smelt in this instance.

Contrast this with the plight of our American Eagles and Red Tail Hawks. Duke Energy was fined one million dollars by EPA for killing eagles and red tailed hawks with wind mills in Wyoming at Duke's Wind Mill farms in their state. But, President Obama jumped in and put

a moratorium on these fines for 30 years for killing birds and bats. Was this because of his desire to promote clean energy? Will the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, and many other environmental groups let this action pass? President Obama has approved this action in favor of clean energy? It looks like the smelt won, the workers and eagles lost.

Jim Mueller
Glenville, NC

Equality

Dear Editor,

I've never figured out how one might bring equality to all, much less a government bureaucracy attempting to do so. Equality ends up being a system for rewarding failure and punishing success. The big snag here is that the rules government

lays down for the rest of us never apply to the political rulers in power. Politicians promise equality for one reason only, to maintain power.

It would be nice to believe that we can somehow make someone with no talent successful in whatever endeavor they might choose but life just doesn't work that way. Politicians get elected because they are charismatic and are able to persuade people to vote for them. The guy who stutters and is as ugly as a stump is often the smartest and most intelligent of all yet unable to win an election. However, he/she just may be a winner in business or industry and provide jobs for people.

Humans are all different from each other with IQ's ranging from 60 on up to 160 but don't be fooled into thinking the higher IQ person will always be a winner.

The fact is that it's usually the average IQ individual who turns out to be the winner, perhaps due to his/her need to prove themselves, works harder and builds something worthwhile. Bill Gates comes to mind here but his IQ is only average.

In the liberal world, we have the intellectual coffee house elites who theorize about how they might make everyone in the lower classes equal, but this always ends up breeding a totalitarian government to force people to be equal. Again, only the political elite are allowed to rise above others. Many liberals I have met actually view themselves as superior and everyone else as inferior, generally causing more harm than good.

Should society be responsible for a kid that drops out of school in the 8th grade and then expects society to take care of him/her?

Is it really equality when a lazy individual makes the same salary as the hard worker?

Why haven't our Hollywood bleeding heart celebrities offered to accept only \$100,000 a year instead of the more common income of \$50 million? They are, as a group less intelligent and less educated than most of our corporate CEO's who work harder and run the companies that provide the jobs.

LBJ's War on Poverty was a disaster and years later we still have poverty and nothing changed even after spending trillions.

The only equality society can provide everyone is an education and it's up to the parents to push their kids to finish school but from then on it's up to the kids to carve out their own success in life. We can't change nature; there will always be winners and losers.

Even in poverty, Americans are still fifty times richer than most of those in poverty in the rest of the world. And, I might add, a lot fatter.

Bob Wilson
Franklin, NC

ABC Board ball is in leaders' court

Dear Editor,

The report on the ABC Board dysfunction makes fun reading; it is also sad. The names mentioned are intelligent people; they should know how to act. Using foul language is inexcusable, and so is other misconduct such as hollering at one another, calling each other bad names, inter-

• See LETTERS page 3

LETTERS-TO-THE EDITOR-POLICY

We reserve the right to reject or edit submissions.

NO ANONYMOUS LETTERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of Highlands Newspaper.

Please EMAIL letters by Sunday at 5 p.m. There is a 500-word limit without prior approval.

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Toll Free FAX: 866-212-8913 • (828) 526-3228

Email: HighlandsEditor@aol.com

Publisher/Editor – Kim Lewicki; Reporter: Brittany Burns

Copy Editor – Glenda Bell; Digital Media - Jim Lewicki

Locally owned and operated Kim & Jim Lewicki

Adobe PDF version at www.HighlandsInfo.com

265 Oak St.; P.O. Box 2703, Highlands, N.C., 28741

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• OBITUARIES •

Therese Madeline Rauner

Therese Madeline Rauner, age 88, of Highlands, NC, formerly of New York, died Monday, January 20, 2014. She was born in New York City, NY, the daughter of the late Andrew J. and Anna Kelly Rauner. She had a PhD in Psychology and was an educator at West Point Children's School.

She is survived by her sister, Ann R. Wannamaker of Sapphire, NC. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by a sister, Susan R. Docherty.

A memorial service will be held in the spring in New York.

Bryant-Grant Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements. Online condolences may be made at www.bryantgrantfuneralhome.com.

Anzil Sanford Bryson

Anzil Sanford Bryson, age 84, of Highlands, NC, formerly of Rock Hill, SC passed away Thursday, January 23, 2014. He was born in Macon County, the son of the late Arthur and Viola Vincent Bryson. He was preceded in death by his wife, Blanche Bryson. He was a retired machine operator for General Tire, he loved blue grass music and clogging, and was of the Baptist faith.

He is survived by a daughter, Diane Moss and her husband John of Yellow Mountain, a son Wayne Bryson and his wife Ann of Yellow Mountain; two sisters, Wilma Reed of Highlands, NC and Doris Tallent of Gastonia, NC; two brothers, Fred Bryson of Gastonia, NC and Dennis Bryson of Rock Hill, SC; four grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren also survive.

A graveside service was held Monday, January 27th at Macedonia Baptist Church Cemetery, with Rev. Keith Ashe officiating.

Bryant-Grant Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements. Online condolences may be made at www.bryantgrantfuneralhome.com.

...LETTERS continued from page 2

rupting, and even disparaging one behind one's back. Such misconduct results in an ineffective board for obvious reasons.

I do not "request" ... I "expect" the Town Board to take action. To say that the board can only appoint the ABC Board members is a cop-out. Real leaders do not cop out.

Having said all that, I am impressed by the suggested changes of Jack Calloway to the store operations and policies, and agree with most of those described in the

paper.

In addition, Jack's suggestions show that he undertook his board appointment seriously, and made the effort to carry out his responsibilities. I commend him for those things.

In any event, I look forward to the next installment of, "How the ABC Board turns."

Griffin Bell
Highlands

...TAX RATE continued from page 1

lections, it has never done it. But Lightner said the county can no longer afford to operate that way.

"We need to get out of that mode ... we don't have the revenues coming in to be 'Mr. Nice Guy,'" he said."

The county's collection rate is 97% but Lightner said it has to be closer to 99% or it will cause an increase in tax rates.

Currently, accounting for delinquent taxes averages one cent on the tax rate every year. He said it's also important that the county collect when the money is due.

"If a business files for bankruptcy, that really ties up collections. We have to get it that first year."

He said he's been with the county 29 years and there is a defunct real estate cor-

poration that has never paid taxes. He said there is another with whom the county tangles every year that owes \$101,000 in taxes. And a well-known business in Highlands owes \$250,000 in taxes.

"Basically these people are using Macon County as a bank," said Lightner.

Chairman Kevin Corbin said this is a perfect example of people who don't have health insurance.

"They go to the hospital and they are going to be treated; they aren't turned away, but you and I pay for that through our cost of health insurance. In this scenario, a little bit of everyone's taxes cover that \$2.6 million in taxes that people aren't paying."

Commissioners gave County Manager Derek Roland, County Attorney Chester

• See TAX RATE page 7



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...NAME CHANGE continued from page 1

for the area.

- Build a website and social media presence to promote our area.
- Explore funding opportunities for various programs.
- Build a local email list and business directory to promote local businesses
- Improve relations between this area and the county government
- Explore water and sewer for the business area
- Get a stop light in downtown Scaly, so the fire and rescue department can turn easily onto NC 106.
- Brand the area and improve perception.

However, it's item number 10 that has touched emotional buttons and is causing alarm among some residents of the Scaly Mountain community and in Highlands.

A couple of new names have been tossed around, though committee members are quick to say this is a "non" issue right now and the last item on their list.

"The people who have business interests in the Scaly area, are concerned about its economy, its vacant storefronts, businesses that have closed, etc., so we wanted to get together to figure out ways to increase prosperity in the area," said committee member JB Coram.

The first point focuses on enhanced internet and cell phone capabilities.

"Bad cell service and bandwidth is a major negative for new businesses that may want to come to the area as well as safety-wise and real estate-wise. It's something that needs to be addressed," said Coram.

Members say they want to entice businesses to rejuvenate the area ... perhaps re-design Don's convenience store/gas station into a strip of shops housing vendors needed by residents as well as shops that would be tourist attractions; basically spruce up downtown Scaly.

January's meeting involved rebranding Scaly – an exercise Highlands recently embraced through the Small Town Main Street program where a logo, colors and slogan were adopted to be used in its wayfinding program.

The January meeting was held at the Industrial Development Authority at Rabun Gap where Rabun County's

• See NAME CHANGE page 7

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New band Red June to perform Feb. 1 at PAC.

Who says there's nothing to do in Highlands in the Winter?

PAC is starting a New Artists Series this winter. These are young North Carolina artists. The kind of group you'll be able to say in a couple of years, "I knew them when".

The first of the New Artists Series is Saturday, February 1, with Asheville based Red June. With a dynamic yet refined sound featuring striking three-part harmonies, electrifying instrumental work, and honest, soulful songwriting, Red June has been capturing the hearts of audiences all across the country. A power trio consisting of Will Straughan on Dobro and guitar, Natalya Weinstein on fiddle, and John Cloyd Miller on mandolin and guitar, the three seamlessly blend country, bluegrass, and American roots music with a dash of indie rock sensibility to create something entirely original and inspiring.

Red June recently signed with Organic Records and 2014 is promising to be momentous with the release of their highly anticipated third album. 2013 was highlighted with John winning 1st place in the bluegrass category at the venerable Chris Austin Songwriting Contest at MerleFest as well as a coveted Artist Fellowship for songwriting from the NC Arts Council.

The band members have been longtime friends, first jamming together at an

Asheville music party in 2005. In late 2008 they formed Red June and went on to release their first album, Remember Me Well, two years later. Their debut was very well received, and was voted the #1 regional release of 2010 by the discerning listeners of WNCW. Their follow up studio project, Beauty Will Come (2012) also garnered much attention, with Chuck Dauphin of Music News Nashville proclaiming,

"Red June possesses an airtight harmony that will impress even the toughest critic. Listen to their vocal blend on 'I'm Willing To Try,' and you may need to have your jaw surgically removed from the floor – they are that good!"

Saturday, February 1 at 7:30pm Tickets are \$20

Next up, Saturday, March 29 is The Malpass Brothers: Christopher & Taylor. Tickets are \$20.

Tickets for both concerts are available online at www.highlandspac.org or by calling 828.526.9047 Highlands PAC 507 Chestnut Street Highlands.

And don't forget the MET Opera Live in HD, Saturday, February 8. Rusalka by Dvorak, starring Renee Fleming. Pre-Opera discussion at 12:30pm. Opera begins at 12:55pm. Tickets are \$24, Students are FREE due to the generosity of underwriters.

...NAME CHANGE from page 4

Tourism Development Board presented a webinar about branding small communities – something it is considering for that area, too.

“Part of rebranding is about scientific marketing and a name change is part of that,” said Coram. “The hope is that building a brand would increase economic activity in the area.”

Coram said economic progress within the community and economic survival are paramount.

“The community is dying; real estate is 50% what it was five or six years ago. More than 50% of its residents are retirees and half that population will be gone in 10 years. If we don’t stimulate the area and make it attractive it will be a ghost town in 10 years,” he said.

According to Coram, the majority of the 15 people in attendance at the January meeting thought a name change was the right thing to do.

The two names that are being considered are Bartram and Middle Creek.

The Bartram Trail surrounds the community on three sides and historians say John Bartram traveled from Rabun County through Scaly to get to the plateau.

The other name is Middle Creek which is the creek that runs through the Scaly community.

Coram said he doesn’t really have a problem with the name Scaly which is the name of the main mountain in the community, but said that when new people are considering the area the name is a turn off.

“I’ve been selling real estate there for 15 years and people being people, when they first hear Scaly they don’t like the name.”

Coram and Futral said changing the name is not an immediate goal. In addition, the committee has no enforcement power or ability to change a town name and the group is more concerned about the other points which they feel need to be addressed.

“It was simply part of a two-hour discussion,” said Co-

ram. “Personally, I think the name will be changed someday. It happens all the time and it’s easier than you might think. But for now this is about a lot of people getting hysterical over a non-event.”

Futral said the move to change things is really about property owners trying to improve the business corridor of Scaly Mountain.

“The area has gone down in the last four years and a name change is only one of many things discussed,” said Futral. “We have no money, no authority, no political pull, no legal standing, nor are we a legal entity. We are just trying to come up with ideas that might entice new businesses to come to the area.”

When talking about a name change the group considered the attributes it could play off of he said – natural beauty being one of them, but Futral said at this point this is just a group of people talking.

Futral said the Post Office, postal codes and signage couldn’t be changed. The name of the physical mountain is Scaly and that can’t change, either.

“It is the perception of the area we are considering. Bartram after the trail or Middle Creek after the creek. Maybe just incorporate a new name in the names of some of the businesses because legally there is nothing we can do. This has been blown out of proportion,” he said.

Meanwhile, petitions are circulating throughout the area asking not to change the name because its messing with people’s heritage.

“As residents of the Scaly Mountain, North Carolina community and surrounding area, we have learned of the effort by a few individuals to change the name of our community. We the undersigned do petition the Macon County Board of Commissioners and the Macon County Planning Board to take no action in support of or regarding changing the name of the Scaly Mountain, North Carolina without scheduling an open meeting with the residents of Scaly Mountain, and if necessary, requesting a vote

• See NAME CHANGE page 8

• INVESTING AT 4,118 FT. •

A Summer Place...What?



Pat Allen
Owner/ BIC of
Pat Allen Realty Group

and people gather at Bucks and Mountain Fresh Grocery for cappuccinos and lattes. Chefs prepare their winter creations using heartier ingredients.

Another glorious site and event is ice-skating on Harris Lake! If you choose to be a bystander gather with the mallards, ducks, and geese that create a Kincaid painting ready for framing. The laughter and antics of

those trying ice-skating for the first time is a site to behold!

So what once was considered a “summer place” when Highlands and Cashiers were first discovered by tourists escaping the heat of long, hot summers now offers a winter wonderland for those longing for snow, fireplaces, and nature’s finest scenery.

This is why Highlands and Cashiers are year-round destinations that assure your real estate investment here is a good one! It is a great time to select your home, golf villa, or condominium and at Pat Allen Realty Group we give you our time and personal service to make that happen. Contact us at 828-526-8784 or by email: pat.fallen@gmail.com. Our website is PatAllenRealtyGroup.com.

...TAX RATE from page 3

Jones and Finance Director Lori Hall the go ahead to contract out collection services. The firm Ridenour & Murphy, PA, that performs collections for Jackson County is being considered.

“This is money we need to operate,” said Roland.

Revaluation

Lightner said there’s no more putting the revaluation off, and the news isn’t good.

According to Lightner, the county has lost 25% of its value since the last reval – a total decrease in value of \$2 billion – dropping from \$9 billion to \$7 billion in value today.

“Even if all revenue and expenditures stay as they were in the 2013-14 budget, the revenue neutral tax rate for the 2015-16 budget will be around 38 cents,” he said. The budget for 2013-14 was \$47,755,565 and the county needs about \$25 million in ad valorem taxes to operate as it currently does.

So, according to the math, when the reval comes through because property owners will likely see their values have decreased, even at 38 cents, the average taxpayer will pay the same amount in ad valorem taxes after this reval as before.

“If the county needs \$25 mil-

• See TAX RATE page 8

Falling Waters is a 52-acre community



A peaceful sanctuary tucked in the mountains just 2.8 miles from Main Street, Highlands, NC. Secluded but not remote. Well forested with mature hardwoods, Rhododendron, Mountain Laurel and wild flowers that take turns showing off through the seasons; two waterfalls & several creeks. Gentle land, easy building sites, and a great place to take a walk.

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www.highlandsnchomesites.com

Contact (onsite owner) or your broker for plats, prices & a guided tour.
828-508-9952.

...NAME CHANGE continued from page 7

be held to determine the position of a majority of the residents of Scaly Mountain," reads the petition.

Herb James, whose family has lived in the Scaly Mountain community for generations and whose mother was one of the first teachers at the Scaly Moun-

tain school house said way back he thought Scaly Mountain was called Middle Creek.

"But it's Scaly now and I am generally not for changing the names of things unless there is a really good reason."

Faith Houston who was born and raised in Scaly and who

has lots of family still there said the idea of changing the name makes her sad.

Her grandmother, Bessie Barnes, who is the oldest member of Scaly at 102 is upset about the idea as well.

Some are also worried that if the community is incorporated

taxes would increase.

Macon County Commissioner Jim Tate who represents Scaly Mountain and Highlands said he is familiar with the name change topic due to numerous Scaly Mountain constituents either dropping by his office or calling him.

"Thus far, I have had seven people contact me and none of them have been in support of any

name change for Scaly. "I am really not familiar with the process – what it would take to change a community's name – so I asked Macon County Attorney Chester Jones to look into it for me."

The next economic development committee meeting is mid-month February. Those interested in attending should contact Bill Futral at bill@futral.net.

– Kim Lewicki



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From left: Amy Hearing, Program Manager, Mission Center for Telehealth, Bryan Arkwright, Director, Mission Center for Telehealth, Danielle Martin, Stroke Outreach Coordinator, Dan Baldasaro, RN, Charge Nurse, Dr. Gray Erlacher, HCH Director of Emergency Services, Bonnie K. Simonson, MS, RN, HCH Interim Chief Nursing Officer, and Virginia Stewart, RN, HCH Clinical Coordinator.

...TAX RATE continued from page 7

lion in ad valorem taxes, the revenue neutral tax rate will bring that same amount in, but there is going to be some variation between the types of properties," he said.

Statistics show that vacant land has lost more than homes, and large homes have lost more value than smaller homes, so a decrease in value won't be across the board. A third will get a decrease, a third will stay the same and a third will go up, he said.

"The bad thing is it's not going to be like in the past where the more valuable property grew faster and got a tax increase. Highlands and Nantahala around the lake may actually see a decrease in their property taxes because the homes are traditionally more expensive there," he said.

He said the average house is the medium so it doesn't increase or decrease that much which means those owners will shoulder a bigger burden than others.

In the past, the biggest growth in Macon County hasn't been in houses, but in the development of raw land. For instance, when a 100-acre tract, valued at \$100 an acre, is divided into 80 to 100 lots which are sold for \$100,000-\$200,000 a lot, that adds a lot of money to the coun-

ty's coffers. However, Lightner said there are no sizeable tracts left to bring in that kind of tax money – there are only two properties over 500 acres left in the county.

By law, tax appraisers aren't supposed to take into account foreclosures or short sales, but since there have been so many of them since the last reval, it is affecting values and "comparables" in neighborhoods and Lightner said they had to be taken into consideration this reval.

Currently property values are equivalent to 2003 and Lightner said it will take 5-10 years before 2007 values will be realized. "There will be another reval before we see that happen," he said.

2014-2015 Tax Rate

Though the Tax Department, Public Safety, schools, social services and the county's technology department all discussed the possibility and for some the certainty of needing more money to operate during the 2014-'15 budget year, Chairman Kevin Corbin said it's not the consensus on the board to raise taxes. The current tax rate is 27.9 cents per \$100 valuation.

"Individually, there is not a will to raise taxes on the board. We don't have any large

• See TAX RATE page 11

H-C Hospital's Telestroke robot diagnoses stroke symptoms quickly

Thanks to a Telestroke robot, patients at Highlands-Cashiers Hospital who are exhibiting signs of stroke can now be evaluated more quickly and accurately.

Telestroke is part of Mission Health's Telehealth system that connects physicians and patients at rural hospitals with specialists at Mission Hospital, the region's only dedicated Level II trauma center. Through the use of a rolling robot and live, two-way, audio-video, Telestroke technology allows Mission Neurologists to remotely interact with patients, families and care providers at the bedside, reducing the need for travel time or patient transfers for specialized stroke care.

"It's a faster way to get acute stroke patients in front of a neurologist," said Dr. Gray Erlacher, HCH Director of Emergency Care. "Patients who present in our ER with stroke symptoms will quickly be assessed not only by us but a Board Certified Neurologist from Mission Health. Time is brain tissue and with this technology, assessment and treatment can begin even sooner."

Dr. Erlacher added that the robot is like having a specialist on-site 24 hrs a day, 365 days a year. The robot will reduce transfers allowing more patients to stay and receive treatment locally. The Telestroke program has allowed nearly 50 percent of patients who received a video Telestroke consult to remain at their local community hospital for care.

"Telehealth eliminates geographic transport barriers and allows improved outcomes for patients through faster treatment and 24/7 bedside access to Mission Health experts," said Jonathan Bailey, MHA, Vice President of Operations at Mission Hospital. "The Telehealth installation at Highlands-Cashiers Hospital puts us one step closer to achieving our BIG(ER) Aim: to get each patient to the desired outcome, first without harm, also without waste and with an exceptional experience for the patient and family."

Mission Health's Telehealth services are now offered in 10 rural hospitals and clinics in western North Carolina.

• BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NEWS •



Wood for heating prepared for the needy

On January 4th at 10 a.m., volunteers from the Highlands Mountaintop Rotary and the Highlands Emergency Council met at the HEC building on Poplar Street to assist in cutting and splitting wood. This wood has been made available to families in need who heat with wood. Many thanks to all those volunteers that helped!

...BOARD of ED continued from page 1

on three possible ways to select the teachers.

Option one would select the chosen 25% by specific school site through a lottery, with itinerant teachers placed in a separate category. Teacher-of-the-year data over the three previous years would be used to determine which employees should be offered contracts prior to the lottery.

Option two suggests the 25% be chosen district-wide through a lottery; past teachers-of-the-year data over the previous three years would be used to determine which teachers are offered contracts prior to the lottery.

The third option would throw all eligible teachers in the district in a lottery and randomly draw 25% of them.

While the first two options would allow all eligible teachers from each school site to have a reasonably fair chance at the four-year contract, the third option would make the drawing completely random with no promise that a top performing teacher will be identified at each school site.

Board member Gary Shields asked Moore if it would be possible to identify the top 25% of

teachers based on teachers who would be near tenure status if the law had not been changed. According to Moore, that is not a wise decision. "The thought is that the district is offering a specific category of employee (age/service related) an opportunity that others employees would not be offered; we feel that this is arbitrary," said Moore.

The Board of Education continued to express its discontent with the law and stated that it hoped whatever decision is made will be the best option for district employees.

Macon County Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin told board members that he would like for the board to consider all three options over the next month and to further discuss the options in February.

"The thought is that the district should have a procedure in place at the conclusion of the March Board of Education meeting," said Moore.

Dean Shatley of Campbell-Shatley PLLC will speak to teachers and offer details and information as it pertains to state law and the relinquishment of career status at Franklin High School in the Fine Arts Center on Feb. 5 at 4 p.m.



Local Boy Scout Troop donates playground to Eckerd Living Center

Taylor Schmitt, a member of Scout Troop 207 (Highlands, NC) and other troop members gifted a special meaningful and long lasting present to the Eckerd Living Center at Highlands-Cashiers Hospital over the Holidays. As Schmitt's Eagle Scout Project, a playground was built for children visiting with their family members at ELC. Sincere thanks from everyone at ELC and HCH to Taylor Schmitt (Eagle Scout), Paul Schmitt (Leader & Taylor Schmitt's Father), Samuel Craig (Eagle Scout), Thomas Craig (Leader & Samuel Craig's Father), Hunter Stanley (Eagle Scout), Adam Schiffli (Eagle Scout), Remy Adrian (Scout), Luke Rogers (Scout), Christian Trevathan (Scout) for your hard work and dedication to the project, and your kindness to the ELC residents and family members.

Big Brothers Big Sisters celebrate their Super Heroes

Every January Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) recognizes its mentors. Those adults that chose to give of their time and talents to help children reach for higher aspirations. This year, the Big Brothers Big Sisters theme for Mentoring Month is Celebrate Our "Big" Super Heroes.

They are every day community citizens that make a difference through friendship and positive role modeling. Their reward is the satisfaction of gaining the trust and friendship of a child. The ability to open new doors and horizons for a child and see his/hers eyes sparkle with excitement.

Currently there are several children on the waiting list in High-



BB Peter Ray with his Little Brother JT school garden.

lands for a mentor. These children have asked for a mentor and expectantly wait every day to hear whether BBBS has found that special adult that has stepped up and offered to befriend them.

Contact the BBBS program coordinator in Highlands: Debbie Lasser, highlands@bbbshnc.org or at 828-526-4044 and volunteer to be a Super Hero.

2014 Mystery Dinner Theater Tickets available

Come solve the mystery first! Louise has left her considerable fortune to her wacky family, and there are some surprises in the will that will lead to murder! You can expect special guest appearances by Former Mayor Joe Collins, Police Chief David Adams, County Manager Derek Roland, Mr. Tim Hubbs and more. With your help, the crime can be solved.

The Macon County Community Foundation Players are back for the 2014 Mystery Dinner Theater. The production will take place at Tessentee Farms in Otto, NC on February 21st & 22nd all performances are at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$40 per person, and include dinner. Reserve your seat or tables in advance, by calling Karen Stiwwinter at (828) 524-5200.

The Community Foundation is pleased to announce that sponsorships are available for this year's play. You can sponsor as an individual, a business, or a company, and your donation is 100 percent tax deductible. As a sponsor, your name/company name will appear on the playbill (size determined by sponsorship level), which could be viewed by more than 250 people.

Your sponsorship of this fundraiser helps the Foundation provide grants to support worthy non-profit organizations in Macon County. In 2013, the Foundation was able to assist more than 21 programs in need and they hope to reach even more this year- with your help! For more information on the sponsorship levels (starting as low as \$50) or to become a sponsor, please contact Regina Lupoli at Regina@LupoliInc.com, or call Sue @ (800) 201-9532 by February 7th.

About the North Carolina Community Foundation:

The NCCF is the single statewide community foundation serving North Carolina and has made nearly \$74million in grants since its inception in 1988. With more than \$170 million in assets, the NCCF sustains over 1,200 funds and endowments established to provide long-term support of a broad range of community needs, nonprofit organizations, institutions and scholarships.

• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

Salvation

By Pastor Sam Forrester
Whiteside Presbyterian Church

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

It used to be that most people in this nation and especially in the south knew this verse and the basic message it relayed. When I was growing up everybody of my acquaintance knew it, even those who were not church goers. But things have changed over the last several decades. I have had several people ask me about the signs held up at football games that say John 3:16. They were completely ignorant of what it meant.

This verse is the gospel in a nut shell. It delivers to lost and dying men, hope. Hope that their Creator has not forgotten them. Hope that in spite of their sin and guilt they can find peace and rest.

It begins with God, the sovereign almighty God who made all things and guides this world toward its final fulfillment of his great purpose of having a people unto himself. He declares his love for the works of his hands. The amazing thing in these first words is the depth of God’s love. He loved this world, his creation, so much he was willing to do the most amazing and wonderful things to save unto himself a people out of its sinful mass of humanity.

The story behind this is the sin of Adam in the Garden. Adam committed treason against his Creator and suffered a terrible fate for it. He died spiritually. This spiritual death came immediately upon his sin. This also began the physical death process. All who descend from Adam are now born spiritually dead. Because of God’s great love he allowed there to be time for the redemption of some men from the curse of this death but how was that to be accomplished?

The message of John 3:16 shows what was involved in this process. God gave his only begotten Son. The concept being he committed Jesus to do the work man, because of his dead nature, could not do. Jesus came into this world taking on flesh and blood and becoming a man like you. He lived his life out on this earth in the perfect will of God the Father doing for you what you could never do for yourself.

He, then, offered his perfect life on Calvary’s cross in your place. He went to the cross to pay a price you could never afford to pay. The wages of sin is death, Jesus died for you. Because he was perfect in his life, death had no hold on him, so once the price was paid, he was able to defeat death and through his resurrection victory give you hope of eternal life in his name.

Over the centuries men have devised many ways to create for themselves hope. The problem with these man created ways is that hope comes back to rest on man and what he does or doesn’t do. True Christianity is the only place you can find a hope offered by God. A hope completely generated through the actions of God. A hope that can never be lost once you have it.

John 3:16 declares without equivocation that hope begins with faith and trust in Jesus Christ, “whoever believes in Him.” If you will acknowledge your sin. If you see your need of forgiveness. If you confess your complete inability to save yourself, placing your trust in Jesus as the One sent from heaven to do for you what you could never do for yourself, your salvation is secured. It was not secured by your works or the merits of your confession but by the grace offered in Jesus as the One sent.

No one who places his hope in Christ Jesus will perish. He will not find himself lost in eternal despair but upheld by everlasting hope. A hope that makes life ring with purpose and that is what salvation is, an eternal hope grounded in the eternal Son given by the amazing love of a gracious and merciful God.

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP • John 3:16

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Wednesdays: Mid-week prayer meeting – 7 p.m.
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Rev. Jamie Passmore, Pator
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Catered dinner - Wed. 6pm
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Sky Valley, GA
Church: 706-746-2999
Sundays: 10 a.m. – Worship
Holy Communion 1st Sunday of the month
Wednesdays: 9 a.m. Healing and Prayer w/Holy Communion
CHRIST ANGLICAN CHURCH
Rector: Jim Murphy, 252-671-4011
464 US Hwy 64 east, Cashiers
Sun.: Chirstian Education, 9 a.m.(Bucks in Cashiers) Family
Worship with music and Communion, 10:30 a.m.
Mon.: Bible Study & Supper at homes - 6 p.m.
Wed.: Men’s Bible Study -8:30 a.m., First Baptist Church
CHRIST CHURCH OF THE VALLEY, CASHIERS
Pastor Steve Kerhoulas
Sun.10:45am, S.S 9:30am. Wed. 6pm supper and teaching.
Tue. Guys study 8am, Gals 10am.
CLEAR CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH
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Sundays: School – 10 a.m.; Worship – 11
Wednesdays -- 7 p.m.
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p.m., Choir – 5 p.m.
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Wednesdays – Choir – 7
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670 N. 4th Street (next to the Highlands Civic Center)
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Wednesday: Prayer Service, 6:30 p.
HIGHLANDS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Pastor Paul Christy 526-3376
Sun: School 9:45a.; Worship 9:09 & 10:50.; Youth 5:30 p.
Wed: Supper; 6; 7:15 – children, youth, & adults studies; 6:15 –
Adult choir (nursery provided for Wed. p.m. activities)
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Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg. – 7 p.m.
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p.m.
Wed: Adult Bible Study & Youth – 7 p.m.
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Wednesdays: Prayer & Bible Study – 7
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WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers
Sunday School – 10 am, Worship Service – 11 am

...INVESTIGATION continued from page 1

of elections. The search warrant application states that Hall informed Ammons that she was advised that a trustworthy source reported that individuals who were not conducting work for the board of elections, were being paid by the board of elections.

The search warrant application identifies that Sonya Stevens, Misty Henry or Misty Bryson, Kathy Holland, and Cassidy Ledford had all received checks from the board of elections that were being questioned. After reviewing the county's fi-

nancial records, Ammons found that the signatures of approval on the check requests were different and lacked good documentation as to why the individuals had received money from board of elections. Through various records and line items, Hall found that more than \$50,000 had been paid out to the individuals between the dates of June 2013 through January 2014.

All of the checks that were paid out were endorsed by Bishop. There was no documentation to back up the initial requests for the checks and signatures from Board

of Elections Chainman Luke Bateman and board member Sara Waldrop on the requests varied. When interviewed regarding their signatures on the checks, both Bateman and Waldrop stated that they had never seen or authorized the checks.

A total of nine check requests totaling \$14,296.81 had been made out to Cassidy Ledford, at the request of Bishop. Two of the check requests were shown to be signed and approved by Waldrop, three were shown to be signed and approved by Bateman, while four were not signed

or approved by any board members. Although the endorsement signatures on the checks to Ledford were "Cassidy Ledford" and co-endorsed by Kimberly Bishop, the signature on the first check to Ledford was signed "Cassady Ledford," while the other eight checks were signed "Cassidy Ledford."

Law enforcement officer interviewed Ledford and learned

that she had in fact worked at the board of elections for Bishop. According to Ledford, she worked after hours and on the weekends for a total of 30 to 40 hours since July. When asked about the more than \$14,000 that records showed paid out to Ledford, Ledford informed officers that she had never received a check, but had received about

• See INVESTIGATION page 14

...TAX RATE continued from page 8

projects that warrant that and I don't think there will be a lot of difference than last year. Citizens expect a certain level of services and our priority has been to provide those services at a low tax rate. That can be a difficult thing to do but again we are also heading into revaluation," he said. "I think it is important that we keep the tax rate as low as possible."

County Manager Roland asked what goal he should impart to his department heads concerning the 2014-'15 budget.

"When you ask for a goal, keeping the tax rate as low as possible would be a goal but we have to provide services efficiently," said Corbin. "We want to provide law enforcement, we want to provide technology, education ... those are priorities. But we also want to do it in an efficient manner. I don't think there is a move on the board to raise taxes. We need to live within our means. Hopefully we will see some increase in sales tax money like we did this past year, but there is a lot that can be done within our current budget."

According to Finance Director Lori Hall, proceeds from July through October 2013 show sales tax revenues and retail sales are up slightly from the previous year. State disbursements are always three months behind so proceeds and data from November and December aren't available yet, but according to Vice Chair Ronnie Beale, all indications are that those months were up drastically from 2012.

Indications are 2013 was better than 2012. Ad valorem and motor vehicle taxes are up from

last year at this time - 81% to 84%.

- Kim Lewicki

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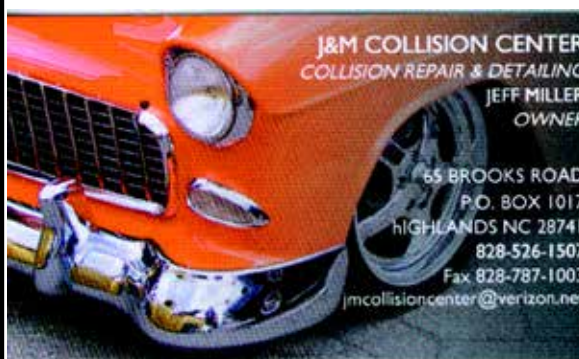


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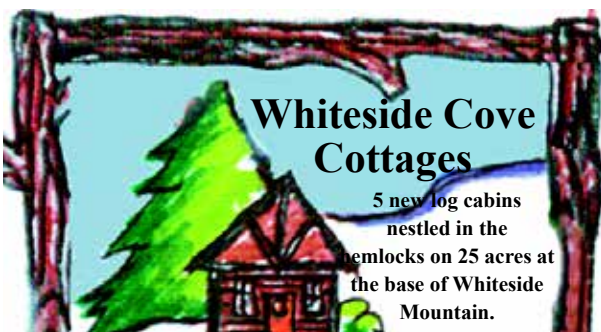
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At a drop-in, Friday, Jan. 24 at the Highlands Fire & Rescue Department, members of the community, family and friends, came to bid Bob Houston good-bye. He is retiring from the department after 50 years of service.

Pictured with Bob are his great-granddaughters Addisyn, 9, and Charlotte, 5, Westendorff. Photo by Kim Lewicki

• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands PD log entries from Dec. 18. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor, or public officials have been used.

Dec. 18

• At noon, officers received a call about damage to real and personal property at a residence on Ravenel Ridge Road.

Dec. 24

• At 9 a.m., officers were called to The Bascom about

viruses on a Bascom laptop.

Jan. 4

• At 2:12 a.m., Matthew Allen Dix, 32, of Dahlonga, GA, was arrested for DWI and exceeding a safe speed when pulled over on NC 106. He was taken to the MC Detention Center and held a unsecured \$1,000 bond. His trial date is Feb. 19.

Jan. 7

• At 1:30 p.m., Christopher Scott Flowers, 28, of Highlands, was arrested for driving left of center and leaving the scene of a crime. He was taken to the MC Detention Center and held on a secured \$1,000 bond. His trial date was Jan. 22.

Jan. 8

• At 8 p.m., officers were notified of cyberstalking at Highlands School victimizing several teenagers aged 14 and 15.

Jan. 11

• At 4:24 p.m., officers were called about vandalism on town property on Oak Street.

Jan. 18

• At 2:15 a.m., officers were called to The Lost Hiker involving trespassing by a person who had been asked to leave the premises.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue Dept. log entries from Jan. 25

Jan 25

• At 1:44 a.m., the dept. provided mutual aid the Cashiers FD and helped extinguish a structure fire on BigView Lane.

Jan. 26

• At 2:39 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Hi-Ami Lane. It was false.

• At 3:36 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Club House Trail. EMS transported to the hospital.

• At 6:29 p.m. the dept. received a call about a brush fire. It was in Georgia so it was turned over to the USFS.

Jan. 28

• At 8:15 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Sagee Woods Drive. The damper was closed in the fireplace.

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...INVESTIGATION continued from page 11

\$2,000 in cash since July.

The search warrant application cites 10 check requests totaling \$12,578, were made out for Sonya Stevens. Nine of the 10 checks were made by Bishop and one of the requests had no signature in the requested by line. Two check requests were signed and approved by Waldroop, three were signed by Bateman and the other five requests were not signed by any board members. Ammons reviewed the checks

made out to Stevens and found that the endorsement signatures on the checks included signatures from Stevens, Misty Bryson, Misty Henry and Kimberly Bishop.

Sonya Franks "Stevens" was interviewed by Special Agent S.R. Ashe at which point it was found that despite the way the name was spelled on the check, the correct spelling of her name is "Stephens." According to Stephens, she had never worked at the Macon County Board of Elections

and that has supervision by the Board of Elections rather than the County Commission," said County Manager Roland.

"For budgetary purposes however, this department does come under the Macon County Budget which is audited by Martin Starnes & Associates."

At this point, officers have not yet interviewed Misty Bryson or Misty Henry, which is believed to be the same person, or Kathy Holland.

Nine check requests totaling \$16,240 were found made out to Misty Bryson or Misty Henry. One check request was signed and approved by Waldroop, four were signed and approved by Bateman, and five requests were not signed or approved by any board members.

All checks were deposited into accounts with the State Employees' Credit Union with several checks being deposited into the same account.

The county's auditors Martin Starnes & Associates also audit the Board of Elections but were not aware of the activity.

"Within our budgetary structure the Board of Elections is a "Shared Authority" department meaning it is a county depart-

ment that has supervision by the Board of Elections rather than the County Commission," said County Manager Roland.

According to Finance Director Hall, the last audit covered July 1, 2012 - June 30, 2013. One of the checks in question was written in June 2013. The remainder are in the current fiscal year.

"The auditors haven't performed an audit yet for the current fiscal year. They usually come in March or April for interim fieldwork and come back in September for final fieldwork. Of course, it's impossible for them to look at every transaction that the county processes. They choose selections from the various types of transactions."

Both the SBI and MCSO are continuing to investigate the office. The office was re-opened for operations last week.

• CLASSIFIEDS •

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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF HIGHLANDS is currently seeking a part-time, responsible person to keep the nursery on Wednesday nights. \$ 10.00 per hour. Please stop by the church office for an application. 828-526-4153. (1/30)

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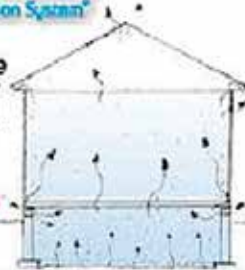
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