

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., March 6, 2014

A tax increase or another electric rate increase?

At the Thursday, Feb. 27 Town Board worksession, the prickly electric rate issue as it pertains to the upcoming 2014-'15 budget was discussed at length with commissioners now rethinking the issue all together.

During the "information only" all-day session, Town Manager Bob Frye said the town is about 55% into its budget year; revenues and expenditures are in line; property tax revenue is ahead compared to this time last year

and he anticipates finishing the year within budget restraints.

Though his projections for next year are "very preliminary," he said he expects water, sewer and garbage rates to stay the same. But once again, to offset Duke's

wholesale electric rate increase and to maintain the \$200,000 to \$400,000 return on investment in the Electric Enterprise Fund, electric rates would have to increase 3 1/2% to 5% July 1, 2014.

•See INCREASE page 2

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Candidates line up for 2014 elections

In preparation for the November 4, 2014 election, there will be a Primary Election on May 6.

Republicans – incumbent Jim Tate and John Shearl will vie for MC Board of Commissioners District 1; Republicans – incumbent Ron Haven and Gary Shields will vie for MC Board of Commissioners District 2; Democrats – incumbent Todd Raby, Nicki Tallent and Kenneth Blaine will vie for Register of Deeds; and Republicans – incumbent Sheriff Robby Holland and Bryan Carpenter will face off for Sheriff.

The official lineup follows:

NC State Senate

District 50

Jim Davis (REP)

Board of Commissioners

District 1

Jim Tate (REP)

John Shearl (REP)

Michael David "Bud" Rogers (DEM)

•See CANDIDATES page 8

Highlanders visit Cuba for cultural arts tour



Highlanders citizens travel to Cuba with The Bascom's sponsored People-to-People cultural arts tour. (See story page 5.)

Testing changing for lower and upper classes

By Brittany Burns

During its February meeting, the Macon County Board of Education moved to lessen the test burden placed on students.

Board members unanimously voted to do away with several end-of-grade tests that were once mandated to measure teacher accountability. While the state tests were once required by law, school boards are now able to waive tests that are not used to measure student success.

Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin said the flexibility allows the local district to have more control on which final exams to

administer to students. Other than being a small portion of the student's overall final grade, the tests identified to be waived were not used to measure student growth.

On the recently released state report card produced by the North Carolina Department of Education, final exams that were used to compare students across the state varied. Elementary and middle grade students were tracked using reading and math, while high school level students were measured using Math I, English II, and Biology.

Baldwin suggested the board

consider waiving final exams for fourth grade science and social studies, career and technical education courses in the middle grades, and English IV and World History for high school students.

The elementary and middle grade final exams constitute 20 percent of a student's final grade and are currently only used to monitor teacher's performance.

At the high school level, Baldwin said English IV puts double pressure on students because senior level English students also complete a senior project. A final exam and a senior

•See TESTING page 6

Candidate challenge filed against Ron Haven

On Monday, March 3, a candidacy challenge against Incumbent candidate Commissioner Ron Haven District 2 was filed with the Macon County Board of Elections.

Republican Haven will face off against Republican Gary Shields in the May 6 primary.

Charles Nichols filed an affidavit challenging Haven's residential address. Nichols alleges he is registered at one of his hotels, not his actual place of residence.

According to Interim Board of Elections Director Debbie George, Haven changed his residency April 2012 and so it is different than it was four years ago when he was first elected to the MC Board of Commissioners.

She said her board is following the proceedings outlined in the NC General Statutes regarding candidate challenges and a hearing date has been set for Tuesday, March 11 at 10 a.m. in courtroom 4B at the MC Courthouse.

On Sept. 20, 1976, the MC Board of Commissioners adopted the resolution "Modification in the Structure of the Board of Commissioners of Macon County" whereby it was ruled

•See HAVEN page 8

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...INCREASE continued from page 1

"I know there is a lot of dissatisfaction and unrest in the community about the recent 22 1/2% utility rate increase. But every year the town gets a rate increase from Duke. Duke raised our wholesale rates another 5% effective Jan. 1, 2014 which we had already built into our 2013-14 budget. But we are looking at 8.5-10% wholesale rate increase from Duke come January 2015 which would translate to the 3 1/2%-5% rate adjustment beginning July 1 of this year," he said.

He said the Electric Enterprise Fund continues to operate in the black but warns the town it is losing and will continue to lose ground if it doesn't levy periodic electric rate adjustments.

"Without positive cash flow going into it and if we don't have a rate adjustment this year and again next year at this time, we would be looking at something like an 18% increase cumulative over two years and would be back to where we were before having to levy large rate increases to our consumers," he said.

Frye and Public Service Administrator Lamar Nix said compared to rates levied by providers around Highlands, Highlands is still in the lower 25% across this part of the state.

Frye said he realizes all people see when they open their bills are higher rates, but the Electric Enterprise Fund is critical to Highlands' overall operations.

"We finance vehicles for other departments and other capital needs. If the

money isn't coming out of the electrical fund, it has to come out of the general fund and if we are not raising electric rates, then we are talking about raising property tax rates," he said.

He said increasing the tax rate is the way many municipalities raise the money they need. In Highlands' case, it would mean shifting the burden of the cash reserves and the fund balance from the electrical fund to general fund because the town still needs the money to provide services and fund capital needs.

The question is, upon whose back is the fund propped up? The answer is the full-time residents who pay heavily during the winter.

Selling the system isn't an option according to Frye because Duke would never buy it at fair market value which it would have to do by State Statute. In any case, he said the idea that rates would be lower is a pipe dream.

"If we sell our system, it would have to be sold at fair market value which is \$50 million. Duke isn't going to give us anywhere near that and we can't sell for a loss," he said.

Frye said the board has to have a serious discussion about its electric rates.

"This highlights part of the discussion you had at the Town Board meeting Thursday night and the need for us to stay on top of delinquent accounts. The more we have to write off, the greater the revenue gaps. How are we going to replace that revenue?"

With a fund balance appropriation or rate increase?"

Frye said the rates are structured so the town gets a return on its investment which enables it to be in the black while funding capital needs.

"The rate increase over the last couple of years was to return \$400,000 to the electric fund and build it back up to \$1 million. Anything over \$1 million could then be transferred out of the electric fund to other departments for other things. However, this year we are only projecting a \$200,000 return on investment because we have absorbed Duke's rate increases to our wholesale rate without increasing our consumers' rates," he said.

Commissioner Brian Stiehler was the first to broach the subject of a property tax rate increase; an idea that gained momentum before the discussion was over.

"What if the plan was to just break even on the electric fund? We could structure rates to follow the same rate increase that Duke levies on us to break even in the electric fund and then to generate the extra money to fund capital projects we could have a tax increase," he said. "It seems like the electric rates are volatile, and this way would be less volatile for our consumers."

He said in his mind, water, sewer and garbage rates are defensible – this is what it costs us to pick up your trash. But defending the electric rates is harder.

"We should consider making it up somewhere else," he said.

At first, Commissioner Donnie Calloway was hesitant to talk taxes with the county's reval coming up, but Frye said from the town's standpoint the reval isn't an issue.

"Overall property values have dropped. Currently, our tax rate is 13 1/2 cents. One cent is equal to \$84,000. To generate the same amount of revenue prior to the reval, the tax rate would go up, but people wouldn't actually be paying any more than what they are paying now," he said.

But he said when it comes to taxes, people will still perceive it as a tax increase even if they aren't paying any more.

Commissioners voiced concern over putting the weight of increasing the electric fund return on the backs of the citizen who live here year-round.

"They are paying the bulk of electricity in the winter. A tax increase would spread it across the board," said Stiehler. "I can defend tax rates, our rates are low anyway. We need to bring in a certain amount of money; the question is do you raise taxes or try to profit off the electric fund?"

Commissioner Amy Patterson said another thing to remember is that ad valorem taxes can be taken off income taxes.

"I hear, 'don't raise my electric rates, raise my tax rate because I can take them

off my taxes.' There are a lot of variables to consider – to find the balance between what we need as a municipality and what is good for our customers, she said."

Commissioner Calloway said he agreed with Stiehler. "We need to put this on a more level playing field so everyone pays across the board."

There are 1,000 year-round electric consumers and 25,000 who come back beginning in May and most of them have turned their electricity way down while they are gone.

"Everyone knows we are buying at wholesale and hiking it up for the reserve," said Commissioner John Dotson. "Electric is a moving target. We would be better served to look at increasing the mileage rate so it's fair across the board. After all, our electric rate is based on what we need in the electric fund to keep it healthy."

Frye said he and staff are very sensitive to the word profit.

"This is part of what has everyone upset. It's not a profit. People perceive that we are making money off them way above what it is costing us to provide the service. It's a return on an investment," he said. "Is it over and above what we are actually spending to buy electricity? Yes. But that money goes to other things. People need to get out of that mindset. We are not in the business to make money, we are in the business of providing services and this is the way we figured out to do it and keep stress off the general fund and the other utility funds."

In the end, commissioners asked Frye to return with a cost comparison to see what it would take to shift some of the burden from the electric fund to the general fund.

However, Commissioner Patterson reminded the board that with the devaluation of property values the tax rate will have to increase to generate the same money it did prior to the reval which means to generate money for the general fund versus the electric fund, the rate would have to increase even further.

Commissioners agreed they wouldn't shift the entire "return on investment" from the electric fund to the general fund, but perhaps enough to lessen the blow to fulltime residents.

– Kim Lewicki

Talk about rabies is March 25

The Macon County Board of Health will host a public forum regarding the continuation of Rabies Vaccination Clinics at the Macon County Human Services Building located at 1830 Lakeside Drive from 5:30-6:30 pm on Tuesday, March 25th.

Highlands Newspaper

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Concerned citizens turn the tide at Town Board meeting

Many times over the past several years citizens have claimed that some on the Town Board don't listen to its citizens, but at the February Town Board meeting that claim was put to rest.

The issue was the rezoning of town properties from R1 and R2 to Government Institutional (GI) to reflect the uses of the properties — seemingly a non-controversial issue.

“The Town of Highlands owns multiple properties within the city limits that are used for utilities such as water & wastewater treatment, water distribution, the cemetery, communications and recreation,” said Planning Director Josh Ward. “Over the years, several of the properties have not been rezoned to reflect the uses of the properties. This is just about bringing consistency to the zoning map so the properties reflect their uses.”

But the rezoning of two properties, 7530874431 (Sequoyah Ridge Road — Vacant — 1.00 acre — Current Zoning R-2) and 7530872068 (Sequoyah Ridge Road — Vacant — 1.15 acre — Current Zoning R-2) caught the attention of adjacent land-owners Ray Vito and Joan Martin who spoke during the public hearing portion of the meeting and said rezoning the vacant, residential lots along Big Creek would diminish their property values.

“I own property adjacent to one of these lots which were zoned R2 back in the ‘40s. I don’t know how the town got them but I don’t see the necessity to rezone them. Doing so will affect my property values,” said Vito. He also said the rezoning of these lots just doesn’t seem necessary right now.

“Consistency on the zoning map is all well and good, but does it need to be done now? Why don’t you wait until you have a reason? If I wanted to rezone my property, I would have to come to you with a very specific, detailed plan. Wait until you have a plan,” he said.

One of the lots is adjacent to the access road to the weir

and Town Manager Bob Frye said that the need to have consistency on the zoning map was the reason for the proposed rezoning. However Martin disagreed.

“The lot adjacent to ours isn’t really for accessing the weir; it’s beyond the lot on the road which is used to access the weir,”

said Martin. “Our property abuts the weir, not the lot that you want to rezone.

But Frye said the property is already used institutionally, and rezoning it to reflect its use won’t affect adjoining property owners.

As to how the town got the residential property in the first

place, Commissioner Amy Patterson said it was likely acquired in an exchange; all the town’s properties are owned free and clear without deed restrictions. But she asked the board if the town could perhaps sell the lots and use the money in a more public way. Frye said disposal of town property

was a normal and legal transaction as long as it is sold at fair market value.

Also, if the town rezoned the lots G1 and then sold them, the new owners would have to come back to the board to get them rezoned residential.

• See TIDE page 4

We will confront these questions and many more in a lecture and open dialoge series. Community invited to attend.

HARD QUESTIONS

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...TIDE continued from page 3

Public Service Administrator Lamar Nix said the only thing the town might use the lots for would be to hold sediment dredged from Big Creek. "Other than that there are no plans for the lots," he said.

Commissioner Brian Stiehler said when the subject first came up, he didn't see the different dynamics and concerns of citizens.

"Now I see this in a different light," he said. "The town still owns this property abutting the lake; there is a need for consistency, but I think these two lots in the Webbmont area need to remain R2. If something comes up; if we have to enlarge the plant, we can deal with that then. For now let's leave them as R2. We still own it. We have use of the property, but this is a real issue for the homeowners. So I say leave it as R2."

Commissioners Calloway and John Dotson agreed.

"I don't have a problem with selling them and I doubt the town would use them as a dumping grown for silt removal simply due to lay of the land; it would end up back in the lake," said Dotson.

In the end the board voted unanimously to rezone all the lots advertised to GI with the exception of the two vacant lots on Sequoyah Ridge.

— Kim Lewicki

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The Bascom sponsors cultural art trip to Cuba

The Bascom Visual Arts Center sponsored a recent People-to-People cultural arts tour to Cuba. The trip, approved by the U.S. Treasury Department and the Cuban government, was lead by Sallie Taylor, the Bascom's Director of Exhibitions. Twenty-six Highlanders made the week-long tour of Cuban art institutions and artists' studios, during the week of February 3rd.

Participants stayed for five days in Havana and two days in Cienfuegos, including a nearby day trip to the historic Cuban city of Trinidad. Both Cienfuegos and Trinidad are UN World Heritage Centers. The daily itinerary for the group was full with visits to historic architectural sites, major museums, and artists' studios. In addition, the group was treated to chamber music and orchestra concerts and dance performances.

As part of the People-to-People program, participants attended lectures and presentations by scholars from the University of Havana on Cuban culture, history, economics and politics. The group

also visited the American Interests Section in Havana for a briefing by US State Department officials.

Tours of architectural sites, museums and artists' studios were conducted by Cuban scholars and experts. Distant Horizons Tours organized the trip and are specialists in cultural trips to Cuba, leading tours for major universities such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford.

Join The Bascom for countless opportunities to explore and participate in art. Members receive discounts at events, lectures and for adult classes. Contact Membership Coordinator Pat Turnbull at 828-787-2898 or email her at pturnbull@thebascom.org for more information about becoming a member. The Bascom is open year-round, Monday through Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm, and Sunday, noon to 5 pm. Enjoy workshops, exhibitions, special events, quality programs and unique shopping throughout the year. For more information, to register for workshop offerings or for more details on all Bascom activities, visit www.TheBascom.org or call 828-526-4949.



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Adult Classes at The Bascom

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PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that at the regular Board of Commissioners' meeting of February 20, 2014, the Town Board voted to list all Town of Highlands Delinquent Accounts in the newspaper. The following accounts are over 90 days past due.

Delinquent Accounts List

Utility Accounts

Larry Chadwell:	\$774.57	Due 08/15/2011	William Horne:	\$4,571.65	Due 01/15/2013
Larry Chadwell:	\$224.42	Due 08/15/2011	Robert Moreno:	\$213.50	Due 11/15/2012
Greg Ewald:	\$485.16	Due 04/15/2012	Elisa Espinosa Parra:	\$646.87	Due 07/15/2013
Carla Gates:	\$1,033.30	Due 01/15/2012	Andrew Quintero &		
Gate's Nursery:	\$5,540.92	Due 06/15/2012	Fiorella Moscoso:	\$621.73	Due 01/15/2013
Gate's Nursery:	\$1,159.47	Due 06/15/2012	Danielle Reese:	\$963.35	Due 03/15/2013
Aaron Goldstein:	\$501.18	Due 03/15/2012	Krysti Rogers:	\$330.25	Due 11/15/2013
Robert Lang:	\$39.88	Due 12/15/2011	Nikki Smolarsky:	\$775.60	Due 07/15/2013
Jess Munger:	\$33.83	Due 04/15/2012	Bob Stephenson:	\$513.26	Due 11/15/2012
Jeremy Skipper:	\$766.50	Due 06/15/2012	Suzi's on Spring:	\$40.93	Due 12/15/12
Creighton Sossomon:	\$11,843.04	Due 07/15/2012	Claudia Thompson:	\$1,663.46	Due 12/15/12
Zeke Sossomon:	\$2,254.29	Due 03/15/2012	To the Nine's:	\$1,929.93	Due 01/15/13
Zeke Sossomon:	\$1,102.69	Due 07/15/2012	Valentine's Photo St.:	\$115.26	Due 02/15/13
Claudia Thompson:	\$233.61	Due 10/15/2011	James F. Webb:	\$90.68	Due 02/15/13
Sampson Wilson:	\$717.58	Due 08/15/2011			
Elena Alcantar:	\$39.37	Due 01/15/2013			
Jeff Andresen:	\$616.23	Due 02/15/2013			
Carlton Barker:	\$1,117.20	Due 10/15/2012			
Robert Carlton:	\$770.02	Due 02/15/2013			
Kristina Crosby:	\$102.32	Due 12/15/2012			
Eric Fielding:	\$140.93	Due 03/15/2013			
Sarah Freeman:	\$52.08	Due 10/15/2012			
Randall Hawks:	\$560.24	Due 11/15/2012			

Business License Accounts

Jose' Munoz Orozco:	\$10	Due 5/30/2013
Matthews Electrical:	\$50	Due 5/30/2013
Movie Stop:	\$25	Due 5/30/2013
Potts Construction:	\$10	Due 5/30/2013
Suzette's Boutique:	\$35	Due 5/30/2013
The Brick Oven:	\$85	Due 5/30/2013

Sewer Connection Agreement Accounts

Sarah Anderson:	\$2,500	Harris Lake Sewer Project	Due 12/31/2011
Roger Baty:	\$2,500	Harris Lake Sewer Project	Due 12/31/2011
Christopher Collany:	\$2,400	Mirror Lake Sewer Project	Due 03/31/2013
Melba Egan:	\$2,500	Mirror Lake Sewer Project	Due 03/31/2013
Deborah Hooper:	\$2,500	Mirror Lake Sewer Project	Due 03/31/2013
Peggy Hopes:	\$2,500	Mirror Lake Sewer Project	Due 03/31/2013
Aliaksandr Kikoin:	\$2,500	Harris Lake Sewer Project	Due 12/31/2011
Darren McGillivray:	\$2,500	Harris Lake Sewer Project	Due 12/31/2011
Michael "Bud" Rogers:	\$2,500	Mirror Lake Sewer Project	Due 03/31/2013
Williams &			
Williams Inc:	\$2,500	Harris Lake Sewer Project	Due 12/31/2011

Payments may be made to: Town of Highlands, PO Box 460, Highlands, NC 28741 to bring accounts to a current status to avoid further collection processes.

Published this 6th day of March, 2014.
Town of Highlands

...TESTING continued from page 1

project weighs heavily on students, he said.

High School World History was identified because Baldwin said teachers across the state have put the course's final exam on the chopping block due to concerns about the quality and substance of the material.

While other final exams could have also been waived, Baldwin urged the board to consider the state's push to move teacher pay to a merit-based system, which would require some forms of tests.

"The General Assembly is indicating rather heavily that merit pay will be based on N.C. final exams, as well as the end-of-course and end-of-grade tests so we are hesitant to waive all of them."

Board member Stephanie McCall made the motion to waive the test, noting that if it were up

to her, she would do away with them all.

Read to Achieve

This year marks the first full year for the implantation of the state's new Read-to-Achieve law. The new legislation requires local districts retain students who are not able to pass end-of-grade reading tests at the end of third grade.

After an outcry from educators in North Carolina, the state has moved to allow local districts to use additional assessment tools when deciding if a child should repeat the third grade. Director of Elementary Education Carol Waldroop explained that it was predicted that 50 percent of third graders in the state would not be able to test

• See TESTING page 13

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Still time to sign up for AHC insurance

Do you need Affordable Health Care Insurance? It's not too late to sign up through the Open Enrollment period which ends March 31. An Affordable Health Care Workshop will be held on Saturday, March 8, 10 to 11 a.m. and Tuesday, March 11, 2014, 6:30-7:30 p.m. at the Macon County Public Library led by Cynthia Solesbee, Certified Health Care Navigator for Macon County. The presentation will include a basic overview of the Affordable Health Care Act and a discussion of the programs available to consumers. Other topics will include Cost Savings and Tax Credits, Exemptions, Dates and Deadlines. Also you will also be able to make individual appointments with Cynthia Solesbee to help with the sign-up process and answer any questions you may have. Registration is not required. For more information, call 828-400-4177.



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NC LMBT #1429
(828) 526-4192

...HAVEN continued from page 1

that "Members of the Board of Commissioners shall be nominated for each electoral district seat by the qualified voters of the county as a whole, and nominees for each seat shall reside within the district for which they are nominated."

The burden of proof falls to Haven to show by a preponderance of the evidence that he is qualified to be a candidate for the office. Since the challenge is based upon a question of residency, the candidate must show all of the following:

An actual abandonment of the first domicile, coupled with an intent not to return to the first domicile; the acquisition of a new domicile by actual residence at another place; the intent of making the newer domicile a permanent domicile.

Nichols is also challenging Haven's qualification as a voter in the precinct of South Franklin (Macon #2).

After the hearing, the Board must render a written decision within 20 business days after the challenge is filed and serve that written decision to both Haven and Nichols.

Nichols alleges that based upon reasonable suspicion and belief, Haven doesn't meet the statutory qualifications for the office of MC Commissioner District 2, for residency.

He claims voter information records show Haven claimed residency as a qualified voter of District 2 at 433 E. Palmer Street, Franklin, but according to the MC Register of Deeds, this address is owned by Cartoogechaye Investments, LLC, with the physical address being 423 E. Palmer St. Franklin.

He alleges the MC Tax Dept. shows the address of 423 E. Palmer St., Franklin to be registered under the name of Car-

toogechaye Investments, LLC and the address 433 E. Palmer St., Franklin, is the physical address of the Haven's Motel office.

According to the NC Dept. of the Secretary of State's office, Cartoogechaye Investments, LLC is a legally recognized Limited Liability Company, effective July 10, 2008. This date is prior to Haven's first election to the County Commission representing District 2.

Furthermore, Haven is a registered agent for Cartoogechaye Investments, LLC, whose office address is 98-30 Mill Creek Road, Franklin. Haven is the manager of Cartoogechaye Investments, LLC. Maricella Haven is listed as a member. The business address for the two company officials is listed as 750 Mill Creek Road, Franklin.

In addition, within the telephone directory, Haven is listed to live at 750 Mill Creek Road, Franklin.

Nichols requested that the MC Board of Elections undertake a full and complete evidentiary hearing, including the issuance of subpoenas for documentary evidence and witness testimony and at the conclusion of which enter an Order and determination that Haven is not a qualified candidate for MC Board of Commission, District 2, in that he doesn't meet the requirements of office.

He requested a copy of his driver's licenses, any forwarding address forms filed with the US Postal Service from any prior domicile of Ron or Maricella Haven, copies of both Federal and State income tax returns from 2005 to current; copies of every address, both physical and PO boxes to where Ron and Maricella Haven receive mail; leases and deeds to all residential and vacant properties leased or owned by the Havens from 2005 to current; all insurance policies related to the Havens since 2005 including renters, homeowners, auto, life, health, dental, liability, etc.; utilities bills, bank accounts, phone bills, oil and gas bills, etc.

— Kim Lewicki

...CANDIDATES from page 1

Board of Commissioners District 2

(In Nov., voters can vote for 2)

Gary Shields (REP)
Ron Haven (REP)
Ronnie Beale (DEM)
John Martin (LIB)

Clerk of Superior Court

Vic Perry (DEM)
Register of Deeds

Jamie Cochran (REP)
Nicki Tallent (DEM)
Todd Raby (DEM)
Kenneth Blaine (DEM)

Sheriff

Robert L. (Robby) Holland (REP)
Bryan Carpenter (REP)

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What does the Board of Realtors do for you?

By Lynn Kimball
Meadows Mountain Realty

The Highlands-Cashiers Board of REALTORS® is The Voice for Real Estate in the Highlands-Cashiers area, with almost 300 REALTOR® members who are brokers, property managers, and appraisers.

Locally, here on the plateau, the Highlands-Cashiers Board of REALTORS® invests in our community by awarding scholarships to our high school seniors, donating to Habitat for Humanity in Macon, Jackson, and Transylvania, participating in Relay for Life, and donating to the Highlands-Cashiers Hospital Pour Le Pink Walk/Run. They will also be sponsoring an event in May 2014 for the Make A Wish Foundation providing special trips for child cancer patients.

There are 62 local Boards under the North Carolina Association of REALTORS®, with more than 31,000 members across the state. NCAR has continued lobbying the NC State Legislature in avoiding expensive Transfer Taxes which impacts every seller of real estate in NC. Also, they have lobbies against a high Service Tax which would affect all services, including real estate brokers, housekeepers, plumbers, etc. Thus far, the NCAR has been effective in these lobbies. The state board also draws from their funds to help bi-partisan local and regional politicians with housing interests that support Highlands/Cashiers residents.

Overall, the National Association of REALTORS®, which is America's largest trade association, represents 1 million members across

54 state/US territories associations and 1400 local associations, all working for America's property owners for the purpose of preserving the right to own real property. Real estate powers almost one-fifth of the U.S. economy, employs more than 17 million Americans, and contributes a quarter of all federal and state tax revenue and as much as 70 percent of local taxes.

Nationally, REALTORS® are opposing the government's tax plan to limit Mortgage Interest Deduction and has been fighting Flood Insurance Rate Increases, along with the NC state association.

As members of the Highlands-Cashiers Board of REALTORS®, we strive to preserve and protect our neighbor's property rights and the right to home ownership. Our members adhere to a strict code of ethics and are required to stay abreast of the latest issues affecting homeowners and those acquiring home ownership.

• Lynn Kimball, currently serving as Director on the Highlands Cashiers Board of Realtors, has 40 years of real estate experience, with 29 years serving the Highlands area. Whether you are interested in searching properties or comprehensive information about our area, you are invited to visit her user friendly website at www.signatureproperties-nc.com. Meadows Mountain Realty has two locations, at 41 Church Street in the Old Edwards Inn complex or visit Lynn at 2334 Cashiers Road across from Highlands Falls Country Club. Lynn Kimball can be reached at 828-421-8193 or by email at Lynn@MeadowsMtnRealty.com.



David and Lori Bee of Prestige Realty Group join Meadows Mountain Realty

David began his trek to Highlands over 23 years ago from Mississippi when he chose to settle in Highlands and buy a restaurant. In 1996 he married Lori Burrell, a Highlands native, and together they owned and operated the Pizza Place on Main Street before selling and turning their attention to selling real estate.

Lori grew up in Highlands and really never left. She graduated from Highlands School, and then worked in retail and the restaurant business before marrying David.

David became a licensed real estate broker in 2005, and in 2008 he and Lori began Prestige Realty Group. Lori managed the office and her rental business while David focused primarily on the area foreclosure market becoming one of the area's leading foreclosure specialists. Now that the traditional market is returning, he believes partnering with Meadows Mountain Realty is coming at the ideal time. "Having

traveled all over the Carolina mountains selling everything from ten thousand to 1.6 million dollar foreclosures has given me greater insight into the housing industry helping buyers to discern their overall needs and working with sellers to help maximize their assets".

David is currently serving as President of the Highlands-Cashiers Board of Realtors.

They enjoy spending time with their Labrador retrievers, singing and leading worship at church, plus time with their nieces and nephew. Lori shares, "These mountains are home to me and I feel incredibly privileged to live here. We enjoy welcoming people to this area and sharing all that it has to offer."

Featuring: William Sadler Band



CommonGround A Unique Worship Experience

March 8, 2014

7:00 pm

First Baptist Church Highlands
220 Main Street



• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

The 'Psalms Project'

By Pastor Steve Kerhoulas
Christ Church of the Valley

The question is why ask people to take time out of their busy life and do this project? The simple answer is: When a Christian invests time in the Bible we hear God's voice. In other words doing a project like this is going to help define and strengthen our relationship with God.

How the PSALM PROJECT works:

Each day you are asked to spend time reading the Psalms. There are 150 of them.

Why read Psalms? Martin Luther, the great theologian and pastor, said the Psalms "might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible." Like what?

You will find topics such as the creation, judgment, and salvation. In it is the story of Israel, the Law, the Presence of God, the coming of the Messiah, warnings against ungodliness, and the tragic outcome of disobedience. The Psalms is a book that can be used in worship, spiritual discipline, and in developing theology.

A few tips on reading the Psalms. Read them prayerfully slow.

Ask yourself these questions:

*What is God saying to me personally from the text? What am I hearing? (You might want to use your journal and write things down.)

*Are their changes I need to make in light of what God is saying me?

*Is there something in the text that someone else needs to hear? Am I willing to share it?

Something to consider:

*Memorize impactful verses.

*Connect with someone else who is doing the Psalms Project and talk about your experiences. Bring your journal along.

*If stumped or need help ask for help.

*Invite a friend to join the Project.

The Psalms are the most quoted book in the New Testament. They flow out of the personal experiences of those who wrote them. The Psalms is a banquet table filled with insights and benefits for those who read them. ENJOY!

Concert to benefit Haiti mission



On Sunday, March 23, Songs of Joy and Sorrow: An Afternoon of Music for Cello and Piano, Featuring the Manhattan-based A.W.Duo (Alyona Aksyonova, piano/James Waldo, cello). Works by Beethoven, Myaskovsky, Debussy, Scriabin and Ayumi Okada. Sunday, March 23 at 4:30 pm at the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Highlands. Free with donations to benefit Highlands Friends of Haiti.

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP • John 3:16

BLUE VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH
Rev. Oliver Rice, Pastor (706) 782-3965
Sundays: School: 10 a.m., Worship: 11
Sunday night services every 2nd & 4th Sunday at 7
Wednesdays: Mid-week prayer meeting: 7 p.m.
BUCK CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH
828-269-3546

Rev. Jamie Passmore, Pastor
Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11
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Services: Sundays 10am - Wed. - 7pm
Catered dinner - Wed. 6pm
CHAPEL OF SKY VALLEY
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
Pastor Jim Kinard
Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11
Wednesdays -- 7 p.m.
COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH
www.cbchighlands.com • 526-4685
3645 Cashiers Rd, Highlands, NC
Senior Pastor Gary Hewins
Sun.: 9:30am: Sunday School

10:30am: Middle & High School; 10:45am: Children's Program.,
10:45am: Worship Service
Wed.: 5pm Dinner (\$7 adult, \$2 child), 6pm CBC University

EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION
Rev. Bruce Walker • 526-2968
Sundays: Education and choir rehearsal, 9 am, Holy Eucharist Rite II, (sanctuary), 10:30
Wednesday: 10 a.m., Morning Prayer
Thursdays: Holy Eucharist, (chapel), 10 am
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HIGHLANDS
www.fbchighlands.org
Dr. Mark Ford, Pastor
220 Main Street, Highlands NC 28741
828-526-4153

Sun.: Worship 10:45 am; Sun.: Bible Study 9:30 am
Wed.: Men's Bible Study 8:30 am; Prayer Meeting 6:15 pm; Choir 5 pm

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Dr. Lee Bowman, Pastor • 526-3175
Sun.: Worship: 11 a.m.; School: 9:30
Mondays: 8 a.m.: Men's Prayer Group & Breakfast

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

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)

Thurs: 12:30: Women's Bible Study (nursery)
HOLY FAMILY LUTHERAN CHURCH: ELCA
Chaplain Margaret Howell
2152 Dillard Road: 526-9741
Sundays: Sunday School and Adult discussion group 9:30 a.m.; Worship/Communion: 10:30

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8 miles south of Highlands on N.C. 28 S in Satolah
Pastor Troy Nicholson, (828) 526-8425
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Choir: 6 p.m.

Wed: Bible Study and Youth Mtg.: 7 p.m.
MOUNTAIN SYNAGOGUE
St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church, Franklin
828-369-9270 or 828-293-5197
MOUNTAIN BIBLE CHURCH
743-2583

Independent Bible Church
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Weds: Bible Study 6:30 p.m.; Youth Group 6 p.m.
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SCALY MOUNTAIN BAPTIST CHURCH
Rev. Dwight Loggins

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 Alfred Sizemore • 526-3212
Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 10:45 a.m.; Worship: 6 p.m.

Wed: Adult Bible Study & Youth: 7 p.m.
SHORTOFF BAPTIST CHURCH
Pastor Rev. Andy Cloer

Sundays: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 11
Wednesdays: Prayer & Bible Study: 7
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP
85 Sierra Drive • 828-524-6777
Sunday Worship - 11 a.m.

Child Care - 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Religious Education - 11 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
Youth 8th - 12th grades meet the 2nd Sundays 5 - 7:30 p.m.

WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers
Sunday School: 10 am, Worship Service: 11 am

• HEALTH MATTERS •

NC Report shows progress on key health indicators for children in Macon County

Report shows more children insured, lower teen pregnancy amid continued economic hardship

Since 2007, Macon County children have experienced improvement in key health indicators, including insurance coverage, dental care, teen pregnancy, child deaths and even high school graduation rates. These gains are at odds with what's expected during economic downturns when health outcomes typically worsen.

"Poverty causes increased financial and emotional strains on families that often result in poorer health outcomes for children," said Laila A. Bell, director of research and data at NC Child. "These data show that public policy actions which promote evidence-based programs and support local communities can be powerful tools to safeguard our children's health during tough economic times." NC Child's 2013 Child Health County Data Card for Macon County finds between 2007 and 2012:

- Medicaid enrollment increased by 25.4 percent and Health Choice enrollment increased by 15.2 percent, which is consistent with statewide data showing a 30 percent decline in uninsured children;

- Medicaid-eligible children who received dental care increased by 32.4 percent for children 1-5 and 20.5 percent for children 6-14;

- North Carolina's teen pregnancy rate continued to improve, dropping 43 percent to 19.7 per 1,000 girls ages 15-17. The teen pregnancy rate was 15.7 per 1,000 girls in Macon County;

- Statewide, child fatalities continued to decline, falling 22 percent to 58.6 per 100,000 children under age 18. Macon County had 2 child deaths in 2012;

- The graduation rate improved by 11.2 percent.

"It's no coincidence that Macon County experienced a significant decline in its teen pregnancy rate and increase in its graduation rate over the past several years," said Bell. "Both of these indicators have been targeted by well-funded state efforts. This improvement should give us hope that we can make progress on big problems when we're willing to put resources behind data-driven so-

lutions."

While typically associated with academic achievement, the graduation rate is also a key health indicator. Education is associated with better earning potential and higher income which enables purchase of better housing in safer neighborhoods, healthier food, health insurance coverage and more timely medical care. Studies have linked high school dropout to higher rates of substance use, psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems.

NC Child's findings for Macon County were not all positive, however. Key economic indicators in Macon County have worsened as a result of the recession and subsequent budget cuts. Specifically, the unemployment rate in Macon County increased from 4.1 percent to 10.7 percent from 2007 to 2012, and the median household income declined 16.2 percent to \$36,438. In 2011, the most recent year for which data are available, 30.6 percent of children in Macon County were living in households that struggled to meet their basic nutritional needs.

"Statewide, one in four children are growing up in poverty. Food insecurity is a very serious byproduct of poverty that's making its presence felt in Macon County," stated Bell. "No child should ever go to bed hungry, but unfortunately, that's what's happening to children across the county."

With the elimination of the state Earned Income Tax Credit and significant cuts to unemployment benefits, there is concern that many families could find their economic situation worsening during a slow economic recovery. What's clear is that the impacts of public policy decisions are playing out in communities across the state.

"We know that parents and communities are working hard to grow healthy children, but they cannot do it alone," said Bell. "Advocates, providers, community and business leaders, state and federal governments must collaborate to strengthen investments in prevention programs and promote focused public policies that promote child well-being."

To download a copy of your

county data card, visit: <http://www.ncchild.org/sites/default/files/Macon.pdf>

About the Report Card

For 19 years, the North Carolina Child Health Report Card has monitored the health and safety of children and youth in our state. The report compiles more than 40 indicators of child health and safety into one easy-to-read document that helps policymakers, health professionals, the media, and concerned citizens track children's health outcomes, identify emerging trends, and plan future investments. The report card presents data for the most current year available, usually 2012, and a comparison year, or benchmark, usually 2007.

Highlands' Rising Stars

Looking for an evening of great food and entertainment? Join us on Thursday, March 13 at Highlands School for dinner and a show!

The Highlands PTO is sponsoring a talent showcase – Highlands' Rising Stars. Singing, dancing and instrumental acts will be performed by students and faculty. The audience can vote for the People's Choice Award. The show begins at 6:30p in the gymnasium. Admission is \$2 per person and includes one entry to vote for the People's Choice Award. Additional entries to vote will be available for purchase for \$1 each.

Before the show, drop by the school cafeteria for a delicious dinner from 5-6:30p. Dinner plates are \$7 each and include BBQ prepared by ...on the Verandah, Asian Cole slaw, mac 'n cheese, dessert and a drink.

Come show your Highlander Pride and support Highlands' Rising Stars Talent Show on Thursday, March 13 at Highlands School.

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• POLICE REPORTS •

Highlands PD log entries from Jan. 21. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor, or public officials have been used.

Jan. 31

• At 8:30 a.m., officers responded to a call about power saws and hand tools being stolen from a residence on US 64 west.

Feb. 6

• At 11 a.m., a wallet containing credit cards, drivers license, medical cards, insurance cards and a check book was reported lost somewhere in downtown Highlands.

Feb. 8

• At 11 a.m., a resident at Pine Brook Condominiums on N. 5th Street reported a noise violation.

Feb. 24

• At 9 p.m., Stacy Lee Arrowood, 40, of Highlands and Alto, GA, was arrested on three outstanding warrants from Union, GA, Towns County, GA and Jackson County, NC. He is being held in the Macon County Jail on a secured bond of \$11,500.

• At 1:40 p.m., officers investigated a case about someone forging a name on checks and credit cards of a resident on Hummingbird Lane.

Harlem Ambassadors coming to Highlands

If you are suffering through the doldrums of winter or experiencing a severe case of cabin fever, Mountaintop Rotary has just the answer with an evening of family fun.

After an absence of several years, the Harlem Ambassadors will return to Highlands Saturday, March 15 for a one-night only appearance to dazzle and amaze with their unique brand of basketball skills.

They will play a team of Hometown Heroes, which will feature local public officials, athletes and others at the Highlands School Gym. The show starts at 7 p.m. In addition to plenty of slam dunks, high jinks and the like, there will also be pizza, hot dogs, and drinks available from the concession stand, operated this year by Dr. John Baumrucker and members of his Bolivian Mission Team. Proceeds will go to support the mission.

Advance tickets for the evening of fun are \$10 for adults and \$7 for students and seniors, and are available at Stanberry Insurance in Wright Square, The Highlander Newspaper on Fifth Street, Meadows Mountain Realty's Highlands Falls office on US 64 East, and Wells Fargo Investments on South Street. Tickets at the door will be \$12 for adults and \$9 for students and seniors. Kids under four are free. Advance tickets are also available from any member of the club.

Ladé Majic as the "queen of the show, she played in more

shows than any woman in history and competes against male players on a nightly basis.

While Rotary organizers already have a number of members of the Highlands Hometown Heroes team, there is still room for more.

"The Ambassadors can really get up and down the court, so we are going to need a lot of players for the hometown team," said Bill Zoellner, incoming president of Mountaintop Rotary and chairman of the event. "The main thing is to find players who have a good sense of humor and can take a joke."

Anyone interested in playing can call him at 787-2323 or Gene Borino at Stanberry Insurance at 526-8939.

The night of fun will also feature a raffle for the basketball used in the game (to be awarded at half time), and team souvenirs will be on sale.

...TESTING from page 6

proficient on the end-of-grade test by the end of this year, causing half of the state's third graders to be held back.

In 2012, the state General Assembly passed a law requiring third graders to read on grade level before being promoted to fourth grade in 2014. If they are retained, students must attend free summer reading camps; if parents do not enroll their child in the camp, then the child is automatically held back. By the summer camp's end, third graders would complete another standardized test and those who fail would be kept in third grade but given additional assistance with the possibility of grade promotion mid-year. Those who pass are promoted to fourth grade.

With such a high percentage of students testing below proficient, the state saw the need to allow local districts to look at assessments in addition to the state final exam.

"Now, if a child is retained, being able to use alternative assessments in addition to the end-of-grade tests will be based on him or her truly needing intervention and not because they performed poorly on one single test," said Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin.

While the basics of the law still stand, Waldroop said that Macon County can now use alternative testing measures already in place such as Starts and Dibbles.

"Third graders can complete a portfolio if they don't pass the EOG test in June," explained Waldroop. "A successfully completed portfolio can take the place of Summer Reading Camp and can allow a student to move on to fourth grade. Since the state has agreed that the reading passages on the test are difficult and written on a 4th/5th grade reading level it has approved other alternatives."

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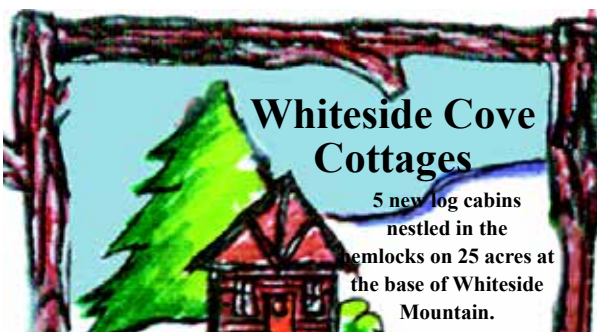
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Coalition kicks off Kelsey-Hutchinson Park fundraising effort

The Founders Park Coalition, which last month won approval from the Town of Highlands to move forward with the first phase of its plans to develop Kelsey-Hutchinson Park, is now kicking off a major fund raising campaign.

The group hopes to raise \$430,000 to make major improvements to the park, which has remained largely undeveloped since it was purchased back in 2006. The goal is to get the total amount needed to

finish all phases of the park as it has been designed to this point. Hopefully, some of that cost will be covered through donated labor and materials from local firms, along with volunteer labor.

"We want to raise the entire amount required to complete the park, not just what is needed for the initial phase, which focuses mainly on building day-use facilities and landscaping," said Nick Bazan, chairman of the coalition. "While we don't have approval yet

for the other phases, we don't want to have to come back to people over and over to ask for money for each additional phase."

Bazan said the crucial thing right now is to raise at least enough money for construction of the first phase so the park can be improved this spring.

The coalition already has commitments from its members for approximately \$30,000 in financial pledges or donated labor, and donations from a few individuals have begun to trickle in.

The coalition is composed of both Rotary Clubs, the Laurel Garden Club, the Mountain Garden Club, the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, the Highlands Plateau Greenway, the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society, the Highlands Historical Society, the Highlands Chamber of Commerce and the Highlands Biological Station.

The group hopes to follow a design developed by local landscape architect Hank

Ross, of Ross Landscape Architecture of Highlands. This includes picnic tables, walkways, benches, lighting, and landscaping, the group hopes to build a new and larger performance pavilion, an interactive fountain, and a monument and plaza dedicated to the town's founders Samuel T. Kelsey and Clinton Carter Hutchinson. The coalition is working closely with the town to make sure nothing conflicts with the ground water treatment system placed underneath much of the park.

There are no plans to ever close Pine Street to vehicular traffic.

To make a donation make a check payable to either Founders Park or Kelsey-Hutchinson Park and mail it to P.O. Box 1703, Highlands, NC 28741. Anyone interested in donating time, equipment, or labor should call Nick Bazan at (828) 371-2653 or e-mail him at nicholas.bazan@gmail.com.

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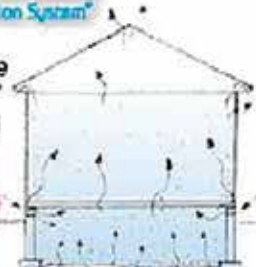
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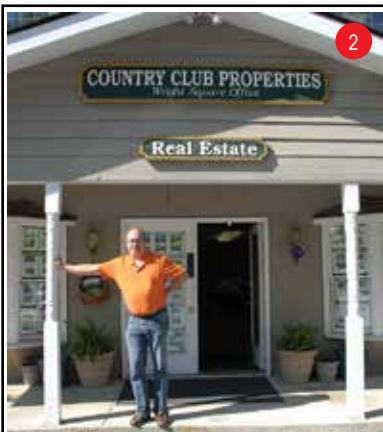
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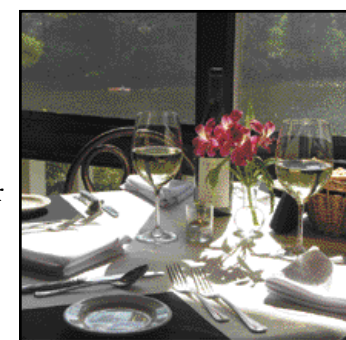
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