

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Jan. 5, 2017

Town ordered to pay Shearl \$35,000 to settle dispute

Just before Christmas Superior Court Judge Gregory Horne handed down his order in the John Shearl vs. Town of Highlands case which Shearl won on appeal back in August.

The court ordered to settle

the dispute, the town must pay Shearl \$35,000 and it must reverse the January 2015 Zoning Board of Adjustment ruling against Shearl; negating the original violation.

Judge Horne also ordered the matter be closed once and for all

— by all.

From September 2013 through December 2016 the town has paid \$68,819 in Town Attorney fees - so it total the case has cost the taxpayers \$103,819.

The Shearl property on NC

28 south was split zoned business/residential. The commercial activities for J&J Lawn Service were conducted on the part adjacent to the highway with the segment behind zoned residential to buffer

•See SHEARL page 13

Highlands Hurricanes win N.GA-WNC Invitational Swim Meet

On Saturday, December 12, 2016, 21 members of the Highlands Hurricanes swim team traveled to Murphy, NC for the December invitational meet against four other teams from North Georgia and Western NC.

The lead changed hands several times throughout the meet but the Hurricanes finished on top. The Hurricanes scored 280 points, while runner up Cherokee County Aquatics Club finished with 270 points. In distant 3rd were the North Georgia Rapids with 208 points. Jackson County had 87 points and the Habersham Rapids finished with 66 points.

The Hurricanes entered 40 events and brought home 89 ribbons, 17 of them blue!

All 21 members of the team scored and they set 66 personal

•See HURRICANES page 2

Highlanders run headlong into 2017



These hearty souls got a head-start on 2017 and ran New Year's Eve instead of on their usual New Year's Day.

— Photo by Bob Sutton

After the fires:

Rethinking WNC ecosystems after blazes

by Jack Igelman
Carolina Public Press

In the wake of fires that burned 55,531 acres throughout

Western North Carolina, conservation and forestry experts are trying to apply what they've learned from years of studying the area's ecology

to attempt to sort out the near and long-term effects of the blazes.

"Our area has some of the

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Paying for law & order:

Western NC salaries for sheriffs and registers of deeds

By Michael Gebelein
Carolina Public Press

Sheriffs are the highest-paid elected officials in each county in Western North Carolina and are responsible for countywide law enforcement and the county jail. County commissioners set the salary and benefits for sheriffs. As with other local offices, sometimes those salary levels reflect the size of the population and health of the economy in a county, but sometimes they don't.

Carolina Public Press made a records request to each of the 19 counties of Western North Carolina for public records related to the compensation packages for the highest paid elected and un-

•See SALARIES page 5

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Planning ahead looking at 2017-'18 needs

With the new year, the Town Board, the new Town Manager and I will begin planning for the year. We are entering the period where budget decisions are made for fiscal year 2017/'18. Let me share some of my initial thoughts.

First, what we decide and have to do doesn't solely emanate from Highlands. What happens in Washington and Raleigh can also impact the financial status of our little mountain community.

I will be carefully tracking events in Washington in the coming months. The nation will have a new president with both houses of congress holding majorities of the president's party. I hope they can pass legislation that will benefit the American people. I also hope that these Washington policies will promote the national economy so Highlands can continue to enjoy the strong housing and tourist markets like this past year. If folks begin to see a retrenching economy they immediately cut personnel spending, especially in such areas as travel and home purchases.

The incoming president and some leaders of congress have been discussing a new trillion dollar stimulus package for

infrastructure projects. Now I won't get into whether it is needed, or whether it will create jobs, or add to the national debt. I just want Highlands to be ready to get a fair share of the federal money if the stimulus comes to pass.

I have asked Lamar Nix, our public works director and town engineer, to review all of our infrastructure needs and to be ready to respond. We have a number of projects, such as improving water impoundments and upgrading our utility systems, that may qualify for stimulus grants. We have benefited from similar stimulus grants in the past. So, Lamar will be getting some projects to an almost "shovel ready" status as events unfold in the capital. If the Feds say they are looking for infrastructure projects to fund, we will be more than willing to help them out.

I know some folks may say that the town should not form a dependency on Washington funds; that it only adds to the growth of the federal government and the national debt. My response is that if federal money is available, I want us to get our fair share. Failure to apply only guarantees that money will end up in towns in other areas. I don't want to see money we could have had end up in New York City! I am sure Congressman Meadows would want his district to get a fair share, too, and would be very



Mayor Pat Taylor

helpful in securing funding.

When, and if the town receives federal and state revenues, it alleviates the tax burden at the local level. Currently, the town has a ten-year-long list of infrastructure needs that have to be prioritized. Just maintaining, upgrading and replacing critical infrastructure is an ongoing process. As soon as we strike a completed project off the list, something replaces it. Federal stimulus funds would help the town move through this list of needs. Our list is not "pork barrel" stuff, but real critical needs.

At the state level, I hope the new legislative session does not threaten the town's budget like that ill conceived sales tax redistribution proposal of the last long session. In the end, everything worked out to where the town, as well as the county, lost a little revenue to Raleigh, but also saw good sales tax increases. With a strong economy and a projected state budget surplus, maybe the legislature will be in the mood to share some of the bountiful revenue.

Or, maybe I'm just doing wishful speculation at the beginning of this new year. Nevertheless, I have hope and optimism for a good year for all.

I will keep everyone posted as budget issues emerge. I hope everyone has a happy new year.

...HURRICANES continued from page 1

records and 18 team records.

Elias McKim set four team records scoring 33 points. Chase Kenter and Vivi Geren also set four team records and scored 32 and 31 points, respectively. Jelehna McKim set five team records and scored 25 points. Ellie BySura set one team record and scored 11 points.

Connor Hughes won two events and scored 29 points. Vivian Kennedy won a race and scored 15 points. Ben Halldin also won a race and scored 10 points.

Jack Sumner scored 16 points. Andre Halldin scored 14 points. Dasha Halldin scored 10 points. La-Donna Dallmann, Aniah McKim and Mia Kaylor all scored eight points. Jack Gagne scored seven points. Hayden BySura scored five points. Savannah Bozeman and Blake Kenter scored four points. Peyton Kaylor, and Francisco Gooch both scored three points. Launch Young scored two points.

The Hurricanes will continue their winter season with a home meet Saturday, February 25 at 9 AM at the Highlands Recreation Pool and will travel to Murphy again on March 25.

The Highlands Hurricanes are a Highlands Recreation Park Swim Team that practices at the Highlands Recreation Park Pool in the evenings during the week and on Saturday mornings. Attendance at all practices is not required. The only requirement to join is that you are able to swim 25 yards (one pool length) unassisted.

For further information, please call Steve Hott, Head Coach at 828.421.4121 or the Highlands Recreation Park Pool at 828.526.1595.

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• WEEKEND WEATHER •

FRIDAY JAN 6	SATURDAY JAN 7	SUNDAY JAN 8
32°/23°	29°/10°	26°/2°

For real-time weather and the extended forecast go to www.highlandsinfo.com and click on Weather

...ECOSYSTEMS continued from page 1



While rains helped end the waves of fires nearly two weeks earlier, fire damage near State Road 80 outside Marion remains obvious on Dec. 12, 2016.

Photo by Colby Rabon / Carolina Public Press.

largest relatively unfragmented swaths of forest land on the east coast, but there are certain forest types that are ecologically out of whack,” Megan Sutton, the Southern Blue Ridge Program Director of the NC Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, told Carolina Public Press.

For instance, non-native species now account for roughly 15 percent of the flora of the 1.1 million acres of national forest in Western North Carolina and there is a lack of early successional habitat – or young trees – across the landscape.

The number one reason: Decades of fire suppression, Sutton said.

The Southern Blue Ridge Fire Learning Network, which the Nature Conservancy and U.S. Forest Service launched in 2007 as a joint project, has worked to assemble wildlife managers, ecologists and forest managers from agencies and organizations that were interested in a better grasp of how both wild and managed fires alter the landscape.

“With the drought and the range of the fires, this has been an exceptional year,” Sutton said.

“In some places we’re resetting the clock of the forest to age zero. That can be catastrophic in places that are potential

hotbeds for non-native species, but can also be valuable to wildlife and to native habitats that form in places that we’ve had difficulty managing.”

Shock to the ecosystem

Gary Kauffman, a forest botanist with the USFS is among a cadre of experts the Forest Service has deployed in Burned Area Emergency Response (BARE) teams. Assembled specialists are sent to analyze post-fire condition of burned watersheds and plan emergency stabilization treatments. Their goal is to look at any special efforts needed to protect forest health and water quality.

“This type of fire doesn’t happen very often,” Kauffman said, adding that it could take a couple of years to see most of the effects.

From a scientific point-of-view, ecologists consider fires an important disturbance in the natural cycle of “succession” – the process of plants and animals changing after a disturbance. A shock can be as small as fallen tree or as wide sweeping as an invasive pest like the pine beetle or a forest fire. In either case, said Sutton, those upheavals are vital in creating a forest with mixed aged forests and habitats that accommodate a range of wildlife and plants.

• See ECOSYSTEMS page 5

• OBITUARY •

Anna Virginia Wise Aliff

Anna Virginia Wise Aliff, 88, of Highlands, NC, passed away Saturday, December 31, 2016.

Born in Richwood, West Virginia, she was the daughter of the late Tony and Anna Wise. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by a brother, Raymond Wise. Anna was a member of Shortoff Baptist Church and the Highlands Women’s Club and she volunteered at Fibbers for 25 years.

She is survived by her husband of 60 years, James H. Aliff; three children, Trina Aliff of Mountain City, GA, Cathy Hagan and husband David of Sanger, TX and



Bert Aliff and wife Susan of Ocean Springs, MS; one sister, Betty Frazier of Indian Trail, NC and three grand children, Bert, Alexis and Alaina.

A Memorial Service will be held at a later date.

In lieu of flowers donations can be made to Four Seasons Foundation Office, 571 South Allen Road, Flat Rock, NC 28731 (www.fourseasonscfl.org/donate/

foundation)

Macon Funeral Home is in charge of the arrangements.

Online condolences can be made at maconfuneralhome.com



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Do you need help with staying warm this winter?

The Highlands Emergency Council will be accepting applications requesting financial help for the cost of propane gas, fuel oil, and wood. Applications will be accepted on Thurs., January, 12; Fri., January 13; Mon., January 16 and Wed., January 18 from 10 am to 2 pm at the HEC office on Poplar Street (next to Wilson gas). Proof of income is required. No applications will be accepted after these dates. Applications must be filled out in person, no applications will be taken over the phone.

Highlands Playhouse to host 'Award Series' January through March 2017

It's that time to cheer for your favorite stars as they walk the red carpet in hopes of winning a Golden Globe or Academy Award. And the Highlands Playhouse believes that you deserve to see the best movies on the BIG screen! To make this happen, they will be hosting an Award Series - planned to run now through March.

"Our goal is to show as many Golden Globe and Academy Award nominated titles as possible. Our immediate requested line-up is very impressive and should result in some wonderful opportunities to see movies that have been receiving some major buzz," said executive director, Ginger Moseley.

In no particular order, they hope to show La La Land, The Founder, Lion, Jackie, Miss Sloane, Kubo and the Two Strings, A Monster Calls, Hidden Figures, and Hell or High Water... to name a few.

The schedule will be very flexible and may change depending on distributor's restrictions, so be sure to check the website often. The box office staff will make every attempt to update the website as soon as a title is confirmed.

Current Movie Schedule

Fridays - Tuesdays at 2, 5, and 8pm (no 8pm show on Sundays)

For more information see www.highlandsplayhouse.org



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...ECOSYSTEMS continued from page 3

The regeneration process is beneficial for a range of plants and animals. For instance, young forests provide food and cover for migratory songbirds and habitat for game such as turkey.

But things grow fast in Western North Carolina relative to other ecosystems. That means forest managers have to think quick to help native species thrive and keep unwanted pests from taking root.

In the wake of intense fires in 2013 in the Linville Gorge the non-native princess tree sprouted up in deeply scorched areas. Just one tree can generate up to 20 million seeds per year and can grow up to 10 feet in a single season.

Kauffman said the agency struggled to address the regeneration of the princess trees because of the extremely steep terrain and the Linville Gorge's designation as a wilderness area which can restrict some of the rehabilitation strategies that can be deployed.

Fighting fire with ...

One strategy could be managed fire – a tactic that land managers haven't always favored.

In 1915 the North Carolina General Assembly authorized the first state fire warden to fight fires and clear brush along rail lines to keep sparks at bay and to protect forests that were prized for their timber value. In 1935, the U.S. Forest Service developed a so-called "10 a.m. policy" which mandated fires be snuffed by the next

morning.

However, research in the 1960s and 1970s led to a shift in Forest Service policy to a "let-burn" policy.

While forest managers now generally view fires as vital to the health of a forest, state forest managers are still mandated to suppress wildfires to protect people and property. It's when the flames cross onto the 1.1 million acres of national forest that forest firefighters have more options to take charge and, if possible, control and manage those wildfires to prevent damage and capture some of the ecological dividends.

Sutton and Kauffman said there is a silver lining in the recent fires. For example, the fires may help contain rhododendron and mountain laurel that spread in the absence of fire from riparian areas in which they belong to slopes and ridges where they provide fuel for fires.

Still, agencies prefer to use controlled burns, rather than wildfire, as a tool to improve the health of a forest. Before a controlled burn, fire experts take months to plan and consider a wide range of factors to minimize the impact of smoke to the health and safety of people and property nearby.

Wildfires, of course, have no regard for timing, people, structures, terrain or weather forecasts. And, among the Fire Learning Network's conclusions is that a lack of fire has led to increased fuel loads that leave forests and people more vulnerable to catastrophic fire.

...SALARIES continued from page 1

elected officials in each county.

Previous articles in this series have looked at the salaries for county commissioners and county staff. Today's article looks at sheriffs and registers of deeds.

Sheriffs

As with most other county-level government jobs, Buncombe County, by far the biggest county in the region, pays its sheriff more than any other WNC county. Sheriff Van Duncan receives an annual salary of \$127,404 per year and, like most sheriffs, the county provides him with a take-home car.

But Duncan's salary, while high for the region's law enforcement officers, doesn't breach the list of the top 10 highest paid public officials in Buncombe County. Statewide records show that Duncan, who received a \$7,000 per year pay raise since the 2014-2015 fiscal year, is one of the 10 highest-paid sheriffs in the state, in keeping with Buncombe's rank among the top 10 counties in population.

Henderson County Sheriff Charles

McDonald makes \$106,541 per year and is the only other sheriff in the region making more than \$100,000. Watauga County Sheriff Len Hagaman is paid \$90,396 per year, making him the third-highest-paid sheriff in the region.

WNC's smaller counties pay their elected officials significantly less than those in larger areas. In the second-smallest county in the region by population, Clay County Sheriff Vic Davis is the lowest-paid sheriff in the region, making \$56,770 per year. Graham County, the county with the lowest population in the region, pays its sheriff, \$62,836. Avery County, Yancey County, Cherokee County, Madison County, Polk County and Mitchell County each pay the sheriff in the \$60,000-\$70,000 range.

Swain County, the third-smallest county in the region by population, pays Sheriff Curtis Cochran \$79,746 per year, making him both the highest-paid elected official in the county as well as the second-highest-paid county official overall.

A complete list of sheriff salaries by

Rethinking long-term efforts
"The cost of fighting wildfires is astronomical," Sutton said. "The recent fires have been really hard to watch personally and my thoughts are with families who lost lives and resources. There's no good spin to put on that."

The wide range of the fires may affect how public land managers address fire in the future. Michelle Aldridge of the USFS said forest planners will reconsider fire in the Pisgah-Nantahala National Forest Plan revision process that is slated to be finalized in 2017. A draft plan and a draft environmental impact statement are expected to be released in the spring.

"We are going to continue the plan development, integrating our best scientific information about current conditions," said Aldridge in an e-mail to CPP. "We'll take another look at the forest-wide direction for fire and make sure that section has everything we need as we move ahead."

Ultimately, the ecological impact – both good and bad – of the fires won't be clear for months or even years to come.

"It's too early to really understand what's going to happen," Kauffman said, though he's hopeful.

"We need to look at the fires as an opportunity," he said. "There is benefit and potential risk. When you burn you are trying to make change, but some species benefit and some don't."

county is at the end of the article.

Register of deeds

The register of deeds is an elected official who is responsible for maintaining documents related to property rights, particularly for real estate. North Carolina law establishes the methods for preparing and storing deeds, and gives county commissioners authority to set a register of deeds' salary and job expectations.

Buncombe County register of deeds Drew Reisinger is the highest-paid in the region, receiving an annual salary of \$87,021

• See SALARIES page 6

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At PAC Live via Satellite Series MET Opera's production of Nabucco by Verdi on Sat., Jan. 7



The Highlands Performing Arts Center will continue the Live via Satellite Series on Saturday, January 7 @ 12:55pm with the MET Opera's production of Nabucco by Verdi. The legendary Plácido Domingo brings another new baritone role to the Met under the baton of his longtime collaborator James Levine. Liudmyla Monastyrskaya is Abigaille, the warrior woman determined to rule empires, and Jamie Barton is the heroic Fenena. Dmitri Belosselskiy is the stentorian voice of the oppressed Hebrew people. Tickets are available online: highlandspac.org, at the door or by calling 828.526.9047 Highlands Performing Arts Center, 507 Chestnut Street, Highlands

Ice Rink Schedule:

Thursdays: 1-8pm,
Fridays and Saturdays: 1-10pm,
Sundays: 1-5pm
Mondays 5-8pm (Ice Hockey only).

Admission is \$5 skates included. Water, Coffee and Hot Chocolate are available for sale. For more information contact Lester Norris or Maxine Ramey at 828-526-3556.

...SALARIES continued from page 5

per year. Henderson County's William King receives \$73,310 per year and a \$3,665 retention bonus. Haywood County pays Sherri Rogers \$70,442 per year.

Graham County pays its register of deeds, Carolyn Stewart, the lowest salary in the region at \$42,922 per year. Cherokee County, at \$46,710 per year for Daphne Dockery, and Madison County's \$44,621 for Susan Rector are also on the lower end of the spectrum for the region.

Jackson County's Joe Hamilton (\$57,714), Polk County's Sheila Whitmire (\$55,053), Macon County's Todd Raby (\$55,280) and Yancey County's Susan Jobe (\$58,181) round out the registers of deeds in the region who make more than \$55,000 per year.

County-by-county breakdown

Avery County (pop. 17,816)

Sheriff: \$64,503
Register of Deeds: \$50,623

Buncombe County (pop. 254,836)

Sheriff: \$127,404
Register of Deeds: \$87,021

Burke County (pop. 89,114)

Sheriff: \$76,078
Register of Deeds: \$51,692

Cherokee County (pop. 27,770)

Sheriff: \$66,002
Register of Deeds: \$46,710

Clay County (pop. 11,036)

Sheriff: \$56,770
Register of Deeds: \$52,307

Graham County (pop. 8,761)

Sheriff: \$62,836
Register of Deeds: \$42,922

Haywood County (pop. 60,631)

Sheriff: \$82,557
Register of Deeds: \$70,442

Henderson County (pop. 112,511)

Sheriff: \$106,541
Register of Deeds: \$73,310

Jackson County (pop. 41,597)

Sheriff: \$86,180
Register of Deeds: \$57,714

Macon County (pop. 34,771)

Sheriff: \$83,585
Register of Deeds: \$55,280

Madison County (pop. 21,663)

Sheriff: \$62,224
Register of Deeds: \$44,621

McDowell County (pop. 45,370)

Sheriff: \$70,092
Register of Deeds: \$47,688

Mitchell County (pop. 15,335)

Sheriff: \$65,912
Register of Deeds: \$49,627

Polk County (pop. 20,828)

Sheriff: \$63,654
Register of Deeds: \$55,053

Rutherford County (pop. 67,617)

Sheriff: \$82,555
Register of Deeds: \$68,521

Swain County (pop. 14,953)

Sheriff: \$79,746
Register of Deeds: \$60,004

Transylvania County (pop. 33,745)

Sheriff: \$78,054
Register of Deeds: \$61,472

Watauga County (pop. 53,737)

Sheriff: \$90,396
Register of Deeds: \$52,688

Yancey County (pop. 17,959)

Sheriff: \$66,393
Register of Deeds: \$58,181

Highlands Rec Park Pool Schedule:

Lap Swim

Monday-Friday 7am-10am 6 lanes and Monday-Thursday 5pm-6pm 1 or 2 lanes. Sharing pool with Water Aerobics at 5:15.

Public Swim

Monday-Thursday 3-5pm & Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 6pm-8pm, Saturday 11am-6pm and Sunday 1pm-5pm.

Water Aerobics

Monday-Friday 10:15am-11:15am and Monday-Thursday 5:15pm-6:00pm (sharing pool with lap swimmers) and Saturday mornings from 11:15-12:00.

Pool available for pool parties Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings 6pm-8pm. Call the pool at 828-526-1595 if you have any questions concerning the pool.

• THE INK PENN •

Think about Auld Lang Syne



Kathy Manos Penn

A few years back, this song popped into my head, when my husband got word that a friend from his Air Force days had passed away. He'd been in the hospital for a month and had been improving, so we were surprised and saddened by the news. Up until about 10 years ago, the two hadn't spoken since those long ago days.

Wikipedia tells us "Auld Lang Syne ... is a Scots poem written by Robert Burns in 1788 and set to the tune of a traditional folk song. The song begins by posing a rhetorical question as to whether it's right that old times be forgotten, and is generally interpreted as a call to remember long-standing friendships."

Should old acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?

Should old acquaintance be forgot, and days auld lang syne?

Well, for my husband, the answer is a resounding "No." When he retired more than 10 years ago, he had time on his hands, and he set about locating friends from his younger days. This was before Facebook, so he did it the old-fashioned way: he used the on-line white pages. I often overheard him leaving messages like, "are you the Joe Smith who went to Whitefoord Elementary School or served in Pleiku?" Believe it or not, he located quite a few old friends this way.

My husband found his Air Force friend in upstate New York, and he subsequently joined us at a Pleiku Air Base reunion in Virginia and became a regular at these annual events. Using that same low-tech technique, my husband located two other Vietnam buddies in the Mid-

west, and one joined him at a Pleiku Reunion in St. Louis. He and several of these guys even caught up on a conference call one time.

He also unearthed a few grammar school friends. Because he moved around quite a bit as a child, he didn't go to the same high school as his boyhood friends, and despite fond memories, lost touch with them. Once they reconnected, though, they invited him to a high school reunion, where he was able to touch base with a good many of them.

When he locates an old friend, they stay in touch through email, Facebook and the occasional phone call. Though he has some more recent friends—recent as in the last 10 to 20 years—I know he treasures his friends from long ago. He has invested heavily in maintaining these friendships, and I'm sure he'd agree that the investment continues to pay him huge dividends. As the song goes, here's to old friends.

*... there's a hand my trusty friend!
And give me a hand o' thine!
And we'll take a right good-will draught,
for auld lang syne.*

So, as you begin 2017, take a moment to remember both old and new friends. Better yet, make some time in the new year to reconnect and let them know you thought of them. Happy New Year to one and all.

Kathy Manos Penn is a Sandy Springs resident now happily retired from a corporate career in communications. Find this column and others in her book, "The Ink Penn: Celebrating the Magic in the Everyday," available locally at The Molly Grace or on Kathy's website at www.theinkpenn.com. Contact her at inkpenn119@gmail.com.

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MC Schools 'contract employment' policy explained

Budget constraints have been a problem with the Macon County School system for the last few years, and with a tighter budget, the school system has examined every aspect of operating costs to save every dollar it can.

Personnel, being the largest expense in the budget has often

been a target for cuts, and through attrition, the school system has been able to keep the district running without laying off employees. Despite more students enrolled than five years ago, the school system is working with less teachers, teaching assistants, and central office staff.

Over the last few years, several key personnel in the central office have retired, and to save the district dollars, those positions have not been filled, but rather consolidated. In addition to consolidating duties of central office personnel, those hired to do the work are through contract positions, rather than full time positions, which saves the district dollars on insurance and workers compensation requirements.

During the December meeting of the Board of Education, three key contract positions were approved by the board for the 2017-'18 school year. Contracts for Terry Bell, Carol Arnold, and Kathy Breedlove were all approved unanimously by the board.

As contract employees, they do not receive health insurance or retirement benefits," said Macon County Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin. "This provides a considerable cost-saving to the school system. The additional benefits costs associated with a full-time employee would add \$4,406.4 (7.65%) for social security withholdings, \$9,285.12 (16.12%)

for retirement, and \$5,564 for health insurance. This comes to \$19,255.52 each for a total savings of \$38,511.04 for Carol Arnold and Terry Bell."

Bell served as a teacher from 1973 until 1983 before becoming the assistant principal of Franklin High School in 1983. Bell served as assistant principal until 1988 when he became an elementary principal for Macon County Schools, where he worked until 2005.

From 2005 until 2009 Bell served as the Central Office Director of Auxiliary Services from 2005-2009 and served as the school facility consultant for Macon County from 2009-2014. Since 2014, Bell has served as a consultant under a contract employee for the school system.

Currently, Bell's primary responsibility with the school system is to manage the district's Human Resource needs. He handles employee recruitment and retention and manages the district's employee record mandates. Bell is responsible for all interviews and managing the benefits for the school system's employees.

As teaching licensures are required, Bell ensures all employees are compliant and properly licensed and renewed. In addition to human resources, Bell works with Todd Gibbs and Dr. Baldwin for all facility and transportation consultant needs. Bell was instrumental in the district's school consolidation process and is well-versed in the ins and outs of each of Macon County's schools.

Bell's annual contract totals \$57,600, which is on the low-end of the salary scale for school system

directors in the state.

Arnold served as an elementary teacher from 1977 until 1983, an English, social studies, science and Exceptional Children's teacher at Macon Middle School from 1984 to 1988 and the director of Macon County's EC department from 1988 to 1998.

From 1998 until 2003 Arnold served as the EC Regional Consultant for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, managing 18 school districts. Arnold has served as the district's Title IX Director, as well as the Human Resource Director from 2003-2009. While serving as the district's Human Resource Director, Arnold also served as the curriculum coordinator and Director of the school system's EC Gifted and Federal Programs.

Currently, Arnold manages the mandated federal programs utilized by Macon County Schools. She is responsible for the Title I & II programs, EC Licensure, and services and programs designed for homeless students in Macon County.

Arnold's annual contract is also \$57,600.

Kathy Breedlove's contract as a guidance counselor at Macon Early College was also approved last month. The contract was approved to start on January 2 and end on June 8. Breedlove provides all services assigned by Dr. Baldwin for guidance counselor services at MEC. The contract states Breedlove will be paid \$260.93 per day during the term of her contract.



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2017 summer to be 94 days long for Macon C. students

This school year marks the second year students at Highlands School and Nantahala School have been going to school for an additional 20 minutes per day. The special calendar exemption which began for them in 2015-'16, has allowed the schools, which are prone to experiencing complications with winter weather, to get testing done before the winter

break, and have the flexibility needed to address snow days.

This year the longer school days went districtwide.

Although the extended days have only been implemented at all schools for a semester, due to its success, the Macon County Board of Education approved the 2017-'18 school year calendar.

•See SUMMER page 14

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Weekday Lunch Special

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tenders and hand cut fries.
\$21.95 serves four.

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

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

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

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

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

Weeknight Pizza Special:

Available Monday -Thursday 4:30 to close
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The Year Ahead in the Highlands, NC Real Estate Market

"You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life."
~ Steve Jobs

It is always fun to take stock of the previous year and review events in order to analyze market trends and goings on, as well as gather inklings for what those trends may mean for the coming months. The

2016 real estate market gives us some definitive clues for how we may interpret the tea leaves for the 2017 market, most especially with regard to demographics, Buyer preferences, and an intriguing market shift for a segment of Sellers.

As I review my Buyer clients who purchased property in 2016, there is a continuation and strengthening of a trend that began a few years ago: increasingly, I am seeing a younger demographic invest in the Highlands market. I estimate that at least half of the Buyers I represented last year

were in their 30s and 40s. This group of investors without fail has done their homework. They are very astute and savvy in terms of market valuations, sales, design trends, and rental demand. These Buyers will continue to seek properties they can renovate to reflect their own tastes (and that of future renters and Buyers). Projects do not scare them; in fact, they embrace the challenge of renovating and possess a clear vision for what they want to achieve. Note: I predict this demographic will lead new construction starts in 2017, with a particular emphasis on buying improved properties close in to Main Street and either completely renovating them or tearing down existing structures and building anew from scratch.

I also see an interesting trend on the horizon for 2017 as it pertains to investors who have been on the sidelines since 2008-2010. As we all know, when the real estate market bottomed, Highlands was not immune to the effects. There were a multitude of Sellers who got caught with properties they could not sell either due to the dearth of Buyers, being completely upside down in the property, or both. Many of these folks took heavy losses not only financially, but also to their credit histories. Interestingly, as the adage goes, time heals all wounds; these folks are now going to be back in the market this year. With renewed enthusiasm, repaired credit scores, stable incomes, and a zeal to invest in these mountains they love so much, this group of Buyers will be looking for properties in the \$400,000 and under range (to limit exposure). They will be looking for outlier properties, sleeper properties, and also affordable lots with great potential -- all in an effort to find the diamond in the rough that gets them back in the game.

Let's talk luxury, shall we? 2017 is going to be all about luxury! I predict a huge upswing in luxury real estate sales across all neighborhoods, country clubs, and home styles. Sellers, if you have been patiently waiting for your Buyer, this is your year! Take the winter months to get your home inspected and tend to all repairs and maintenance items. Clean up and declutter. Think immaculate, pristine spaces because the group of investors coming into the



Susie deVille
Owner/ Broker-in-Charge
White Oak Realty Group
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market this year expect/demand an even higher attention to detail and property condition must reflect that. They are willing to pay for the unique, the special, and the extraordinary. Get your house in order -- literally.

Perhaps the most intriguing trend I see for 2017 is the shift toward being a total Seller's market for those who are selling properties within a half mile of Main Street, as well as for Sellers of properties that have been renovated in accordance with market taste/style

preferences, are situated on desirable lots, and are priced in line with market value. When I say a "total Seller's market," I mean just that. In 2017, I predict Sellers of these properties will have an average of 60 days on market and will command higher sales price to listing price percentages. Caution for Sellers: if your property is not priced in line with market value, this market won't bite. Don't miss your window -- listen to your agent and price accordingly!

This year will be my 16th year in the real estate business in Highlands. I can honestly say I am more excited about the market this year than I have ever been. I see blue skies for both Sellers and Buyers, with strong activity, as well as a surge of property renovations and neighborhood renewal across all price points. This coming market feels fun, light, exciting, and busy! If you've been circling the idea of whether or not to buy or sell, I predict you'll find the 2017 market to be one that offers the best in a fresh start.

• Susie deVille, ME, ABR, SFR, is Owner/Broker-in-Charge of White Oak Realty Group. Her areas of expertise include real estate investments, niche marketing, social media, and strategic property positioning. An expert in entrepreneurship and anthropology, Susie applies her acumen in human behavior toward negotiating and advocating on behalf of her clients. White Oak Realty Group's sales office is located at 125 South Fourth Street in the heart of the retail district in Highlands. For more information, visit WhiteOakRG.com or call (828) 526-8118.

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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

Proverbs 3:5

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John 3:16

Our Divisions Must End: For Heaven's Sake



By The Rev'd Jim Murphy,
Christ Anglican Church, Highlands-Cashiers, NC

We, as Americans, will soon finish an onerous eight-year stretch that has been recognized by many as the most rancorous and divisive period in our nation's history.

Consider a few of the divisions that have widened and are getting wider: Republican vs. Democrat; Caucasians vs. African Americans; Traditional morality folks vs. LGBTQ supporters/practitioners; Christians vs. Muslims; Jews vs. Muslims; Caucasians vs. Hispanics; Hispanics vs. African Americans; Haves vs. Have-nots; Tax payers vs. Tax takers; Policemen vs. African Americans; Progressives vs. Police-men; Conservatives vs. Liberals; the Proud to be Americans vs. the Embarrassed to be Americans; Women vs. Men; those who value life vs. those who consider it disposable; and the list could go on.

We only hurt ourselves by giving into the spirit of division. Indeed, we demonstrate a peculiar disdain for the God who created us of "One blood," when we separate one from another, building walls of hostility.

Many of us remember with fondness the words that President Ronald Reagan spoke to his counterpart in the old Soviet Union, "Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" He was referring to the "Berlin Wall" which had been erected decades earlier to divide and separate one city, one nation, into two.

In a manner of speaking, the ministry of Jesus Christ was to do the very same thing, to tear down a wall. However, he came to tear down the spiritual wall that had separated us from God's abiding presence for better than two millennia. Jesus, as the apostle Paul said about the Lord, "[H]e himself is our peace, ...[he] has broken down... the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2:14, ESV) Instead of simply calling for peace, ala Reagan, Jesus was (is) peace—the only portal through the dividing wall.

In the beginning of time, as the Book of Genesis describes it, the world was created in perfect peace. There was a one to one, personal relationship with God. There was no separation between God and mankind. Indeed, unbroken peace was the rule of the day, the rule of the world, the universe. Hostility was unthinkable. Imagine a world such as that. No death, no pain, no war, no lack, no division—for anyone!

Hostility was unthinkable, that is, until sin entered the world. Invited and embraced by humanity, sin became the dividing wall between God and us. When Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, the angelic guards who were posted to protect the entrance came to represent that wall of hostility that we had erected.

What were we to do? A barrier guarded by the power of God himself, how could that be breached? It seemed as

• See SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING page 13

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

The Highlands Police log entries from Dec. 19. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

Dec. 19

- At 3:15 p.m., Jonathon Daniel O'Brian, 33, of Jacksonville Beach, FL, was arrested on an outstanding June 2016 warrant for a felony charge of PWISD Marijuana.

Dec. 21

- At 9:30 a.m., officers were called about a fraudulent financial transaction when someone bought a \$1,800 bottle of Dom Perignon champagne with a fraudulent credit card from MountainTop Wine on Main Street.

Dec. 28

- At 12:12 p.m., officers were called to a residence on Williamsburg Court regarding a disturbance around the property.

- At 5:42 p.m., officers responded to a two-vehicle accident in Highlands Plaza.

Dec. 30

- At 5 p.m., officers responded to a call from Gold N' Clipper on Main Street where someone opened a locked

container and took a Rolex watch valued at \$5,000.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue Dept. log from Dec. 20.

Dec. 20

- The dept. provided public assistance to a motorist at N. 4th Street and Foreman Road.

- The dept. was first-responders to a residence on Hicks Road.

Dec. 22

- The dept. was first-responders to a residence on Turtle Pond Road.

Dec. 23

- The dept. was first-responders to a residence on Queen Mountain.

- The dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence in Fairway Villas.

Dec. 24

- The dept. was first-responders to a residence on Dendy Orchard Road.

Dec. 25

- The dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on

NC 106.

Dec. 27

- The dept. responded to a first alarm at a residence on Cullasaja Club Drive.

- The dept. was first responders to a residence on Jack Wilcox Road.

- The dept. responded to a medical alert alarm at a residence on Jack Wilcox Road.

- The dept. was first-responders to a residence on Webbmont Road.

- The dept. was first-responders to a residence on Oak Street.

- The dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Sagee Drive.

Dec. 28

- The dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Moorewood Road.

Dec. 30

- The dept. was first-responders to a residence on Falls Drive east.

- The dept. was first-responders to a residence on Whiteside Cove road.

Dec. 31

- The dept. was first-responders to a residence on Chestnut Hill Drive.

Jan. 1

- The dept. responded to a chimney fire on Main Street.
- The dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Walking Stick Road.

Jan. 2

- The dept. offered public assistance to a motorist on Buck Creek Road.

...SHEARL continued from page 1

the residential neighborhood from business activities.

As shown on the 1988 zoning map, the business portion of the property ran 230 feet deep from the centerline of NC 28.

The problem arose in 2009 when neighbors behind J & J Lawn Service complained that commercial activities were encroaching on the residential portion of Shearl's property closest to them. Subsequently, working off ordinances referring to an amended 1990 map, the town found Shearl in violation.

However, though an amended zoning map in 1990 was noted in Town Board meeting minutes, an actual map has never been produced. The problem? The 1988 map said the commercial part of Shearl's property was 230 ft from the centerline and the amended map changed it to 150 ft.

All along Shearl has challenged the town on the grounds that it couldn't produce any competent evidence that any action of the town subsequent to the 1988 zoning map changed the commercial line for his property from the original 230 ft. mark.

This has been bounced around the courts as well as Highlands Zoning Board of Adjustment hearings for some time – the town winning, then Shearl winning, then on appeal the town was told to hold another hearing in front of the Zoning Board of Adjustment. This the town did, but the Zoning Board upheld the town's decision; still finding Shearl in violation. Shearl appealed and this time – the final time as ruled by the court – Shearl won.

Though no longer the case, the 1988 map was the only map in existence when this all started.

After the Zoning Board upheld the town's violation claim against Shearl, at a subsequent public hearing to reaffirm the amended (though non-existent) zoning map held on Feb. 19, 2015 whose notice said "it was to reaffirm the current zoning not a rezoning," both sides spoke and presented written comments. The public hearing was continued until Feb. 26. At that time, without any discussion, the Town Board adopted an ordinance to reaffirm the official

zoning map of the Town of Highlands.

However, since there was no map dated 1990 when this all started, only the 1988 map, the court ruled that at its Town Board and Zoning Board meetings the town was reaffirming the current zoning map which was the 1988 map. Therefore, the commercial area of Shearl's property – the 230 ft. from the center line of NC 28 – stood. Even though the town adopted an ordinance saying the map had changed in 1990, the court ruled that it didn't change in any way the zoning of Shearl's property because the map itself was non-existent.

In this final action, the courts ruled that the town failed to comply with G.S. 160A-79 and produce any zoning map or ordinance related to a map that had been "certified under seal by the city clerk as having been adopted by the council and maintained in accordance with state statute and the Zoning Board of Adjustment had acted arbitrarily and capriciously.

After January 1, 1972, no city ordinance can be enforced unless it has been codified or filed and indexed in accordance with G.S. §160A-77 or G.S. §160A-78. which says "council may provide that one or more classes of ordinances shall be codified by appropriate entries upon official map books to be retained permanently in the office of the city clerk or some other city office generally accessible to the public."

N.C. Gen.Stat§160A-77 further provides that actions "establishing or amending the boundaries of zoning districts" are one of the "classes of ordinances" that a council may require to be "retained permanently in the office of the city clerk."

In 2015, the town took all the necessary steps to codify its ordinances and its official map book which is accessible to the public – separate from its Town Board minutes which it had relied on in the Shearl vs. Town of Highlands case. This includes an amended zoning map depicting what the town claimed to be in existence since 1990.

– Kim Lewicki

...SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING continued from page 11

though we blew our one and only opportunity for godly, abiding peace. From our perspective, the wall could not and cannot be overcome. A divine initiative was called for.

Thanks be to God! He had a backup plan for us— Love does things like that. His plan was to provide a perfect offering for sin, an entry way back into God's peace-filled presence. Our almighty Father gave us His Son, Jesus Christ. Many across the globe have just recently recognized the anniversary of His birth. God's Son became peace for everyone who would pass through the portal in that hostile wall by faith. Moreover, he gives us the blessed pleasure of participating in his wall-destroying mission.

As our loving God resolved to bring us back to his peace, let us resolve in this New Year to accept that passport through the wall (Jesus) and to be about his mission of tearing down all of the walls in this world until there is perfect peace again.

Divisions of any stripe can be overcome by coming together in Christ Jesus. Indeed, He is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life through who any separation can be destroyed. Without Him, we'll stay divided. Let us further resolve to make the next eight years, by prayer and through obedience to the Word of God, a period of growing unity, wherein the love of God is lived and witnessed. For Heaven's sake we should, we must.

• CLASSIFIEDS •

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LOST DEC. 29TH on upper Fourth Street area a gold ring with 5 stones in a row. Please call 828-526-8860 or turn into Police Dept. Greatly appreciate your kindness!

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CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION IN HIGHLANDS is looking for a Nursery Attendant for the 10:30AM Sunday Service three Sundays a month for approximately 2.5 hours. Experience working with children 0-5 years old is required. Please contact the church office by phone 828-526-2968 or email at incarnation@incarnationwnc.org (st. 8/25)

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF HIGHLANDS, NC, is seeking a part-time director of music, salary DOE. Musical training and experience required. Resumes, including references,

may be sent to FBC Highlands, POB 625, Highlands, NC 28741 or emailed to info@fbchighlands.org. 828-526-4153 (st. 8/4)

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...SUMMER continued from page 8

dar to continue with the extended school days.

Macon County Schools Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin told members of the board that adding the extra 20 minutes to the school day has cut down on the number of days that school had to be in session,

"The traditional calendar, prior to adding the 20 minutes per day, gave us 1,080 hours in 180 school days. This calendar gives us 1,077 in 171 days."

Macon County Schools IT Director Tim Burrell presented the calendars to the board and noted that the 2017-'18 calendar were similar to this year's, while meeting the state mandates regarding start- and end-dates.

"It looks a lot like the calendar that we had this past year," said Burrell. "We finish the first semester before Christmas and the second semester before Memorial Day. We have 79 days in the first semester, 92 in the second."

North Carolina's calendar law says

schools can start no earlier than the Monday closest to Aug. 26 and end no later than the Friday closest to June 11. This school year is slated to end on May 26 and based on North Carolina law, the following school year is required to start on the Monday closest to Aug. 26, which is Aug. 28 next year.

From the last day of school this year, to the first day of school next year, there will be 94 days of summer break.

The summer will end up being about a month longer than what the district has seen in the past, leaving the school system trying to plan educational opportunities during the summer so students aren't void of "learning" all summer.

Dr. Baldwin noted that the district's summer Edventure camp, which is typically eight weeks long -- but is only available in Franklin -- may be extended. The district is also looking at continuing the transitional instruction camp atmosphere for rising 5th graders.

Former Macon County Commissioner Kevin Corbin, who is set to be sworn into the North Carolina House of Representatives on January 11 in Raleigh, plans to immediately get to work on education issues like the school calendar law.

"I believe without question that local school boards should set their own calendar," said Corbin. "What works in Wake County does not necessarily work for Highlands. Each county school board should have that flexibility."

Last month, House Bill 12 was introduced during the special session, and would have given local boards control of their calendars. The legislation failed to gain traction, but Corbin hopes to reintroduce it in the coming weeks.

"House Bill 12 was referred to the committee on Rules, Calendar, and Operations on Dec. 15," said Corbin. "Basically, the bill was killed. We will have to reintroduce the bill in the 2017 session which I plan to help do."



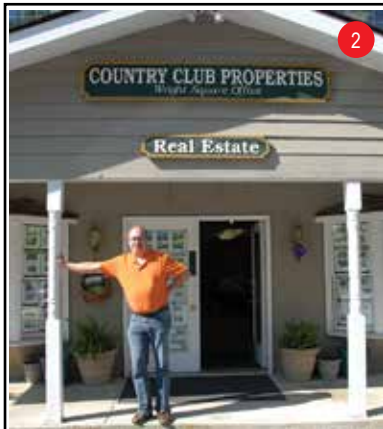
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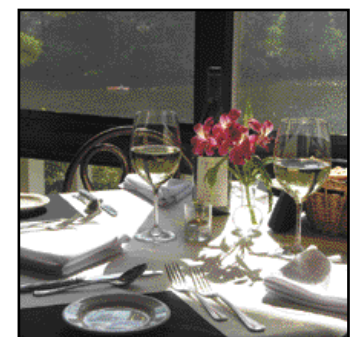
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