

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Dec. 3, 2020

The paving of Main, 4th and beyond is on again

Work to begin March 2021

A couple years ago talk about paving Main Street began. The project which entails milling about two inches of old asphalt,

clearing it away, repaving and marking the road was supposed to begin early spring a year ago.

Due to funding, it was de-

layed and it looked like it would be cancelled indefinitely.

"It has been delayed one year

• See PAVING page 7



Even though it wasn't Highlands' traditional town lighting, this year's "Light up the Park" drew folks on foot and in vehicles to see K-H Park on Pine Street dressed for the holidays. See more photos on page 10.

— Photos by Brian O'Shea

COVID cancels '20 Christmas Parade

Though on Saturday night the town lit up with festive lights at the strike of six, all other tradi-

tional Highlands holiday festivities have been cancelled.

"It is with great regret that

the Highlands Chamber of Commerce is canceling the 2020 Olde

• See PARADE page 10

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HCHF announces 2020 grant recipients

Living up to its stated intention of improving the health and wellbeing of Highlands, Cashiers and the surrounding communities, Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation (HCHF) has awarded more than \$1 million toward grants and special projects in 2020.

"This has been an unprecedented year for everyone," stated, HCHF Board Chair, Dr. Walter Clark. "In late March, our Board

refocused their 2020 priorities to meet the new community needs that arose from COVID-19."

Since then, HCHF has been in full swing addressing COVID-19 projects such as funding the distribution of 250 hand sanitizing stations in partnership with four Chambers of Commerce, sponsoring community COVID-19 drive through testing

• See HCHF page 8

Arnold named to BOE

By Brittney Lofthouse

Members of the Macon County Board of Education met Monday morning to vote on a replacement for the seat left vacant after Fred Goldsmith after he announced his resignation earlier this month.

The board followed the procedure of opening up the vacant seat for applications or letters of interest from members of the community to be considered. The Board of Education received four

letters of interest.

Board member Tommy Cabe nominated Carol Arnold who submitted her application for consideration. Arnold is a retired Macon County Educator and is retired from working in the central office of the school system.

"I have worked with Carol and honestly she probably deserves a seat on the board for her knowledge more than I do," said

• See ARNOLD page 17

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Planning is necessary to balance change

Thanksgiving was a different holiday with changes and adjustments due to COVID-19. I have looked back at past pandemics and have noticed some parallels.



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

Boccaccio wrote the Decameron in reaction to the Black Death that swept Europe in 1348. The story is about seven young women and three young men from the upper merchant class of Florence who flee the plague-filled city to a country villa in nearby Fiesole. Their hope was that they could escape the Black Death by retreating to the mountainous country area just outside the city. I am struck by how we are witnessing a similar exodus during the current pandemic.

The Highlands Plateau has been full of visitors this fall, many of them young professionals from surrounding metropolitan areas. Many visit relatives, some stay in hotels and others do VRBOs. Some are purchasing homes here. Whether they will live here year around, become seasonal residents or view their new homes as VRBO investments remains to be seen. Neverthe-

less, major demographic shifts are happening in Western Carolina and in Highlands. There will be positives, negatives and challenges with these changes.

Sallie and I had our own Decameron moment on Thanksgiving Day by backpacking and camping in Panther town. It was a way of escaping the bustling little town of Highlands for a moment of reflection and meditation. We saw about six hikers on our way to our campsite next to the headwaters of the Tuckasegee River. We pitched our new teepee tent and cooked a great meal of Brunswick stew and sausage.

Similar to the characters in the Decameron, we sat around the campfire that night and recalled family stories, talked about our future and what lies ahead for Highlands, as well as the region. After a surprisingly cold night we broke camp the next morning and hit the trail. As we reached a panoramic peak, I looked over the vast wilderness of Panther town and thought how much of Western Carolina is untouched and remains in a natural state. I'm glad we took time to reconnect with what brought us here in the first place.

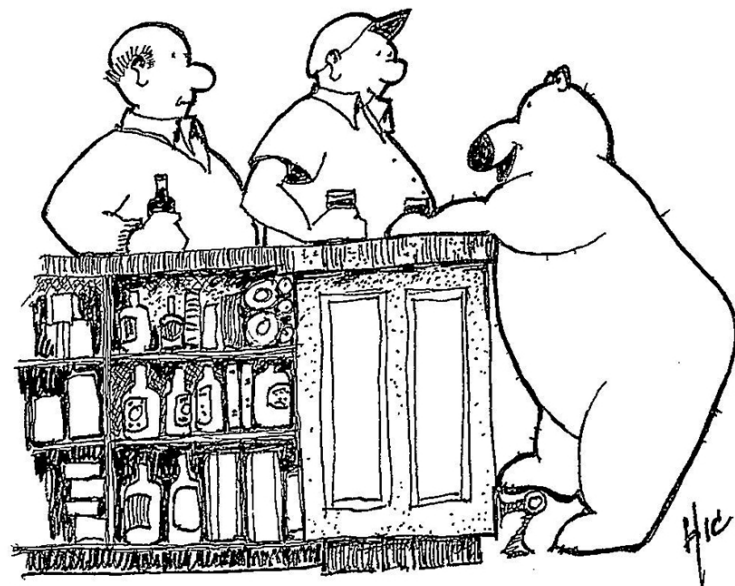
My concern is that these beautiful natural places will be under growing stress and pressure as folks flock to Western Carolina. I recently read in the Asheville Citizens Times that waterfall areas are being visited by massive numbers of tourists. Experts are concerned that these vast numbers will alter the landscape and ecology that make these waterfalls so beautiful.

We can see one aspect of the problem close at hand on the Franklin Road. There are recurring serious traffic backlogs at the entrance to Dry Falls. The state patrol is aware of the situation, as well as the U.S. Forest Service, but a solution isn't simple, if at all. The Forest Service just received billions of dollars to upgrade and repair their existing venues. I will lobby for funds to go to improvements at Bridal Veil and Dry Falls.

A positive perspective is the economic impact that visitors bring. The negative is the pressure vast numbers of tourists bring

• See MAYOR page 5

• HIC'S VIEW •



WHS.00141 © YAHOO.COM

• WEATHER •

Thu, 3-Dec	Fri, 4-Dec	Sat, 5-Dec	Sun, 6-Dec
53°F 30°F	50°F 40°F	45°F 26°F	53°F 27°F
Partly sunny	Periods of rain	A couple of morning showers	Mostly sunny and not as cool
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High: 58° Low: 24°	High: 51° Low: 33°	High: 39° Low: 31°	High: 58° Low: 24°

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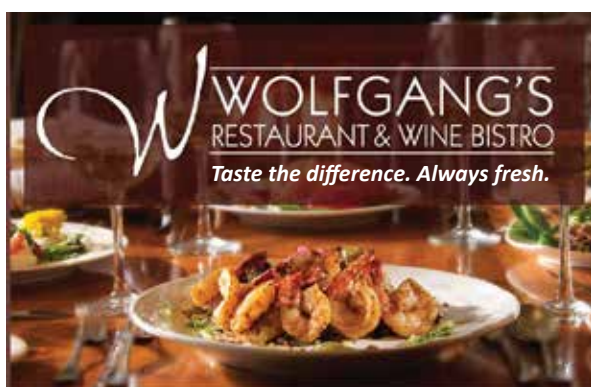
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• LETTER •

Proposed development is not a good fit for Cashiers

Dear Editor,

We, Cashiers area residents, are writing to oppose the high density development as promoted by an Atlanta builder, in an article that appeared in your publication the week of Nov. 19 entitled "Proposed Cashiers Hillside Community unveiled."

That proposed development on 55 acres at the crossroads of 107 and 64 is in direct violation of the general purpose of the Jackson County Code Regulations for Cashiers Village.

The proposed plan calls for the construction of 914 living units, 160,000 square feet of commercial space including two hotels and 1,473 parking spaces with an eventual total development of more than 1.2 million square feet.

Such a development would destroy the heritage of Cashiers as well as a mature forest on the site and have significant negative impact on water tables, erosion, sedimentation in the Chattooga River as well as worsening already increasing traffic problems.

We are not opposed to development in general, but ask that it be scaled appropriately in keeping with the well established ambience unique to Cashiers.

The article in the Nov. 19 edition of Highlands Newspaper only contained a portion of the first phase renderings. The developer admits in the article that the entire project will take as much as ten years to complete.

Such a project will destroy the long established unique character and scenic beauty of the central Cashiers district that so attracts seasonal visitors and contributes to the reasons why so many of us have chosen to live here full time, supporting the year-round economy of both Cashiers and Highlands.

Richard and Wanda Ott
Cashiers

...MAYOR continued from page 2

to these beautiful, natural areas. The solution to some degree will be in wise planning.

Oh yes, what about that other pandemic, the 1918 Spanish Flu? Health officials back then also encouraged folks to wear masks to curtail the flu. There were even attempts to create a vaccine. As like now there were some who resisted wearing masks. I am glad to see that the vast majority of people in Highlands do wear masks. Mask wearing is a sign that we are a caring community.

• OBITUARY •



James (Jim) Kent Shearon passed away on November 20, 2020 at his home in Highlands, NC surrounded by his family after a long illness. He was 79.

Jim was born to Clara Francis and Paul William Shearon on May 21, 1941 in Macon, MO. He was preceded in death by his parents and his sister, Paula Phillips.

After graduating college with a degree in civil engineering, Jim went to work for the Missouri State Highway Department. After 14 years there, he pursued and accepted a position with the Saudi Aramco Oil Company. For 22 years he and his family enjoyed living, working, and traveling overseas where they met numerous lifelong friends. After retiring from Saudi Aramco, he and his wife Linda settled in Highlands, NC. Not one to sit still, Jim accepted a position with Lupoli Construction where he worked for 16 years before retiring fully.

Known for his personable demeanor and infectious smile, Jim was a humble and kind man who cherished family, friends, and his community.

Surviving Jim are his wife of 55 years, Linda Ann Shearon; his children, Lisa Shearon of Highlands, NC, Kevin Shearon (Kristin) of Chestertown, MD, and Jason Shearon (Rita) of Jupiter, FL; sisters Carol Flett (Larry) of Ft. Myers, FL, and Kathy Brown (Hal) of Charlotte, NC; grandchildren Jenna Butler (Tyler) of Clayton, GA, Matt and Ally Shearon of Chestertown, MD, and Maya and James Shearon of Jupiter, FL; and by great-grandchildren Taylor and Jacob Butler of Clayton, GA.

In lieu of flowers, contributions in Jim's honor may be made to the Four Seasons Hospice of Flat Rock, North Carolina or the Episcopal Church-Incarnation of Highlands, NC.

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• BIZ/ORG NEWS •

Rotary 'giving trees' aimed to help those in need



From left: Duncan Greenlee, Dr. Michael Crowe, and Dr. John Baumrucker at Bryson's Food Store.

The Rotary Club of Highlands Mountaintop has placed Giving Trees at both Bryson's Food Store and Reeves Hardware. At Bryson's, clients can purchase gift cards for any amount and the cards can be exchanged for food when given our prior to Christmas by the Food Pantry at the Methodist Church or the Emergency Council on Poplar Street.

At Reeves, customers can add funds to their purchases and the money will be split between the two entities mentioned above.

Over the years, more than \$10,000 has been collected and distributed at these two locations.



Site of future Dollar General going up at Cherrywood Lane and US 64 east.

— Photo by Brian O'Shea

A Dollar General Store coming to the Cashiers Rd.

The property on Cherrywood Lane across from the Highlands Fire & Rescue Substation on the Cashiers Road will soon house a Dollar General Store.

Originally, the owners of the property were planning on building a car storage facility but then an offer came in for the property and so they accepted it.

After the property was under contract, the sellers discovered that the buyer was a developer who builds Dollar General stores.

The sellers said this was unexpected so they called their attorney to understand the options. "After research and a lot of discussion, it was clear that the developer planned on building a Dollar

General somewhere on the road between Highlands and Cashiers. Knowing it would be our lot or another, we decided to move forward believing we could minimize the impact," said the sellers.

To that end, they negotiated for the developer to build an upgraded facade which cost the sellers \$35,000 because they took a reduction in the purchase price.

"The net result will be a Dollar General in an already commercial location that will look much better than their store in Scaly or the one near Sapphire," said the seller. "It is unfortunate that there are no zoning restrictions outside of the town limits. If not selling to the builder meant there wouldn't

ever be a Dollar General on that road, we would have tried to find a way out of the deal. We love Highlands and wish there were no chain stores of any kind up here. I think we made the right decision."

Dollar General Stores are typically erected in areas without close access to variety stores.

"Though we don't like how they look, we actually think it will serve that area very well considering it's 10 minutes in either direction to the next place that will have milk or other basic essentials," said the sellers. "And I doubt many other people would have spent their own money to make it look better."

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...PAVING continued from page 1



Areas along Main Street in the NCDOT contract.

— Photos by Brian O'Shea

due to statewide financial constraints and one year because it must be started on March 15, 2021 to be completed by Memorial Day," said David Uchiyama, NC DOT Communication Director.

However, the N.C. Department of Transportation officials recently announced it awarded three separate contracts totaling more than \$6.7 million to resurface more than 26.2 miles of roads in Graham, Jackson, Macon and Swain counties.

Work within the Town of Highlands is slated to begin on March 15 with milling operations and paving scheduled to be completed by May 21 as weather and temperatures allow.

"The schedule for the repaving of Main Street, US 64 and NC 28 had been delayed. We were concerned that the current NCDOT funding crisis would delay it even further," said

Mayor Pat Taylor. "I am delighted that funds became available so the project can move forward. There are degraded areas on US 64 and NC 28 that needed attention without further delays."

The contract includes the following work:

- Asphalt resurfacing of U.S. 64 beginning at N.C. 106 (1st Street) and continuing through the Town of Highlands along U.S. 64 east to Buck Creek Road.

- Asphalt resurfacing of N.C. 28 beginning at U.S. 64 (4th Street) in the Town of Highlands and ending at Clear Creek Road.

- Asphalt resurfacing of Main Street, beginning at U.S. 64 and ending at 5th Street, in the Town of Highlands.

- Asphalt resurfacing of Whiteside Mountain Road, from U.S. 64 east to the end of the state-maintained limit.

- Asphalt resurfacing of Ellijay Road, from Little Ellijay Road

to U.S. 64/N.C. 28.

WNC Paving of Waynesville has been awarded a contract to resurface 9.7 miles of N.C. 28 in Graham and Swain counties. Crews will be allowed to begin this work on April 15 and have until Oct. 15 to complete the contract.

Harrison Construction of Asheville has been awarded a contract to resurface 5.5 miles of U.S. 64 in Jackson County from the Transylvania County line to Cedar Creek Road for \$1.3 million. Crews will be allowed to begin this work on April 15 and have until Oct. 15 to complete the contract.

Harrison has been awarded another contract for \$2.7 million to resurface a total of 11 miles of U.S. 64, N.C. 28 and three secondary roads in Macon County. Crews will be allowed to begin this work on March 15 and have until Oct. 15 to complete the contract.

— Kim Lewicki



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ALL ABOUT BOOKS

• INK PENN •

Favorite fictional detectives

The WSJ posed the question: Who is your favorite fictional detective? They printed five answers, and I'm not sure any of them would have made my list. Perhaps there are just too many from which to choose especially for someone like me who mostly reads mysteries.

Not that I need any books to add to my To Be Read list, but I had to look up the two that were new to me. The first was DC Smith from Peter Grainger's DC Smith series. As so often happens, this British detective series isn't available at my local library, so I've ordered a used copy of

book one, "Accidental Death," from Amazon. I'm a sucker for British mysteries.

Next up was Phryne Fisher from Kerry Greenwood's series set in 1920s Australia. There are twenty books in the series, and the tales were briefly turned into a TV show and one follow-up TV movie. These books seem right up my alley, and the description reminded me of the Mrs. Bradley series starring Diana Rigg, though Phryne Fisher is a younger character. That series is available at my library, so it's on my online list to order later.

Miss Marple was also on the list. Funny, I have a vague memory of reading maybe one Miss Marple book. The rest I've enjoyed on television. We have a running debate at our house as to who played the best Miss Marple. I'm partial to Geraldine McEwan, and my husband prefers Joan Hickson.

Jules Maigret who is featured in 75 novels and innumerable television productions was the fourth detective mentioned. Written in French by George Simenon, the books were later published in English. Again, I've never read any of these, but have enjoyed the latest BBC production starring Rowan Atkinson.

The fifth detective appeared only on



Kathy Manos Penn

TV—the beloved Columbo. Didn't we all love him? I'd forgotten he had a dog until I read that fact in the paper.

This list was not meant to be definitive nor complete. It was comprised simply of responses that came into the WSJ mailbox. Who would I put on my list? That's a difficult question. I'm not sure I could come up with a number one favorite, though I can list several char-

acters whose stories I've followed with great pleasure. Robert B. Parker's Spenser leaps to mind as do Louise Penny's Armand Gamache and Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch. Kinsey Milhone was a longtime favorite, but these days it's the British sleuths like Jacqueline Winspear's Maisie Dobbs and Charles Todd's Inspector Rutledge who top my list.

Is it any wonder my TBR list at the library has over forty books on it, and my wish list on Amazon is a lengthy one too? Who's your favorite fictional detective? Can you narrow it down to only one?

• Award-winning author Kathy Manos Penn is a Georgia resident. Find her cozy mysteries locally at Books Unlimited in Franklin and on Amazon. Contact her at inkpenn119@gmail.com, and follow her on Facebook, www.facebook.com/

...HCHF continued from page 1

sites in Cashiers and Highlands, and funding COVID-19 weekly testing in three local schools. "We want to put our dollars where the needs are greatest, and where needle-moving projects make a real difference," said Dr. Clark. "Once we addressed critical COVID-19 projects our Programs & Grants Committee went into action."

Led by Stephanie Edwards, the HCHF Programs and Grants Committee proceeded with the original strategic priorities for 2020 grants: 1) Health and Access to Healthcare, 2) Education, and 3) Transformative and Collaborative Solutions. "Our grant cycle took a little longer this year, but I am thankful to our committee for persevering through a judicious process to make a meaningful difference in people's lives," said Mrs. Edwards.

Twenty grant awards (19 confirmed

and 1 pending) totaling nearly a million dollars were approved by the HCHF Board in October. "These awarded funds will touch lives spanning from early childhood through end-of-life and support non-profit services that uplift and improve lives," added Edwards. Fifty-five percent of HCHF's 2020 grants will support health projects such as school-based health, dental care and behavioral health services for the underserved; nearly 20% will fund childhood education programs and the remaining funds went toward transformative solutions to some of our areas most pressing issues.

Director Linda Quick said "While transformative is a difficult concept to define, we were impressed by programs that inspire and lead people to learn and thrive. Our goal is to improve health and well-

• See HCHF page 17



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LIFE ON THE SUNNY SIDE

with Kenny Youmans

Finding hope when everything feels hopeless

Psychologists say hope is crucial to our physical and mental health. It guards us against anxiety and despair. And it protects us from stress.

Research shows that people with higher levels of hope have better coping skills and bounce back from setbacks faster. They're better at problem-solving and have lower levels of burnout. They have stronger relationships because they communicate better and are more trusting. And they're less-stressed parents -- more able to teach their children to set goals and solve problems.

"You can think of hope as a PPE -- a Personal Protective Emotion" says Anthony Scioli, a professor of psychology at Keene State College in Keene, N.H., and co-author of "Hope in the Age of Anxiety" and "The Power of Hope."

Most psychologists define hope as a yearning for something possible but not certain -- such as a better future -- and a belief that you have the power to make it happen.

This above article was written by Elizabeth Bernstein "The Wall Street Journal"

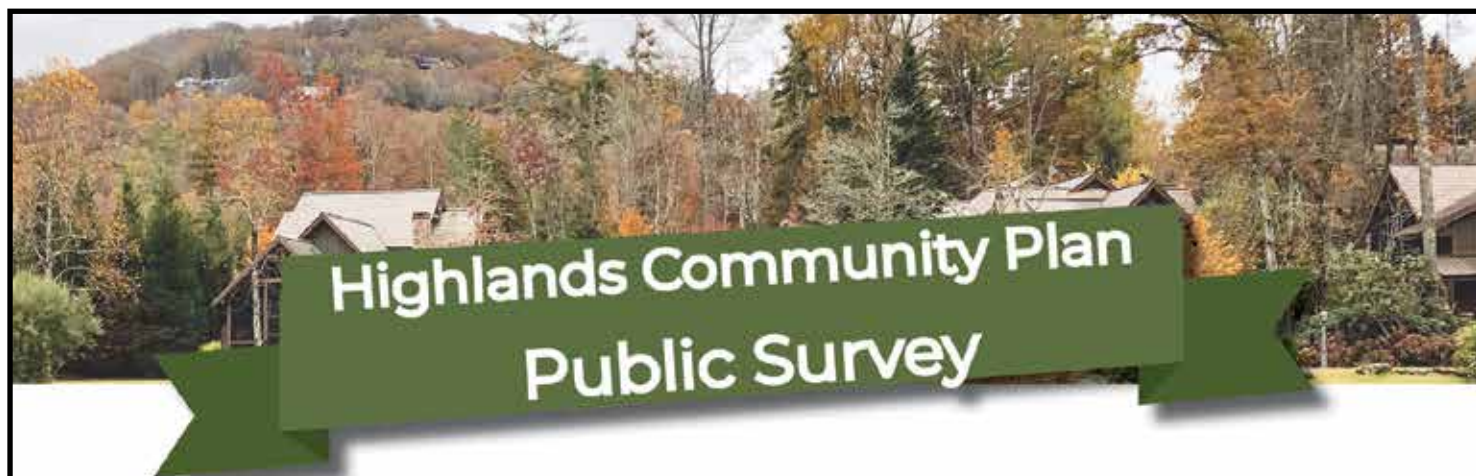
Whether we think about it or not, hope is a part of everyone's life. Everyone hopes for something. It's an inherent part of being a human being. It is a necessary ingredient for getting through tough times. We all have tough times. It's part of life

"When you recover, what will you do?"

"When you recover, will you still be you?"

"Will you be stronger, will you be you?"

"When you recover from what you've been through?"



Highlands Community Plan Public Survey

The Town of Highlands is updating the Highlands Community Plan, which will help guide development and town priorities into the future. We want to hear from all residents, workers, visitors, and lovers of Highlands about your priorities for the future in and around town. A public survey is open now where you can give feedback on issues such as housing, transportation, recreation, and more.

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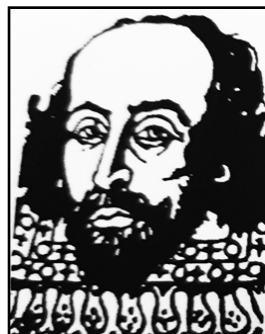


...LIGHTS from page 1

Mountain Christmas Festival on December 5th," said Kaye McHan Chamber President.

Due to COVID cases rising rapidly in North Carolina, the state has tightened existing mask requirements and enforcement and since last week's announcement 10 more counties were designated as red for critical community spread.

The Chamber Board made the decision in support of community health and well-being. Event plans are already underway for 2021 in hopes that we can once again bring the community together to celebrate in Highlands' traditional way.



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• PAST & PRESENT •

Who speaks for the poor?

No one it seems, at least if you're a political candidate. Indeed, in all the recent presidential primaries and conventions, only three candidates even memorably if sparingly uttered the words "poverty" and "the poor," Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and, earlier, Marco Rubio. All lost.

In truth, the bottom 8% of this nation has become a largely abandoned and dismissed throwaway group that many would like to make invisible even as their numbers grow. We have "built a wall" between the poor and the rest of America, and generations will remain hidden behind it.

For those of us only too willing to cast stones at billionaire Donald and his towering riches or Hillary and her obscene speaking fees, look no further than our own state and local officials and to ourselves as villains all.

While both Republicans and Democrats run ads, put up lots of signs, visit local farmer's markets, knock on doors, and do everything they can to "turn out their base," they studiously avoid any gathering with the poor. No one wants a photo op with them. How easier it is to hire more law enforcement, build jails, and regulate bathrooms than increase social services or help the weakest in our society. After all, the poor don't vote in substantial numbers, even less with new restrictive laws.

Without endless political wrangling over what constitutes poverty, percentages thereof, and experiences of those considered poor, all should acknowledge their Biblical existence within our society. Moreover, their numbers have increased dramatically in the last decade, for example moving North Carolina from 26th in the nation to 12th in terms of real poverty.

Perhaps as many as two million in North Carolina now can be termed poor while one of every three children now live in poverty. From Winston-Salem to Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina's cities now populate the top ten for growth in poverty. And yes, they're also growing in small towns like Highlands and Cashiers if peripherally. Yet such statistics inevitably fall on deaf ears and stone hearts.

In truth, the poor might as well live in a foreign country so little are they visited and "aided." Indeed, those who help usu-



Milton Ready

ally expect the poor to come to them, to their churches and free meals, distribution centers, all the while giving them a few boxes and hoping they disappear. Yet where do they go?

Their presence strikes unease and fear into most of our hearts. It feels good to write a check, to safely stand behind a table and dispense food and goods, and, at Thanksgiving and Christmas, to deliver a meal and some toys. We always wear

masks at these events even if we don't. Yet few of us want to do more and our elected leaders less.

Talking about the poor and helping them has become the third rail of American political and social policy. Mention it and you instantly will be accused of "class warfare," of "the politics of envy," or of being a "bleeding heart liberal" and, worse, a socialist.

Following the lead of unbefittingly named "heritage" foundations, many quite ordinary folks believe that the poor deserve their fate, that they are the "users and abusers" of society, have little ambition, are lazy, and prefer government handouts to hard work. They're somehow not as "responsible" as "we" are. No "makers and shakers" and "aspiration makers" among them. That's called Social Darwinism, the survival of the fittest, and, along with greed, that's what made America great. Or at least more unequal and uncaring.

A pliable "Jesus solution," the idea that the poor will always be among us, "never cease out of the land," and that churches and charities can best address their needs, that poverty is an intractable, unending social problem, and that government programs like Medicaid and SNAP only exacerbate the problem has created a do-little rationalization many embrace. It's also conscience salving.

Yet concern and action on our part should not necessarily reflect progressive so much as Biblical values, and our departure from them does much to explain why a younger generation has fallen away from religion. Perhaps the truest measure of making America great again comes not from the idea that "we're all gonna be so rich" but from how we treat the weakest members of our society, an impossible task we joyfully should undertake. We should all speak for the poor.

Fundraiser Sale at Rhodes Superette December 3-24



The Rhodes Superette, also known as Dusty's, on NC 106 is selling locally crafted, beaded Christmas ornaments. All proceeds will benefit the Highlands Food Pantry.

Unbelievably, hunger is a very real problem in the Highlands area with many people living below the poverty level.

Join us in a small but important way to help make those in need have a Christmas devoid of hunger.

The suggested price for each ornament is \$10 but any contribution is welcome.

The Rhodes Superette has volunteered to match donations up to \$1,500.

Any business interested in matching funds, or making a donation should contact The Rhodes Superette. Thank you and Merry Christmas to all!

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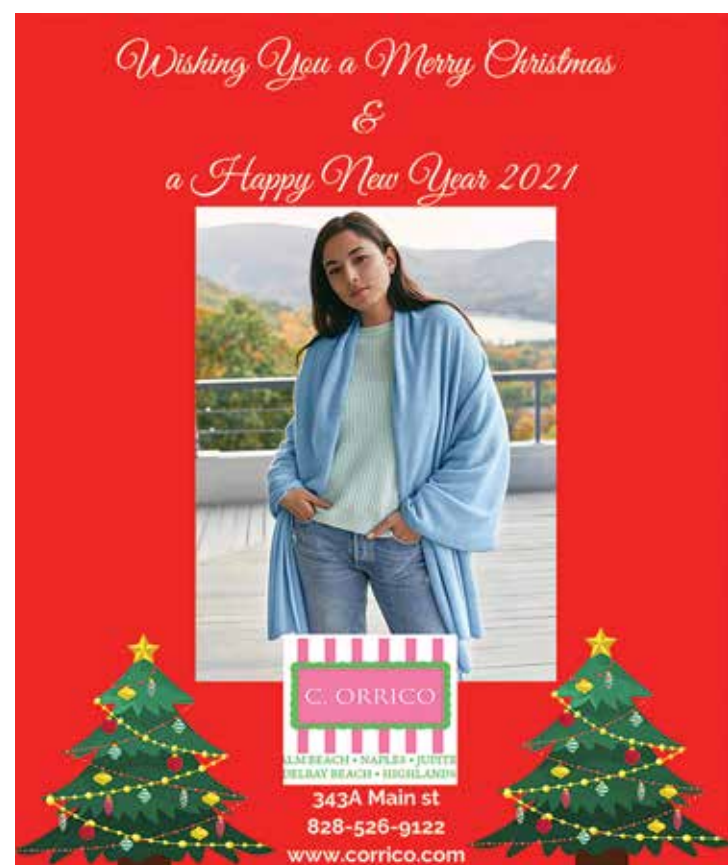
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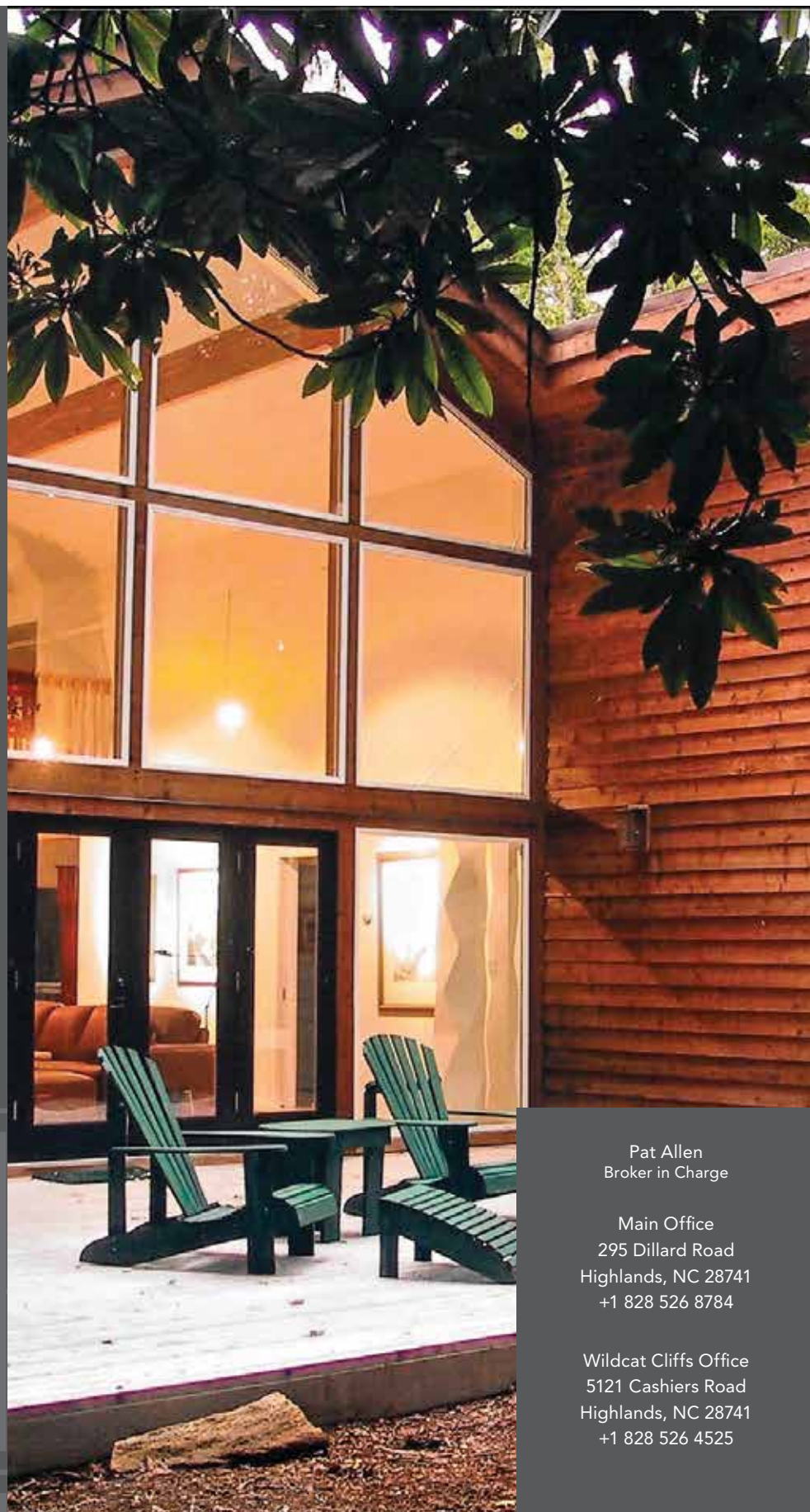
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• INVESTING AT 4,118 Ft. •

2020 in a Nutshell

Now that December is here, some find themselves like a compass needle, pointing the way to a new year, a fresh start. But the other end of that same needle points to what was and can navigate us through a reflective mood.

The title, 2020 in a nutshell seemed apropos since, well...2020 has been NUTS! This isn't one of those Auld Lang Syne columns though, as I'll just be pointing out a few of the highlights as they affected our business and real estate in general in our area.

Build the wall! There was about a one-two week period of total shut down before the official Phase I started. Our town looked to be somewhere between a fairy tale and dystopian movie set. Dystopia is defined as an imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice, typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic. The quiet was like that after a snowstorm without the beauty, and the compass I referred to earlier. That needle was spinning out of control as many felt like they were in the cyclone scene of Wizard of Oz, or maybe The Walking Dead (if you're familiar with

the very popular show, it all started with a virus.) We were in uncharted territory.

A big part of the shut-down was meant to keep everyone safe and inside their own homes and were told not to venture out to other communities. We had police check points, and second-home-owners got letters pleading with them to stay away. Stay at home. Stay safe. There's no room here to get into mask debate. There was much to do about something using 'whatif-fin' politics because everything became political. There was one point, early on when we were told no short-term rentals. (Short-term rentals, referred to as STR are rentals less than 90 days. These rentals are taxed by the state AND county, whereas rentals over 90 days are not taxed. It doesn't matter if the rentals are inside the town limits or not, all are taxed, and a portion of the 3% tax collected trickles back to the Town of Highlands.) Property managers and private



Jeannie Chambers
Chambers Realty
& Vacation Rentals
828-526-3717

homeowners were asked to register all short-term rental properties with the town.

After STR were allowed again, the floodgates opened. Over the last 10 or so years, Thanksgiving week has started to resemble July 4th weekend, but 2020 has almost been that way since May. What a good problem to have. Highlands has become very event oriented, and the pandemic turned out to be quite an event. Even with most everything cancelled, first-time visitors to

mountain communities were at an all-time high. One of the remarks we heard many times was, "We just want to look at four different walls."

Especially during the first few months, people were renting homes to shelter-in-place just to be somewhere different. Some brought all their supplies because the media warned of shortages, but most used the

carry-out services of our restaurants and bought groceries locally. Our rental process took on a different look as we blocked the day before and after each rental to assure proper cleaning could be done.

Anytime you have this many visitors, you're going to have people wanting to relocate or retire here, or at least buy a home they can rent out until they can retire here. Real estate sales were at an all-time high as well.

The prejudice against STRs has been simmering for years, but the situation has come to a full boil in the last couple of years and with the influx of "those people" during the pandemic, the pressure cooker is about to explode. You would think caution would be in order by HOAs and zoning officials as they impose new restrictions on property owners.

Remember STRs are considered 90 days or less. Maybe that's what the majority of property owners want, to be such an exclusive town that the only people here are the ones that "belong here."

Does Highlands need to have more

• See INVESTING page 21

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Gratitude Amidst Uncertainty

The time has flown by since I joined Highlands-Cashiers Hospital (HCH) and relocated to these lovely mountains with my wife. I've learned much about our extraordinary hospital and its history, which is marked by steadfast community support. I've appreciated the warm welcome and support I've received from the people who call the Plateau home — whether year-round or seasonal residents, the Highlands-Cashiers Foundation, hospital staff, and our Board.

As I mentioned before, 2020 is a year that will undoubtedly go down in the books as one that never stopped throwing us curveballs. We prepared ourselves capably for possibly getting hit hard by the virus, and I am profoundly grateful that our community was mostly spared. Our unparalleled team tirelessly and safely cared for patients at our multiple locations and endured many changes without complaint — while social distancing and wearing masks for up to 12 hours a day. They also met the challenges of losing contact with our patients' visitors and interacting socially with their peers with grace.

We've entered a period when we traditionally anticipate time with family, celebrate Thanksgiving, and reflect upon our many blessings. 2020, as we know, will be very different. Despite navigating so many unknowns this year, not the least of which was learning the safest way to live during the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe we still have much to be thankful for. Let me share a few things I am grateful for.

I am thankful that all of our team reported to work daily to carry on our mission, despite being afraid — often for their loved ones more than themselves — during the pandemic's early days. Personally, I miss starting each day meeting with my leadership team in person. Pre-COVID-19, we'd meet daily at a Safety Huddle to learn about any operational issues, but the meetings also allowed us to connect. While we still hold these meetings, they are now held virtually, like every-



Tom Neal
CEO, CNO
Highlands-Cashiers Hospital

thing else we seem to do.

I am thankful for the continued safety of our Eckerd Living Center (ELC) residents who as seniors are more vulnerable to the virus. ELC staff rose to every challenge posed by COVID-19 with utmost professionalism, from learning ever-changing safety and treatment protocols to remaining compassionate toward these patients who deserve extra "TLC" in this time of isolation. Staff attended lovingly to the residents' mental health by creatively connecting them with their families and each other through a planned visitation parade and visitation from windows and outdoors. Residents' days were also kept fun with events like the fall festival, which included a visit from the llama farm and a socially distanced Trunk or Treating event where we distributed candy safely — with 6-foot PVC pipes!

I am thankful for the support that our still-new relationship with HCA Healthcare has brought to HCH and our community. Our membership in the HCA network means that our facilities will receive needed updates and advanced technology, and continue to welcome new physicians, like Dr. D. Todd Detar, our most recent addition to HCH's stellar physician staff.

We are blessed to be a part of a strong organization like HCA Healthcare that is committed to, and more importantly has the resources, to grow. Many communi-

ties now have to worry about their hospitals closing due to financial hardships. We don't, thanks to HCA.

From Day 1 of the pandemic, HCA protected our people by keeping them safe — and employed — and protected the company's financial viability, so we can serve our communities for years to come. We never struggled for PPE and were constantly updated about best practices regarding safe operations.

I am thankful to our community for practicing the three Ws — wearing masks, waiting so we can be at least six feet apart, and washing our hands frequently. These simple steps continue to be crucial in controlling COVID-19 spread. I know we are all ready for this end, but we are not finished, so please keep it up.

I am thankful for HCH's Board of Trustees, who are among the most experienced and supportive I have ever worked with. I can't express how much I have benefitted from their leadership this year.

I am thankful for the long-term generosity from our community and the Highlands-Cashiers Foundation that we've enjoyed over many decades since our inception. Though the Foundation's focus shifted from directly supporting the hospital to strengthening community health and wellness when we joined with HCA, our facility has benefitted from both foundational iterations.

Finally, I want to share how thankful I am for my family. Many know that one of the reasons I am here is to be closer to my family. Unfortunately, the pandemic's restrictions prevented us from seeing them much of the year, even though they are an hour away. However, we all stayed safe and kept our jobs.

Many cannot say this, and I encourage you to help someone in need if you can. HCA offers many ways to give back, such as our Hope Fund, which helps our

• See HOSPITAL page 19

...HCHF continued from page 1

being by partnering with organizations that make a lasting, impactful difference.”

In addition to COVID-19 projects, and grant-funding the Foundation unveiled its “Leap of Faith” initiative to open a new community health center operated by Blue Ridge Health (BRH) incorporating a Rural Teaching Practice ran by Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) and the UNC School of Medicine. HCHF invites donors and funding partners to support this project to ensure access to quality healthcare for our community and to create a pipeline to increase rural physician recruitment to our area. “If all goes as planned, we expect to see an opening date by summer 2021,” said Dr. Clark.

Since its founding 21 months ago on February 1, 2019, HCHF has invested more than \$3.6 million dollars across six counties through 73 grants to non-profit organizations and special projects. “2020 has been a year of unexpected need. The Foundation and Board of Directors have done a tremendous job by listening to and meeting the increased needs of our community. I am honored to serve alongside fellow Board Members and dedicated Community Advisors. We all look forward to continuing this momentum and building upon our purpose creating lasting impact

for generations to come,” Dr. Walter Clark, Chair of the Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation.

“The Foundation looks forward to another tremendously impactful year in 2021, as we continue to move the needle forward for improving health and well-being throughout Highlands, Cashiers, and the surrounding communities,” said Robin Tindall, CEO & Executive Director of the Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation.

Approved Organizations - 2020

- Advance Highlands Education Committee (AHEC)
- The Bascom: A Center for the Visual Arts
- Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic
- Blue Ridge School Education Foundation
- Cashiers Valley Preschool
- Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority
- Circles Cashiers-Glenville
- Fishes & Loaves Food Pantry, Inc.
- Friends of The Albert Carlton - Cashiers Community Library
- Macon Program for Progress
- Giving Spoon, Inc.
- Hampton Preschool and Early Learning Center
- Highlands Biological Foundation, Inc.
- Highlands Community Child Development Center

opment Center

- HIGHTS, Inc.
- Hospice House Foundation of WNC, Inc.
- Macon County Care Network
- Pisgah Legal Services
- The Summit Charter School, Inc.
- Vecinos Farmworker Health Program

...ARNOLD continued from page 1

Board member Melissa Evans. “I think all of those who showed interest in the open seat are great people and I think Carol will do a good job.”

Arnold was 38 years of experience in education, including serving as a member of the Macon County Board of Education from 1998-2002. Arnold came off of the board in 2002 due to a terminal illness in her mother. Arnold has built a career in education, working as a teacher in Swain County as well as at Macon Middle School. She has served as the Exceptional Children’s Director for Macon County Schools as well as the Assistant Superintendent of Clay County Schools. Since retaining, she has worked as a contract consultant for Macon County Schools Federal Programs. She resigned from her position in order to serve on the Board of Education.

Stephanie McCall, who is set to come off the Board of Education next week, voted against Arnold being appointed to the

seat. She said she had been contacted by individuals of the community who wanted to see Matt Mason appointed to the seat.

Mason ran for the Macon County Board of Education earlier this month, however, he lost to incumbent Jim Breedlove. Mason was not one of the four individuals who submitted the requested letters of interest. McCall did not say she had spoken to Mason about the appointment and said she was not sure why he did not submit a letter of interest.

The last time a board member was replaced due to a resignation was when McCall was selected to serve on the board to represent Highlands in 2009. McCall was selected out of a pool of seven candidates submitted for consideration.

Arnold was appointed to fill Goldsmith’s seat with a 3-1 vote. Arnold will serve the remaining term and will be able to seek election for the position in two years.

• BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NEWS •

Annual awards given at Chamber’s ‘business after hours’

The Chamber of Commerce held a Covid safe Business After Hours outside at Highlander Mountain House on November 19th to honor volunteers and the business of the year. It is with humble gratitude that we thank and recognize individuals and a business that went above and beyond this past year as we all pulled together to protect our community.

The Robert B. Dupree Award for Outstanding Community Service went to Mary Anne Creswell for 28 years of Service to the community through the Highlands Emergency Council. The council provides essentials such as food, clothing, and kitchen items to community members in need. Mary Anne has been a tireless and giving leader in the organization.

Duke Power representative Lisa Leatherman, Nantahala Area District Manager for Duke Energy Carolinas presented the Duke Power Award for Volunteer of the Year to Matt Eberz. Matt was awarded for his service and Leadership in the Neighbors

Helping Neighbors program. The Chamber began program this program in March 2020 to serve as a central point of contact for services needed by those who had to self-isolate. With Matt’s leadership and determination, the program grew to over 50 volunteers in Highlands, Cashiers, Scaly, and Sky Valley and provided delivery service for food, pharmacy, post office, simple home repairs and whatever else was needed. Matt worked with businesses and nonprofits in Highlands to serve those in need.

The Dale Roberts Award for Outstanding Business went to a business demonstrating unselfish contributions to the community and this year we recognize Old Edwards Hospitality. They went above and beyond during COVID-19 with food donations to the International Friendship Center’s Food Pantry and Highlands Emergency Council, COVID-19 testing for the community, and promoting job opportunities, outside their own organization, available in the Town of Highlands.

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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •



The second day of Advent is about Peace

Pastor Mark Ford
First Baptist Church of Highlands

This coming Sunday is the second Sunday of Advent. The universal understanding and emphasis of this day is the subject of Peace.

The prophets anticipated peace in the first coming of Messiah (Isaiah 40:1-11), and today we as His people anticipate its complete and global fulfillment in His second coming (II Peter 3:3-15).

As Christians, our message is that our faith in God's first incarnation and His sacrifice for sin and His resurrection accomplishes peace in our hearts. We have the peace of God and peace with God because He came. We are at peace in this life because we passionately believe that in His second coming peace will rule eternally by the Prince of Peace.

But we do a great disservice to the world around us if we confine our faith and this powerful message of hope to so-called spiritual domains only. This message must infiltrate all contexts because we live and breathe in all contexts. This message should impact cultural, social, economic, and political domains where we exist. We are a part of the public square, not outliers with limited voices restricted to spiritual domains of church and home only. We can and are called to be voices and light in the world around us, and we can do so without being sectarian or an advocate for any ideological or political persuasion that may blur the Gospel. We must, though, speak loudly to a world that needs hope and needs the Prince of Peace.

But here's the rub. A Christian's conviction about God, faith, the coming of Christ, and His sacrifice for sin is transcendent and metaphysical in nature – beyond the norms of human reasoning and nature as the world sees it. And because of this we are told to refrain from the conversations of the public square. Simply, "keep your religious and spiritual stuff to yourself, because you don't fit." You see, the essence of modernity and secular thought is to reject such beliefs and stories of faith. To the secular mind, there is no order of behavior with fixed virtues and permanent truths outside the individual or consensus of group think, and there is no "other world" but only the here and now and flames of human desire.

So, Christians, accept the fact that our lives and messages don't fit the institutional and cultural domains of our world because they are "out of this world." But I declare by faith, that our message of hope, peace, love, and joy are exactly what this world needs to hear, and by faith can know even as we know. Our calling is to point people to this "out of world" message that holds such hope for those in this world. Without our declaration of the Gospel, the public square is decaying and destitute and without peace. Be a source of God's peace wherever you are and wherever you go. Point to the Prince of Peace.

Proverbs 3:5

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Wed.: Men's Bible Study 8:30 am; Choir 5p; Prayer Mtg 6:15p

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Mondays: Men's Prayer Group & Breakfast 8 a.m.

Wed: Choir: 6p

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Wed. Kidsquest 6p.; Worship 7p.

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

Sundays: Worship: 11

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Wednesday: Prayer Service, 6:30 p.

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Pastor Zane Talley

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

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

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at St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church, Franklin • 828-524-9463

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743-2583 • Independent Bible Church

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

4224 Big Ridge Road (4.5 miles from NC 107)

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

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Rev. Fr. Jason K. Barone – 526-2418

Mass: Thurs. 12:10; Fri. 9am; Sun: 11 a.m.

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Rev. Marty Kilby

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

Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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

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Mass: Thurs. 9am, Fri., 11am; Sun. 9am

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Thursday: Noon Healing Service with Eucharist.

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Sunday Worship - 11 a.m.

WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers

Sunday School: 10 am, Worship Service: 11 am

• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Nov. 4 Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

Nov. 4

• At 8 a.m., officers received a report of injury to real property at the Car Spa of Highlands when someone tried to break into the coin machine.

Nov. 23

• Officers received a report of a woman receiving an email threatening to kill her if she didn't send money.

Nov. 26

• At 9:51 a.m., officers received a report of property being taken without permission at the 4th Street Market.

Nov. 28

• At 4:48 p.m., officers received a report of someone taking a wallet at Appalachian Harvest on Main Street.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Nov. 25

Nov. 25

• At 2:15 p.m., the dept. responded

to a call of a possible structure fire on Lower Brushy Face.

Nov. 26

• At 7:41 a.m., the dept. provided traffic control on US 64 west.

• At 8:57 a.m., the dept. investigated smoke on Birchwood Drive.

• At 3:07 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a downed power line on Wyanoak Road.

Nov. 27

• At 10:57 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a location on Main Street.

Nov. 28

• At 12:10 p.m. the dept. responded to a call of a car fire on Main Street.

• At 7:35 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Old Edwards Lane.

Nov. 29

• At 2:05 a.m., the dept. responded to a mutual aid call from Cashiers but it was cancelled.

Nov. 30

• At 10:37 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Hemlock Circle.

...HOSPITAL continued from page 16

colleagues and families, and a 1-for-1 match for employee's contributions to charitable organizations.

I believe strongly in the power of positive thinking. As we enter winter with many questions and few answers about how the virus will play out, I urge everyone to take care of themselves by eating and resting well, getting outside, and connecting safely with others, all of which uplift your mood as well as your health.

On behalf of every HCH team member, thank you for choosing us to care for you. We renew our commitment to you every day, no matter what unexpected twists and turns come our way.

** Tom Neal, RN, MBA, MHA, is the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) of Highlands-Cashiers Hospital. Neal is a proven leader with more than 30 years of progressive healthcare experience. Prior to his role at Highlands-Cashiers Hospital, he held the position of Chief Executive Officer of Community Health Systems (CHS) and served as Chief Executive Officer of both Berwick Hospital Center in Berwick, Pennsylvania, and Greenbrier Valley Medical Center, Roncoveerte, West Virginia. Tom has an MBA from the University of Louisville, MHA from the California College of Health Sciences, BSN from Regents College of New York and an ADN from*

SCAM Notice from the Highlands PD

The Highlands Police Department has received information about a scam in which an unknown sender threatens to kill the recipient unless they are sent money.

The message begins with "Someone paid me to kill you" and then demands money in order to call off the threat.

Our department suggests that you not open the email. We also suggest that if you do open the email and find a similar message, do not respond and call the NC Fraud and Complaint hotline at 1-877-5-NO-SCAM.

DA Welch brings awareness about breast cancer through personal battle

Last week, District Attorney Ashley Hornsby Welch announced that she has breast cancer and is undergoing medical treatment.

"I wanted to publicly share the information to raise awareness about the importance of early detection," Welch said. "Because of the threat of coronavirus, health officials say many women are delaying or even skipping routine mammograms. I am proof that these basic health checks save lives."

Barring a mammogram, Welch likely would have learned about her cancer later in the process, risking additional spread of the disease.

Welch has stage II breast cancer. Doctors expect her to make a full recovery.

"Going public with private information is tough," Welch said. "But, I believe that it is the right thing to do."

Welch holds elected office as the top prosecutor for the 43rd Prosecutorial District, made up of the state's seven westernmost counties.

The district attorney has continued working, though on a limited basis; meanwhile,

day-to-day office functions have been handled by staff members.

"I have a terrific team of people," Welch said. "Their determination to take care of the court's business while I take care of this health issue makes me value them still more."

Welch had surgery last month and starts radiation treatment this week. She will be treated for six weeks, five days a week.

"I am truly grateful for the outpouring of support from colleagues, other lawyers, judges, law enforcement and members of the media, who have known about my diagnosis almost from the beginning," she said. "Cancer is frightening. But the support has made my journey easier than it might have been, otherwise."

The American Cancer Society recommends routine mammography for women starting at age 45; however, doctors are increasingly discussing with their patients the benefits and risks of earlier mammograms. "Have that conversation," 42-year-old Welch said. "Figure out what's right for you, then follow through."

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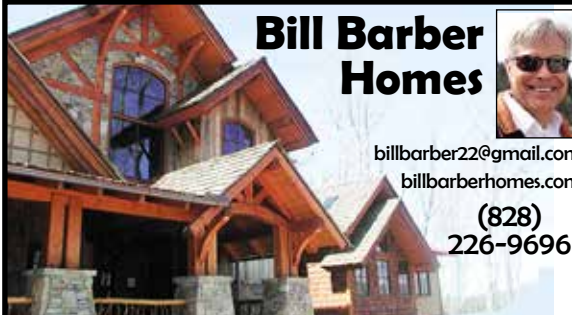
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...INVESTING continued from page 15

hotels to house the visitors? The thing about vacation rental homes is that they are homes, and some people prefer to be in a home rather than a hotel. Many come here annually to make and preserve memories. Some never buy, but their children and grandchildren keep coming and keep making those memories.

When AirBnB became a buzzword and some (not ALL) of the VRBO visitors converged upon our town, it removed the personal element from the STR equation. The problems started when someone could book a place with

no personal interaction with a local person. Progress. Our office, like many other property management companies, and some of the private homeowners that offer STRs still maintain a personal interaction.

In a nutshell, I think it is remarkable that as of this column, 28741 has only had one death related to the Coronavirus. Our cases have gone up, and so has the testing, but hospitalizations and deaths are low despite the fact that we've had people from every state in the country visit here.

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