

Highlands Newspaper

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Volume 18, Number 6

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Thurs., Feb. 11, 2021

'Base Camp' portion of Bear Shadow Music Festival to be relocated

The residents of Horse Cove spoke, and although not happy about it, Highlands Festivals, and Eleven Events listened.

Horse Cove residents against the event in that location were set to speak during the public comment period of Tuesday night's

MC Commission meeting, but when word got out that the event would be relocated, the issue was

•See BEAR SHADOW page 16

Despite COVID, tax revenues soar across the state

Macon County reports 16 percent increase

By Brittney Lofthouse

When Macon County Manager Derek Roland presented the 2020-'21 fiscal year budget last year, he presented a budget plan that did not take into account the potential impact of COVID19. Like local governments across the state, the budget planning process began before the Pandemic began making headlines. Once COVID19 began to spread across the country, local governments began altering their budgets to anticipate significant revenue shortfalls caused by the pandemic.

"Sources such as NCACC and Moody's Investor Service pointed to a forthcoming recession and provided budget guidance based

• See REVENUES page 18

Hop on the sled train!



Scores of locals and visitors frolicked on Monkey Hill this past weekend where sled riding has been a long standing tradition. See more snow photos on pages 10 & 11.

— Photo by Rachel Lewicki

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MC EMS assumes COVID19 testing duties

Macon County death toll now at 26

By Brittney Lofthouse

After complaints from the community about testing and vaccine capacity in Macon County, the Macon County Board of Commissioners directed County Manager Derek Roland to look within existing staff to address staffing shortages at the health department.

With limited staffing, Health Department Director Kathy McGaha told the county to be able to

improve things, the health department needed additional support.

Within the week, Macon County Emergency Management Director Warren Cabe took over all testing for the county with staffing for a COVID19 testing site provided by Emergency Management, EMS, Fire, Veterans Services, Code Enforcement, and the Dental Clinic staff.

Macon County Emergency

• See TESTING page 17

Feds, state & counties consider in-person school

Highlands School staying with current plan

By Brittney Lofthouse

The Macon County Board of Education held a special called meeting last week to discuss the recently proposed Senate Bill 37: In-Person Learning Choice for Families as well as recommendations from Governor Roy Cooper for students to return to in-person school five days a week as soon as

possible.

While the message is the same — in-person learning is the best option for students — how the groups on different sides of the political aisle want to accomplish this varies.

Senate Bill 37, which was co-sponsored by Senator Kevin

• See IN-PERSON page 12

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Be careful; keep eyes on the future

There has been a strong community response to the plan to locate the Bear Shadow Concert from Founders Park to Horse Cove. Residents in Horse Cove had legitimate concerns about having a musical concert in their quiet residential community. As one Horse Cove resident put it, why should a small, quiet community have to endure a concert that is intended to promote the businesses of Highlands? They have a point. Whether the concert is held at Horse Cove, or at another location on the Highlands Plateau, the greater community should pause and reflect on where this business promotion model is headed.



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

While it was announced that during the COVID-19 restrictions that the proposed concert would limit the number attending, some folks wondered what size such an event would become once the pandemic subsides? Would future events be 2,000, 4,000 or even more? Could the plateau develop into a major outdoor musical concert, festival venue attracting nationally known groups and visitors from major metropolitan areas? Some would welcome

such events for the purpose of promoting Highlands businesses and the expansion of hotel and VBRO facilities.

Now some readers may think my picture of the future is an exaggeration, but it is a prospect that concerns many residents. It is a view of what may be welcomed in larger communities -- billboards, suburban spread with fast food joints on every corner.

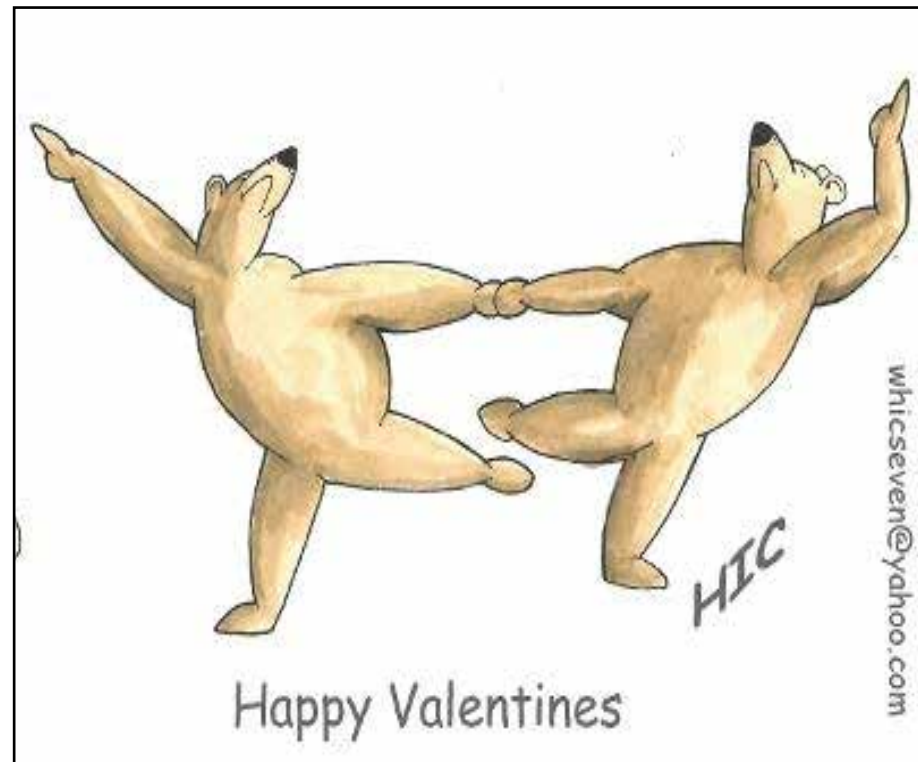
People living here want to be in the beautiful nature and experience what visionaries like Thoreau and Muir advocated. As John Prine sang, people want their friends to be simple and plain as they step down from their new train into this welcoming community, and for some, sacred ground.

To lose our distinctive community character to where the lines between neighborhoods and commercial enterprises are blurred could have lasting negative impacts. The Highlands Community Plan will address many of these concerns. The Highlands Chamber of Commerce is also developing a new business plan that hopefully will address the dynamic of commercial promotion in balance with community preservation.

So, am I against concerts? No, but I do think there needs to be a community conversion involving the town, businesses and residents about the future initiatives.

I support defined zones for business activities, residential neighborhoods and public events spaces. Having concerts in Kelsey Hutchinson Founders Park was, and continues to be, a great idea. They should continue, although the size of the space will impose limitations, along with current town ordinances and policies. About 1,500 people would be the maximum capacity for the park. On the other hand, concerts in that space do not invade the settings for our surrounding neighborhoods. But, if they were to do so, residents have recourse to address the issue with the Town Board. Having concerts in large open spaces outside the town have no such restrictions. Macon County does not have land use policies or restrictions to regulate such events. Maybe it is time for the county to also address these potential developments. County residents, with unlimited use of their land, could be just one event away from impacting their neighbors' enjoyment of their property.

• HIC'S VIEW •



• WEATHER •

Thu, 11-Feb	Fri, 12-Feb	Sat, 13-Feb	Sun, 14-Feb
49°F 40°F	44°F 35°F	40°F 34°F	43°F 29°F
Periods of rain	Mostly cloudy, a little rain	Chilly with periods of rain	Mostly cloudy and chilly
RealFeel® High 52° Low 42°	RealFeel® High 45° Low 36°	RealFeel® High 41° Low 32°	RealFeel® High 43° Low 33°

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Phone: (828) 200-1371

Email:

HighlandsEditor@aol.com

Publisher/Editor: Kim Lewicki

Reporters: Brittney Lofthouse

Brian O'Shea

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• LETTERS •

The Highlands Cashiers Land Trust was innocent

Dear Editor,

The Highlands Cashiers Land Trust is aware of the unhappiness of Horse Cove residents over the announced Bear Shadow Festival to be held in their neighborhood. However, there appears to be some public misunderstanding of the role of the Land Trust with respect to those concerts.

As owner of the Bear Shadow view site on US 64 east, the Land Trust thought this festival would be a good opportunity to get some publicity about the lands we conserve for public enjoyment, such as the Shadow, Sunset Rock, Satulah summit, portions of the Kelsey Trail, etc.

The organizers were excited to have us as their "charity partner," as we are designated on the festival website. We were unexpectedly offered the benefits from one of their "side events," a 100-ticket show by a single musician at a commercial venue.

However, we receive no share of the profits from the concerts currently scheduled for Horse Cove, and other than having some say as to the use of the easement area, we have absolutely no control over any other aspect of the festival and no responsibility related to the planning, operations or execution of it.

The Land Trust does indeed hold a conservation easement on the property in issue. Our legal affairs committee has reviewed the easement restrictions and the planned use of the property and concluded that the planned use does not violate the easement, and that accordingly, we cannot prevent the event. The specific language of the easement allows "recreation" as a permitted activity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "recreation" as an "enjoyable leisure activity." It seems without question that a music

concert would fall within that definition.

Additionally, although commercial use is prohibited generally, there is a specific exception if it is "related to" recreation.

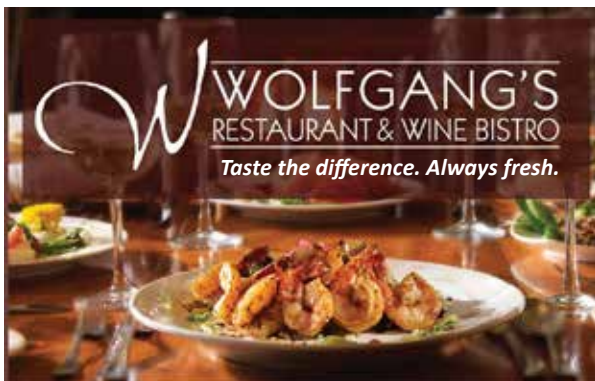
The property is primarily used as pasture and the plants that give the area conservation value are not in the areas the festival plans to use. As an additional precaution we will insist that the area be fenced off to ensure the safety of the plants.

We fully appreciate the point of view of the Horse Cove residents. Nonetheless, from the Land Trust's perspective, the planned concerts are not within our control.

Carlton King

President, Highlands Cashiers Land Trust

• HIGHLANDS DINING •



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Dear Editor,

I write this letter in support of the Bear Shadow Music Festival scheduled for this April. This is being put on by the same group that runs Highlands Food and Wine (HFW), Eleven Events.

For some context, I first started coming to Highlands 28 years ago. In 1997 my partner and I bought a house just outside of town. Like many folks, this was - and continues to be - our sanctuary; a place to get away from the noise and haste of city living back in Atlanta.

Ten years after buying our home, we bought Mountain Fresh Grocery. It was my entire life for over a decade

• See LETTERS page 8

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PETITION IN OPPOSITION TO BEAR SHADOW MUSIC FESTIVAL IN HORSE COVE

The undersigned residents and property owners of Horse Cove and family members oppose the selection of Horse Cove as the venue for the Bear Shadow music festival. The proposed event is inconsistent with the peacefully quiet residential character and serene natural setting of Horse Cove and presents an unacceptable risk of unsafe traffic congestion on Horse Cove Road, noise, trash, excessive numbers of people attracted by the event, and other inconveniences and problems for those of us who live in Horse Cove.

Mary Abranyi
Tom Bailey
Betsy Melvin Batten
Wise H. Batten, Jr.
Marty Boone
Ellen Bramblett
Gene Bramblett
Douglas L. Bullman
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• HOSPITAL NEWS •

Radon's risks and H-C Hospital's capability to provide advanced lung cancer screening

Most people think of tobacco use when they think of lung cancer, but did you know that there's another, lesser known culprit that's responsible for 22,000 lung cancer deaths across the country each year? It's the naturally occurring gas radon, which is created when uranium in rocks and soil breaks down. Radon is invisible and odorless, and sneaks into homes, schools, and other buildings, usually through cracks and openings in basements and foundations.

As it deteriorates, radon sends radioactive particles into the air, and breathing it in, in large quantities, can lead to lung cancer. Radon is not a problem when it disperses outdoors, but when trapped indoors, that's when it becomes a health hazard.

The Environmental Protection Agency shines a spotlight on radon awareness in January, with National Radon Action Month. Radon is measured by picocuries per liter (pCi/L), and a normal indoor radon level is 1.3 pCi/L. The highest radon levels in the state are found here in Western North Carolina, and the area's geological makeup is responsible for that, because we have comparatively high levels of uranium in our rocks and soil.

Fortunately, radon tests can be purchased at home stores and you can get a reading easily and quickly for your home by using one. If you do find that your home has a high level of radon in it, there are contractors who specialize in radon mitigation and can reduce the radon level of your home to a safe and acceptable level. It is now also standard practice during home inspections for radon levels to be checked.

The risk equation is also impacted by the fact that those who smoke or who have been exposed to second hand smoke are at greater risk for radon-related lung cancer.

As with every cancer, we know that the earlier we can detect it, the better a patient's prognosis



Tom Neal
CEO/CNO
H-C Hospital

is. It used to be that lung cancer wasn't typically detected until it was a later stage condition, but with the advent of an advanced screening technique — the low-dose CT (LDCT) scan screening for lung cancer — many lung cancers are being found earlier now, when treatments can be more effective.

That said, there are specific criteria that a patient needs to meet in order to get a low-dose CT scan covered by insurance, and it's a good thing to discuss with your primary care provider at your next appointment.

I'm pleased that Highlands-Cashiers Hospital (HCH) has the capability to offer LDCT screenings to our community members as part of our radiology services menu, and it's important to know also that at this time, screening services at HCH are completely safe, as we continue to take every COVID-19 safety precaution while we provide them, from screening to equipment sanitization.

You're in the best hands when you come to the hospital for radiology services because our team members and technologists maintain the highest safety standards as they provide care, reflected in the fact that we're a fully accredited Diagnostic Imaging Center of Excellence™ from the American College of Radiology.

As I drafted this column, Western North Carolina received

its first doses of COVID-19 vaccine, a truly remarkable event which can give us all hope that 2021 will be much different than 2020. We were privileged here at HCH to be able to vaccinate 210 people on December 19: 47 ELC residents and 163 employees. I'm most grateful to our team members from HCH, ELC, our HCH clinics, and division support team members from WorkWell, Pharmacy, Information Technology, and Infection Prevention. This event exemplified the value of team spirit, as people helped where and as they could, from serving as runners to administering the vaccine safely and efficiently. We also want to say "Thank you" to Sherriff Robbie Holland and the Macon County Sherriff's Department for providing security coverage.

I was heartened to see people appear early before the start of the vaccine kick-off, and once we got to the vaccination step, we were busy for about four hours. I noticed that I clocked in 24,000 steps that day, since I picked up vaccine doses and delivered them to the vaccinating team.

I'm so proud that we could play such a significant role in this momentous step toward relieving the scourge of COVID-19, particularly because we happen to be the smallest hospital in the division.

All of this seemed truly unimaginable nine months ago, and to follow up on the theme of vaccination, I'll be talking about the importance of vaccines throughout our lives in an upcoming column.

Even though the vaccine is in our midst, we can't let our guard down. I urge you to continue practicing the three Ws — wearing your mask, washing your hands often, and waiting six feet apart to curb the spread of COVID-19. Our choices and actions now — including taking the vaccine when it becomes available to you — will create the reality we experience in the coming year.

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...LETTERS continued from page 4

until we sold the business nearly three years ago. My Highlands experience as a weekender, then a full-time resident and business owner, and now again as a part-time resident has given me multiple perspectives on life up here.

Would I want every weekend to be Highlands Food and Wine or Bear Shadow? No. But I look forward to it every year and attend many of the events. It's a mix of young and old, locals and visitors all having a good time and enjoying each other and their surroundings.

The women at Eleven Events run a tight ship with minimal impact on any of the places they temporarily turn into a venue. Anyone who has attended HFW knows this will be a far cry from the camp-out sloppy weekend festivals that you see hosted in other towns and cities across the

south. It's also significantly smaller. I've been to parties in Horse Cove that were larger than this event.

Ultimately how Bear Shadow goes down will determine the attitude of residents and visitors toward this event and HFW for years. I believe the gang at Eleven Events knows that. Having worked with them during my business days, I know they love our town and wouldn't want to do anything to negatively impact our community.

My belief is that Bear Shadow will be a much needed bright spot after a very tough year, and leave Horse Cove the following Monday much the way it was the week before.

**JT Fields
Highlands**

Whistle blower should be protected

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the article in the Jan. 28 Highlands Newspaper edition entitled "Confidentiality of Town Board Closed Session was compromised."

Thank goodness the Town Board and town attorney, Elliot Ness, are on the job –

not to uphold righteousness but to subdue and intimidate a whistleblower. Not so long ago, a national whistleblower was sanctified as a bona fide hero; now his or her counterpart here in Highlands must apparently be outed and destroyed through desperate and insidious legal nitpicking, weak and piti-

ful as it is.

In the last 10 years, I personally have learned of "super secret" matters heard by the board in "closed sessions," a.k.a. the fortress of solitude or the cone of silence

Quick, convene a grand jury! Or, possibly, get over yourselves. Or even, gasp!, tell us what the heck you are doing. Or, more likely, make up some reason why that is unreasonable. We only live here, pay the taxes that support the town, vote here, and look the other way while you acquire land and build a new fire house without voter approval. No doubt a new palace for your

own offices is in the offing, as it was indeed prior to the voters turning it down. Maybe it can be fitted with a state-of-the-art star chamber to interrogate jaywalkers. Do you board members honestly think that people are not aware of the shenanigans related to making Highlands a smart Wi-Fi town?

Fraud, chicanery, and duplicitous naïveté love the dark. Dark days right now, board members. Take advantage now before someone comes after you and Elliot Ness can't help you.

**Brian L Buckley
Highlands**

In support of Bear Mountain Music Festival: In support of Highlands

Dear Editor,

The Bear Shadow Spring Music Festival, slated for April 23-25, is a beacon of hope to the twin communities of Highlands and Cashiers – communities that are rising to their feet once more following the catastrophe of 2020.

The mandate of the event organizers, Eleven Events, is to ensure that locals and people from afar can gather safely and celebrate the things that have been the heritage of all who call the Plateau home – music that lifts the spirit (recalling the telling of fun-filled nights at Helen's Barn), wonderful food, nature's wonder – and a deep, welcoming spirit that will not be denied.

Drawing up these plans in accordance with state and federal guidelines has been a challenge, but the people at Eleven Events are seasoned professionals and I believe that their results will withstand the most stringent examinations. In fact, the preparations are available for everyone's consideration at bearshadownc.com.

This festival is constructed upon the solid foundation of the Highlands Food & Wine Festival, which has drawn celebrants from across the country. The good people of Eleven Events, who made the Highlands Food & Wine Festival a vibrant reality, graciously brought that wisdom to the building of Bear Shadow Music Festival – while making all the accommodations for life in the age of Covid-19.

Highlands Food & Wine – now in its sixth year – has consistently provided a positive impact on the Town of Highlands through increased retail business revenue, boosts in tourism, progressive environmental conservation efforts, and significant donations to the local non-profit community.

And, when all the hype and hoopla

is removed from the equation, that's why this event is so important.

Bear Shadow Spring Music Festival will be an immediate shot in the arm after an unprecedented difficult year – not only to our emotional well-being in need of a healing salve – but also to businesses throughout the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau.

We're talking about those in the hospitality industry – from cozy bed & breakfasts to elegant inns that have earned an international reputation.

It's the same for the Plateau's remarkably diverse restaurant landscape. Every one of them, every one, is emerging from a life-altering 2020 with a less-than-promising 2021.

And all of these businesses, and the shops and galleries that dot the landscape, are not simply fluctuations to the bottom lines of corporations headquartered in far-flung corners of the world.

They're the dreams and livelihoods of our friends and neighbors, and they're living symbols of the goodness to be found here. They and their employees represent all that's best about us.

Some of our neighbors have voiced environmental concerns about the festival. A very important concern to everyone. In partnership with ZeroHero, Highlands Festivals has diverted over 15,000 pounds of waste through recycling and composting, making it one of the most progressive event "greening programs" in the South.

I hope this will allay the concerns about Bear Shadow Spring Music Festival that have been raised in recent weeks.

Please understand why so many are laboring to bring this festival to Highlands.

If you've heard rumors that the safe-

• See LETTERS page 9



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• ON THE SUNNY SIDE •

Valentine's Day

Antonius Valentine was a Roman Priest. He was born 245 AD. He was imprisoned for helping Christians escape that were being persecuted by the Roman Empire.

While in prison, he cured the jailor's daughter, Helena, of blindness. They fell in love. The day before his execution, he wrote her a letter and signed it, "I love you, from your Valentine."

He was beheaded February 14th, 269 AD. In 369 AD, he was named a Saint. 498 AD, the church made February 14th a National Holiday and called it Saint Valentine's Day.

About 1100 AD, young sweethearts started celebrating Valentine's Day like we do today. They would draw straws to see who was going to be whose Valentine on Saint Valentine's Day.

The first Valentine Day cards were sent in the 13th century. Initially, these were homemade. Sweethearts would decorate with romantic symbols including flowers, love knots and often lines of poetry. In 1850, Esther Howland, an American printer and artist was the first to publish and sell Valentine Cards in the United States.

One of the first and more popular poems

"A Rose is Red
A Violet is Blue
Honey is Sweet and So Are You
Thou Art My Love and I Am Thine,
I Draw You to be My Valentine"

Today over one billion Valentine Cards are mailed or exchanged each year and Valentine's Day is not only celebrated in the



Kenny Youmans

US, but also all over Europe.

Chocolates and Valentine's Day

Anthropologist have found evidence that chocolate was first produced in present day Mexico as early as 1900 BC. The cacao beans(chocolate) were so valuable that at one time the beans were used as currency. Chocolate was advertised as a most nourishing food. It was also advertised as a West India drink which cures and preserves the body of many diseases. Today dark chocolate is promoted to be a powerful source of antioxidants.

1861 Cadbury Chocolate's decided to market chocolate on Valentine's Day using beautiful heart-shaped boxes with familiar images of Cupids and roses. The box was so pretty it could be used over again and again. The beautiful boxes caught on and business began to flourish. It was the beginning of chocolate lovers all over the world to enjoy the beauty of finely wrapped chocolates.

Chocolate and sweethearts go together on Valentine's Day. Over one billion pounds of chocolate in beautiful heart shaped boxes will be sold the week of Valentine's Day.

"My days are filled with yearning;
My nights are full of dreams.
I'm always thinking of you;
I'm in a trance, it seems.
You're all I ever wanted;
I wish you could be mine;
And so I have to asked you:
Will you be my Valentine?"
Happy Valentine's Day to all!

PS: Ladies don't forget your husbands or boyfriends on Valentine's Day!

...LETTERS continued from page 8

ty of attendees and the larger community are not taken seriously, well, I'd once again invite you to visit bearshadownc.com.

And, finally, if you still believe that this is a nutty idea, I'd remind you that it's not nearly as nutty as the scheme cooked up by Messrs. Kelsey and Hutchinson nearly 150 years ago.

Thanks for reading this, and I hope I see you (safely distanced) at the Bear Shadow Spring Music Festival.

Marjorie Christiansen
Board Member
Highlands Festivals, Inc.

• See LETTERS page 12

PETITION to KEEP the FESTIVAL OUT OF HORSE COVE

I oppose the Bear Shadow Festival Highlands being held in the Macon County, NC community of Horse Cove in April. The event, as planned, is thought to be an imminent hazard of serious adverse health effects for our citizens related to the spread of COVID.

Additionally, the residents of Horse Cove community, as stated publicly, oppose the event for reasons of protected rare species, traffic safety, congestion, trash on road, and amplified reverberating sounds and I support them in these concerns.

My opposition may be electronically submitted. I support the authority to abate this recognized hazard.

For agreement, please respond via Email to
HorseCoveHelp@gmail.com
stating your name(s) and approval of this Petition.

Thank you, from Horse Cove residents.

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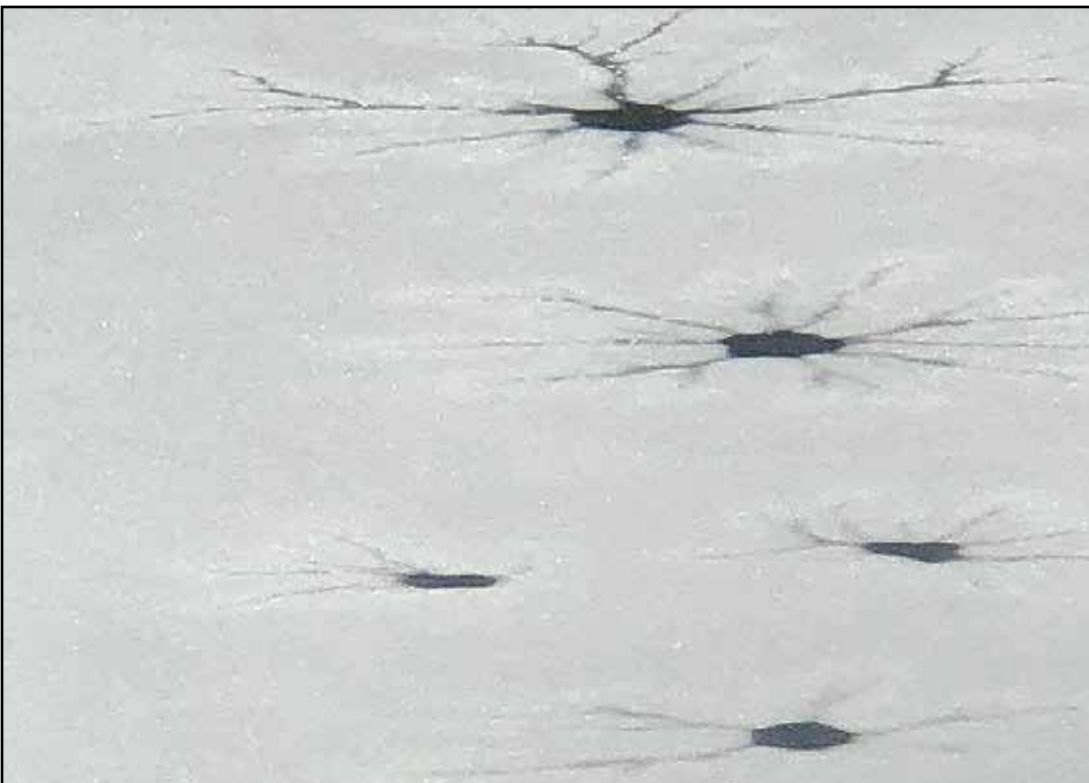


This past weekend's snowfall of about 6 inches was enough to guarantee fun on the slopes and Monkey Hill as well as snow-softened solitude on The Greenway and by-ways of town. Locals and visitors mingled at the Scaly Outdoor Center for snow tubing and at Monkey Hill for sledding and snowball fights. The phenomenon of Ice Spiders, or Ice Stars was even seen on Mirror Lake.

– Photos by Sara Benson,
Kim and
Rachel Lewicki



Winter fun in Highlands offers something for all!



...LETTERS continued from page 9

Innovative Bear Shadow spring music festival to provide a welcome boost to local community's economy and spirits

Dear Editor,

After an unprecedented year amidst a global pandemic, recent objections by the community to host the Bear Shadow spring music festival are shocking and counterintuitive. Small business owners and our local government have worked together to create revenue when a lack of tourism and social gatherings has created deficits, forcing some to seek grants or close their doors.

We must support efforts to infuse revenue back into our community, and Bear Shadow event organizers, Eleven Events, have a track record of doing so through the Highlands Food & Wine Festival. The annual, weekend-long festival – now in its sixth year -- has consistently provided a positive impact on the Town of Highlands through increased retail business revenue,

boosts in tourism, progressive environmental conservation efforts, and significant donations to the local non-profit community.

Highlands Food & Wine Festival has succeeded in marketing Highlands to destination visitors from over 20 states in the Southeast and beyond, including key drive markets like Atlanta, Greenville, Charlotte, Charleston, Birmingham, and northern Florida. Event demographic reports the average attendee has an annual income of \$320,000 and spends an average of \$1,000-3,000 in additional lodging, retail and restaurant spending during these events. Key local businesses have reported double-digit increases in retail sales during the festival weekend (traditionally in November), with sales rivaling those of a typical July – peak tourism season. Occupancy levels for hotels, inns and

private home rentals also remain at an all-time high during event weekends.

In partnership with ZeroHero, Highlands Festivals has diverted over 15,000 pounds of waste through recycling and composting, making it one of the most progressive event “greening programs” in the South. Festival organizers continue to develop ways to give back to the community, including awarding an annual culinary scholarship to the Culinary Institute of America, in honor of Highlands resident, Louis Osteen. The festival also donated over \$36,000 to the Highlands Food Pantry between 2016-2018.

In addition to losing the sense of camaraderie that special events provide, with clear benefits for our emotional well-being, communities like ours suffer

economic hardship with the loss of live events such as Highlands Food & Wine Festival and Bear Shadow. Eleven Events has been nimble, innovating new ways to gather together yet practice responsible social distancing to help offset losses during the pandemic, and Bear Shadow spring music festival bridges that gap.

Event planners have taken measures to ensure the show can go on within the current COVID-19 safety guidelines. To that end, ticket purchases were capped to allow 1/3 of capacity, and the event was moved to a larger venue – Oakleaf Home Farm – to allow for a pod-style event in which groups of 6- to 8-people would enjoy the live performances from self-contained viewing platforms, called coves (Contained Open-Air

Viewing Environments), spaced at least six feet from other coves. That is, until a small group of neighboring residents in Horse Cove raised objections to the event based on misinformation.

After seeing the careful planning and safety considerations for this event, I believe we should support the greater community good by welcoming Bear Shadow spring music festival to Macon County and applaud Eleven Events for their out-of-the-box thinking that has created innovative ways to flourish through challenging times and safely bring the community together when we need it most.

David Bock
Board Member
Highlands Festivals, Inc.

...IN-PERSON continued from page 1

Corbin, would require all 115 public school districts in North Carolina provide an in-person option for students. The Governor's announcement and letter to local districts — strongly encourages local districts to offer in-person instruction. While SB37 would mandate it, Governor Cooper is only requesting and urging it.

While one would be a requirement and the other a recommendation — the details of what in-person instruction would look like if implemented basically remains the same for both parties.

SB37 states schools have to provide access to in-person learning under Plan A (minimal social distancing) for students with exceptional needs.

It also requires schools to provide in-person learning options for all K-12 students under either Plan A or Plan B (moderate social distancing).

Families would still have the choice of remote learning for the remainder of the 2020-'21 school year.

For Macon County, that means all grades K-5 in Macon

County are currently and have been for months, in school for in-person instruction under Plan A four days a week. Grades 6-12 are under Plan B — with the exceptions of Union, Macon Early College, Highlands, and Nantahala, which are also under Plan A due to enrollment numbers.

Highlands Principal Brian Jetter said that the school has several factors to consider when contemplating changing the school's current plans.

“We are going to keep things as they are for now,” said Jetter. “Two reasons: 1. Teachers and students are learning valuable computer skills by practicing them on Fridays. 2. Teachers are doing the online lessons on Fridays, but they are also responsible for ‘deep cleaning’ their rooms to remove all possible traces of COVID from all room surfaces with disinfectant on Fridays. Custodians are doing the same to all the areas outside of classrooms in the buildings. That is a lot of work. On Fridays, the building smells like a hospital from all the disinfectant we use!”

Based on overall state atten-

dance in North Carolina Schools, more than 750,000 students are in-person, which is 48 percent of the student population, meaning 51 percent of students in the state are currently virtual. That percentage would change if the 25 districts that are currently virtual provide an in-person option, however, a large number of the students enrolled in virtual learning are doing so by choice.

Macon County Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin told members of the school board that with over 500 students in virtual learning across the district, having in-person instruction on Fridays isn't feasible at this point and allow teachers to address virtual learning needs on Fridays.

Dr. Baldwin also warned against a rush to in-person instruction without access to vaccines for teachers.

“Without vaccination within our school staff, increasing students on campus would increase possible exposures which would increase possible quarantines. My

• See IN-PERSON page 22

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Highlands School Basketball and Soccer highlights

Stories & photos by Brian O'Shea, Plateau Daily News



Highlands Lawson Shuler drives to the basket against Summit



Highlands Cooper Hall under pressure from Summit.

Highlands JV boys team wins on the road against Summit

Highlands boys junior varsity basketball team traveled to Cashiers last month and took on Summit Charter School in a game with drastically different halves, and walked away with a solid win, 43-23.

"We lost the first half by 2 but won the second half by 20, so we obviously got off to a slow start but finished strong," said Highlands Coach Bryan Dearth.

Highlands had 8 players who put points on the board, top scorers were Lawson Shuler with 12 and JJ Postell with 11.

"This is a tough year with

fewer games than normal, but the kids are working hard every day and enjoying the ability to play," said Dearth.

Summit Coach Jeremy Robinson said the Bears played hard but had an off-night shooting and couldn't keep pace with the Highlanders' offense.

"This team is young and is still learning to take care of the ball and defend well," said Robinson. "I expect to see us improve a lot throughout the course of the season, especially limiting turnovers and defending."



BREC Korbin Walters, Highlands Brent Sleight and BREC Carsen Williams.

Highlands boys varsity team defends home turf against BREC

Highlands boys varsity basketball team hosted Blue Ridge Early College last month and won 66-60.

Highlands Coach Brett Lamb said the Highlanders played well.

"Blue Ridge made it difficult by shooting well from the 3-point line," said Lamb. "It kept the game close. They really play hard and we had to match their intensity. Always a good game with us and BR."

Highlands Gig Chalker put up 23 points and Jeffrey Olvera scored 19, both career highs. Highlands Collin Stoltzfus had 8 rebounds.

BREC Coach Elijah Reece said he thinks the Bobcats played well overall.

"They ran the things I wanted, and we had probably our best shooting night of the season so far," said Reece. "We have a team full of quick athletes, but not many pure shooters. So, for them to shoot the way they did especially against our rival felt good. Our game plan was to really push the pace and get a lot of shots up, and we did a decent job of that. The guys also did a good job putting pressure on Brent Sleight. We held him to single digits scoring which

was good for how much of an impact he can make on a game."

Last year, Highlands defeated BREC by over 30 points, twice. This year, the Bobcats won the first match up of the season and trailed by less than 10 points throughout the second game.

"I'm proud of the jump the guys have made this year and I can honestly say they've gotten better every practice and game,"

said Reece. "They've bought in to what Coach [Tim] Mayse and I say and they're really working together as a team right now. Coach and I both think they still haven't reached what they're capable of this year, but we are hopeful they will continue to work hard and put this loss behind them."

The girls did not play because BREC's team was quarantined.



Highlands Nathan Keener and BREC Carson Druffel.



Highlands B. Bryson brings the ball down court against BREC last week at home.

BREC girls basketball team takes down Highlands on the road

Blue Ridge Early College girls varsity basketball team hopped a bus to take on Highlands last week for a game that came down to the final minutes, but BREC walked away with the win 42-37.

BREC Coach Tim Mayse said he thought the Lady Bobcats played great. He said both teams struggled towards the end of the close game, but that's not surprising due to the nature of the rivalry between BREC and Highlands.

"That's a true rivalry game for sure," said Mayse. "I thought our girls played very well against Highlands. They showed a lot of grit and determination. Playing a half-court game the entire time is really something we have struggled with in the past, but they did a great job sticking to the game plan the entire night."

Highlands Coach Brett Lamb said the Lady Highlanders made some good stops on defense but didn't make enough shots. He added to BREC's credit,

the Lady Bobcats hit some tough, timely shots in the final minutes of the game.

"I think we played well in spurts," said Lamb. "We have flashes of getting things going but couldn't sustain it. We did fight to the end but couldn't make the shots that we needed to when it counted. We relied too much on the 3-point shot and didn't attack the basket enough."

High scorers for BREC include Charlotte Sherrill with 18 points and 13 rebounds, Mahalah Stewart had 15 points and 10 rebounds, Chloe Fowler had 4 points, 6 rebounds, 4 assists, and 4 steals; Macy Heltsley scored 3 points and snagged 7 rebounds, and Vanessa Russell had 2 points and 2 rebounds. Sherrill is averaging 23.9 points per game this year and was listed on HighSchoolOT.com's watchlist, see more [HERE](#).

The Lady Bobcats only had 6 players for last week's game against Highlands because of athletes in quarantine, but Mayse said they should be getting players back by

the end of this week.

"I think only having 6 players is more of a mental challenge than a physical one for our players," said Mayse. "We don't have much depth and it doesn't matter to us if our opponent is deep. You still have to play us 5v5. I think staying out of foul trouble and not being able to push the tempo weighs on their minds more than the conditioning aspect of the game."

He added that it's always a close game when playing Highlands.

"Since I've been the girls' coach at Blue Ridge [2014], we have had 15 out of 21 games with Highlands decided by 10 points or less," said Mayse. "So, you know it's going to be a close game and it always comes down to who is going to make plays consistently in the end."

High scorers for Highlands include Bella Wilson-9, Hayley Borino-7, and Reese Schmitt-6. Highlands Julia May Schmitt had 5 rebounds.

Highlands boys soccer team kicks off season with win against Blue Ridge Early College

Highlands JJ Postell launches for a header against BREC on the road.



Highlands travelled to Cashiers last week to take on rivals Blue Ridge Early College for the season opener and walked away with the win, 3-2.

The Bobcats didn't go quietly and rallied in the final minutes to score two goals back-to-back, but couldn't clinch the win.

Highlands Coach Caleb Brown said it took about 10 minutes to fall into a rhythm, but as soon as the boys strung together a few passes and moved the ball effectively, they were able to create more chances and take some shots on goal.

"Given our lack of many substitutes, the boys certainly were playing hard and tired from all of their great effort," said Brown. "BREC showed some great determination and was able to score back two goals on us quickly. They cut the goal deficit to one, which did make us a bit nervous, but we were confident that the boys could pull through. Through their determination and will to give it their all they were able to make some great stops and even create a few chances on goal during the final minutes of the game."

BREC Coach Nick Pressler said the Bobcats played well for their first outing.

"We possessed the ball the majority of the first half, just couldn't find the net," he said. "They never gave up and put two good goals together late."

The first goal of the game was scored by BREC against

themselves after a deflection off the keeper. Highlands Jeffrey Olivera scored the second goal, followed by a score by Highlands Win Dyleski.

BREC's first goal was scored by Jacob Pressler, the second was a header by Korbin Walters with an assist from Pressler. While they had the momentum with them, it wasn't enough to take the win.

"With basketball and soccer going at same time we have not had a full team practice," said Coach Pressler. "We will get better and I think we can contend well with the other conference teams. Silly mistakes and lack of focus in the first half put us behind on the score."

Athletes playing multiple sports with overlapping seasons is affecting teams throughout the state, and Brown said he's proud of the players' dedication.

"For a team that has not had a great deal of time practicing together, the players played their positions excellent," said Brown. "They created chances, moved fast on the ball, and really showed their impressive conditioning by playing a full fast paced 80-minute game without walking or gassing out. I am exceptionally proud at the work ethic these boys have shown to play two sports at the same time and give it their all in every game. I could not be more pleased with their performance on the field and the final result."

...BEAR SHADOW continued from page 1

not brought up.

However, Dr. Michele Mangum, author of a letter-to-the-editor that was published in local media, had prepared a statement for Tuesday night's public comment period.

"I speak as a physician who has serious concerns that the festival will significantly spread COVID-19; a likely super spreader event."

"The number of County cases has decreased somewhat recently based on the # of positive test results. However, only 6.8% - 8.2% of the County population has been tested. Asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic non-tested cases are difficult to estimate. In late September, the CDC estimated 40% of the infected carriers are asymptomatic."

"Governor Cooper has enacted a series of executive orders to attempt control of the virus in NC."

"The DHHS has issued several Secretarial Directives to this end as well."

"These include a limit on outdoor gatherings of 50 or 100 people. 1,000 festival attendees are expected and planned for. The festival obviously exceeds the 50 to 100-person limit. The Assistant Secretary of Public Health at DHHS stated it is likely that in April we'll be still under an order which restricts the number of people gathering to a level considerably below that of the festival. In summary, it's obvious the festival is in violation of the NC outdoor mass gatherings limit."

"EO's and Directives also require face masks for outdoor gatherings of non-household persons where social distancing is not possible. The festival ignores this recommendation to prevent viral spread. The planned pods (called COVEs) are to hold 6-8 persons each. It is not reasonable to think that each 6 or 8-person group is from the same household. Nor is an all-household requirement mandated by the festival for each pod. Not wearing masks is allowed within the pod. Social distancing is not possible within a pod. In summary, the festival is in violation of the NC face mask mandate."

"Overall, the festival violates the state guidelines and mandates on number of attendees and mask use. The number of attendees and the festival plans represent a viral spreader hazard for the County."

"The Director of Emergency Services and Macon County Public Health, in coordination with the NC DHHS, has a responsibility and mandate to assure the festival is not an imminent hazard to the residents of the County, which, as a physician, I believe it is."

"More personally, the festival is not some public humanitarian event that could benefit all. Any casual perception that residents' objections amount to just some finicky people who don't want noise or congestion is disdainful. The festival is primarily a commercial event to benefit the few at the health of the many."

In communication with Highlands Newspaper, Frank and Ruthie Oliver had

this to say:

"I do not fault the event organizers in any way for a failure of information or lack of communication. They were very open and forthcoming with information about the event."

"My husband and I simply believed the scale of the event was not suitable for Horse Cove. There was a very wide variety of different concerns in the neighborhood in opposition to the event."

The following is a prepared statement by Christy Medford at Eleven Events concerning the change of plans.

"The much-anticipated Bear Shadow Music Festival — scheduled for April 23-25, 2021 — now is making plans to relocate the larger "Base Camp" portion of the festival to another venue after a small group of neighboring residents in Horse Cove stirred objections to the event. The Base Camp portion of the festival was slated to be held at Oakleaf Home Farm, previously known as Black Rock Preserve, a 17-acre private property a few miles outside Highlands, NC, with other portions located at smaller venues throughout the area. Event organizers have decided to relocate Base Camp, with more information regarding the event's new location to be announced soon.

"To say that we are disappointed in having to relocate from Oakleaf Home Farm is a tremendous understatement," emphasized Casey Reid, Festival Director and Partner at Eleven Events. "Despite our best efforts to ensure a magnificent experience at Oakleaf — a spectacular place for a top-quality, fun and safe event for a year that presents unique challenges — we have been unable to reach agreement with a few dissenters and, therefore, this concert site is off the table. We have gone to extraordinary lengths to accommodate everyone's interests and offer informative meetings to discuss concerns face-to-face. However, we could not find common ground with a few individuals to

allow the event to go forward at this venue."

Reid continued, "While we respect the points-of-view of everyone involved, we do not endorse misinformation about the event being spread in the community. We had hoped that the few people who are objecting to the venue would better understand — with the information documents provided and an invitation to meet — how we have planned a best-in-class live music celebration with safety and environmental sustainability as our top priorities. We thank local officials, sponsors, performers and fans from across the region who have supported and continue to support Bear Shadow and its mission: to promote and give back to the local community. Nevertheless, we are preparing to unveil a new location for Bear Shadow Base Camp, as we remain committed to supporting the economic development and stellar reputation of the greater Highlands area."

As partners with the community, in a community that we care deeply about, we hope the below addresses any on-going concerns:

- Bear Shadow is a production of Highlands Festivals, Inc., a 501c3 organization whose mission is to promote destination visitation, economic stimulation and awareness of Highlands, NC, through event marketing.

- Highlands Festivals, Inc., has also produced Highlands Food & Wine Festival since 2016, which has provided significant support for Highlands and its stakeholders during what is typically a shoulder season for the seasonal town.

- Any net proceeds from Bear Shadow and Highlands Food & Wine are invested back into marketing initiatives and designated charitable partners.

- In cooperation with local authorities, **•See BEAR SHADOW page 22**

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• OBITUARY •

Sheila Potts Harbold

Sheila Potts Harbold, 56, of Highlands, NC and Alto, GA passed away February 7, 2021. She was born October 11, 1964 in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri to Lucille Zachary Potts of Highlands, NC, and the late Wade H. Potts. Sheila was a homemaker and enjoyed hobbies including, cross stitching, crocheting, and listening to gospel bluegrass music. She was a friend to many and will be missed by all that knew and loved her.

Sheila is survived by her mother, Lucille Potts; a daughter, Amanda Perkins; two



bonus daughters, Chrystal Hulseley and Amber Pass. In addition to her father, Sheila is preceded in death by her husband Michael Harbold; three brothers, Keith Potts, Johnny Potts, and Wayne "Rug" Potts; a sister Teresa Potts.

A Celebration of Life Service will be announced at a later date.

Bryant-Grant Funeral Home and Crematory is serving the Harbold family. Online condolences can be made at www.bryantgrantfuneralhome.com

...TESTING continued from page 1

Management Director Warren Cabe updated commissioners last Thursday and reported that since assuming COVID testing duties at the public health department beginning January 21, testing is now being conducted five days per week and is now housed in a drive-thru operation routed in front of the Sheriff's Office under a canopy completely separate from the vaccination location.

"We have been able to double COVID-19 testing appointments scheduled from 16 per hour to 32 per hour with the capability of expanding to 40 per hour if needed," said Cabe.

Since taking over on January 21, Cabe reported that EMS had averaged administering 42 COVID tests per day with a total of 481 administered as of Feb. 3.

Cabe said that his department has also developed a plan to administer COVID vaccinations to home bound individuals with the assistance of Senior Services, the health department, EMS, and the Highlands-Cashiers Community Vaccination Clinic.

Not only will EMS also continue to help the Highlands-Cashiers Community Vaccination Clinic with their walk-in clinics when supplies become available but Cabe noted that a plan for a walk-in clinic for the Franklin area has been developed for when supplies are available.

The Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation (HCHF) also continues to sponsor local COVID-19 testing initiatives on the plateau. On Feb.15 the format will be drive-through at the Village Green in Cashiers from 11am-1pm and the Highlands Recreation Center from 2:30-4:30pm.

On Feb. 22 the drive-through times will be 11am-1pm at the Highlands Recreation Center and 2:30-4:30p.m. at the Village Green in Cashiers.

Pre-registration is required through the following link <https://cov19.health/#/> by noon the day prior to testing. Choose "register as a new patient" and the office loca-

tion code will be: MTNPKUCR. Negative results will be provided through this online link as well. Saliva testing will be administered while monthly supplies lasts and then the nasal swab collection will be used.

Participants will be asked to present a photo ID and insurance information on site. Uninsured participants are eligible to participate with out cost, however a photo I.D. is required.

The tests will be administered by Mountain Park Urgent Care (MPUC), of Sylva, NC in full compliance with CDC, FDA, and NCDHHS guidelines. The County Health Departments are provided COVID-19 test reports as required by NCDHHS.

Anyone testing positive will be contacted directly by MPUC. A COVID-19 test is a one-time indicator. Frequent hand washing, face coverings, and social distancing at least six feet apart are also important for protection to slow the spread of COVID-19. Please refer questions to info@mtnparkuc.com.

Cabe also noted that his department has established the drive-thru to be able to also administer vaccines, once additional supplies are made available from the state.

"The drive-thru COVID test site has been modified slightly so once we get an adequate supply of vaccine, we can administer COVID vaccinations after all COVID testing appointments are fulfilled each day," said Cabe. "This should allow 1-2 hours for testing each day and the remainder of the day open for vaccinations, in addition to the regular vaccination line."

EMS and Emergency Services has also been able to staff the observation section of the regular vaccination drive-thru line with a full ambulance crew and operations support staff for the health department as well.

The additional work by EMS has not impacted regular operations for the county's EMS support.

"None of our regular daily ambulance staffing assignments (5 ambulance crews, 1

EMS supervisor) have been affected by the additional staffing," said Cabe. "All other duties have been filled by part-time or off-duty full-time EMS staff."

While EMS is now managing the testing site for Macon County — a newly developed call center has been launched to accommodate the extraordinary volume of calls the county is receiving for both vaccines and testing appointments.

"At the Board of Commissioners meeting on January 12, 2021 Macon County, like all counties across the state and nation was in the infancy stage of the vaccination process," said County Manager Roland. "Similar to every other aspect COVID-19 Pandemic, a vaccination process of this magnitude was a first for this organization. The moment vaccine became available, our phone system was overwhelmed with calls to the testing and vaccination call center. In the days, leading up to the January 12 meeting, call volume was exceeding 500 calls per hour, every hour, every day. This resulted in a complete shutdown of the entire county phone system for hours and sometimes days at a time.

After the call center — which was opened with the help of local business own-

er Phil Drake, was launched, the 45-minute wait time is now less than four seconds a call.

To date these call centers have assisted with the registration of approximately 5,000 Macon County Citizens. All of which have now been placed on waiting list rather than given an appointment slot. The wait list which was developed from scratch by IT and has brought about a more efficient means of scheduling in response to the ever-moving target we are presented with by the state. It contains phase specific information by which individuals on the list can be sorted and contacted immediately via phone, email or reverse-911 if they are in the appropriate phase and vaccine becomes available.

The call centers have been staffed using MCPCH employees and county employees from multiple other departments including Sheriff, DSS, TAX, IT and Recreation, in addition to five part-time employees who were hired and started work the week of January 18th.

The call centers operate from 8-5, 5 days per week. Call 349-2517 for anything testing and 524-1500 for anything vaccine.



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Why Renovation May Make Sense

Over the past few months there have been numerous articles about the active real estate market, multiple offers and properties selling above asking price.

At this point, our inventory is very low and as I have said in the past, if a property is still available it is for one of three reasons: it is in need of work (deferred maintenance, out of date features or is functionally obsolete); it is overpriced; or a combination of both of these reasons.

Most agents currently have a list of buyers who are waiting for the right property and ready to make an offer, but without enough listings in good condition, that leaves the option of only showing homes that need renovating or finding a lot to build on.

Choosing to renovate is a big decision, but there are advantages to it. The first that comes to mind is that you can see what the house is like on the property.

You can see how the light is at different times of the day and you can experience the view. You will have the opportunity to make the house function the way you want it to. Before committing, you may have the opportunity to meet with designers and contractors, obtain preliminary estimates and create a budget.

Price is probably the best reason to consider a renovation. Reviewing some property sales from the past few months that I was involved in or had good knowledge of, I picked 5 homes that sold and needed renovation and 5 homes that were newer or had been updated and were in good condition. Both categories had samples in various sizes, locations; with or without views; etc.

Updated properties sold from \$325 to \$550 per square foot, at an average of \$470/SF. Properties in need of work sold from \$180 to \$295/SF, with an average of \$247/SF. Assuming a 2,500 SF house purchased at \$247/SF (\$617,500),



Carl Romberg, BIC
Landmark Realty Group
678-936-9309

you could have a renovation budget of \$557,500 and be at the average price for something that's already done. That's quite a budget for a house that size and renovation costs are likely to be much lower than that.

Other reasons to renovate are that you are able to choose the style, colors, finishes and ap-

pliances that you like. It is an opportunity to correct issues that may be apparent, rather than have surprises that are concealed. It is also an opportunity to improve the efficiency of the house, with new systems, better windows or adding insulation. In many cases you may be able to use the home immediately, while in the planning stages and schedule renovations during the off season. If desired, you can spread out the renovations over several years, tackling one project at a time.

There is no doubt that renovation can be expensive, slow and difficult to live through. I know firsthand, as I am living through it. Dishes are being washed in the bathroom sink, appliances back-ordered and some subcontractors already behind schedule because of weather.

There are a number of important pieces of the puzzle to make a renovation come together. It begins with a list of priorities and a real estate agent that has knowl-

edge of renovation and some vision for properties that need work. Involving talented designers and professionals at an early stage is important. It's important to check that changes can be made according to zoning, ordinances or restrictive covenants. And always, be sure to obtain the proper permits when required. Maybe now is the time to consider a renovation.

Note that the numbers presented are from a small sample and comments are generalizations. There are many different factors that go into the actual value of a house and each buyer doing proper research and investigation is essential.

• Carl Romberg is the Broker-in-Charge of Landmark Realty Group's Highlands Office. Landmark has been the firm with the largest dollar volume of sales on the plateau each of the past 8 years. Carl can be reached at 678-936-9309 or carl@landmarkrg.com.

...REVENUES continued from page 1

on this assumption," said Roland during last week's budget work session. "Some sources were indicating as much as a 50% drop in sales tax revenue during the first quarter of the fiscal year."

Now, a couple of months into the fiscal year, many local governments in North Carolina are realizing that tax revenues did not experience the loss anticipated — and in fact, revenues have soared across the state.

Sales Tax was budgeted at a level 5.2% below the amount originally budgeted for FY '20 resulting in an original budget revenue loss of \$1M for Macon County. Through the first four months of FY '21 however, sales tax collections are up 16% over 2020 actuals in Macon County and 11% statewide. As a result of this trend, Macon County increased the sales tax revenue projections for the remainder of the year to the 2020 actual level.

"The collection rate for property tax and motor vehicles was reduced by 1% to 97.3% in the original budget based upon an anticipated reduction in property owners "ability to pay" due to what everyone was certain would be a forthcoming recession," explained Roland. "This was based upon guidance from NCACC and historical Macon County Data following the recession in 2009. As of 12/31/20 however, we are collecting taxes at the same percentage we did in the previous year, thus revenue projections for the remainder of FY'21 have been increased to the prior year levels."

Not only are other county revenue sources collecting at the same levels as the previous year — they are exceeding prior year's levels.

To begin FY '21 a 10% decrease from FY '19 actuals was budgeted for fees collected in Register of Deeds (ROD), Building Inspections and On-

site Wastewater and wells again based upon a projected declining economy. Fortunately, however, Macon County experienced the exact opposite:

- 7-1-20 – 12-31-20
- ROD 70% higher than 2019 actuals
- Building inspections 3% higher than 2019 actuals
- OSWW and Well fees- 64% higher than 2019 actuals

"We have been able to take advantage of these unforeseen revenue increases in service fees through January and have increased the service fee revenue to FY'20 levels for the remainder of the fiscal year," said Roland. "These revenue increases have resulted in our ability to largely close the budget gap we faced to begin the fiscal year, getting us to a level that is almost as if COVID-19 had never happened."

Due to an increase in revenues at the mid-year review, Roland proposed county commissioners

approve budget amendments for capital expenditures totaling just under \$2 million.

"Although much uncertainty remains for FY '22, the \$1.7M in additional revenue gained from a "booming yet fragile" economy enables us to restore capital funding to the priority areas of public safety and education," said Roland. "It will enable us to begin working to identify and make recommendations for addressing inadequacies within our pay-scale in the coming fiscal year."

Moving forward, Roland said the county is taking a conservative approach, however many projects that were originally cut from the budget due to COVID19 are now able to be completed.

Roland also proposed restoring capital funding to the school system to prior year levels, which will allow Macon County Schools to complete needed capital projects to improve

the schools.

The community funding pool was originally reduced by 50 percent in the budget, however with the budget surplus, Roland proposed restoring the line item to original levels.

The additional revenues will be allocated to the Sheriff's Department to purchase the originally requested six new vehicles, as well as funding to complete the installation of in-car camera systems for all vehicles and body-cameras for Sheriff's Office staff.

Macon County Emergency Management will now be able to purchase a new stretcher and lift as well as an ambulance remounting and EMS coordinator SUV.

The Macon County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the budget amendments proposed by Roland.

• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

Valentine's Day exemplifies God's love

Dr. Curtis Fussell
Co-Pastor at First Presbyterian Church Highlands

Valentine's Day approaches. Surprisingly, this day originally celebrated a "saint" in the Christian church who was martyred for his love of God. Nowadays, the "St." is omitted and we associate the day with romantic love. Yet, the love of God, can still be recognized in our secular celebration of Valentine's Day in the following story.

The writer Drew Duke tells the story of her second grade Valentine's Day party. Before the day, the teacher placed a big box at the front of the classroom. It was the "Valentine Postbox." Each student was invited to drop valentine cards into the box addressed to their fellow students. On Valentine's Day, one student was designated as the "postal carrier" to distribute the cards.

Earlier that week Drew's mother brought home a package of 35 valentine cards. Drew asked her, "Why did you buy so many?"

Her mother replied, "So you can give a card to everyone in your class."

Drew said, "No mom! We don't do it that way. We only give cards to our special friends. I only need four cards."

Her mother said nothing else. Drew signed her name on four cards, addressed to her special friends.

When the Valentine's Day party began, the "postal carrier" began handing out the cards. Some very popular children got loads of cards. Drew also received numerous cards and was having a wonderful time.

But then Drew noticed that the girl sitting in front of her had not received any cards. Her head was drooping lower and lower. Suddenly, the postal carrier delivered to her a Valentine letter. Her face lit up like morning sunshine. She tore open the valentine letter, hurrying to see who had cared enough to send her a card.

Drew looked over her shoulder and saw that it was signed "Your secret admirer." The little girl smiled and glanced around the room, wondering who it could be. Drew said, "I knew who it was, but I didn't tell her. I recognized it as my mother's handwriting."

Drew's mother had obtained a class roster and had sent a card to every child in the class. What Drew learned from her mother was what her mother learned from God: God's love reaches those overlooked because everybody is included in God's love!

Yes, the Gospel says, "God so loved the world that God sent Jesus," a "card" if you will, sent not to special friends, but to everyone; even to people we don't regard as friends. What an amazing thing to receive and live in the wonder of that "card" sent from God.

Proverbs 3:5

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464 US Hwy 64 east, Cashiers

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Pastor Brent Metcalf • 743-5470

Sun. 10:45am, S.S. 9:30am. Wed. 6pm supper and teaching.

Tues. Guys study 8am, Gals 10am.

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Pastor Jim Kinard

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

1st & 3rd Sunday night Service: 7 p.m.

Wednesdays - Supper at 6 p.m.

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www.cbchighlands.com • 526-4685

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Sundays: 9:30am - Adult Sunday School; 9:45am (masks required) Early Worship Service; 11:15am (masks optional)

Worship Service; Sundays 10:45am-Children's Program,

Sunday Youth-4:30pm - 6:30pm Dinner

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Dr. Mark Ford, Pastor • 220 Main Street, Highlands

Sun.: Worship 10:45 am; Sun.: Bible Study 9:30 am

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

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Curtis Fussell & Emily Wilmarth, pastors

526-31 • 75 • fpchighlands.org

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Wed: Choir: 6p

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John 3:16

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Rev. Marty Kilby

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Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

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

Jan. 19

• At 1 p.m., officers responded to a one-vehicle accident on Cook Road.

Jan. 27

• At 4:25 p.m., officers responded to a two-vehicle accident in Highlands Plaza.

Feb. 6

• At 2:54 a.m., Alexis Sade Hall, 23, of Franklin, was arrested for DUI. She was issued an unsecured \$3,500 bond. Her trial date is April 14.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Feb. 1.

Feb. 1

• At 4:49 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Bobby Jones Rd.

Feb. 5

• At 7:15 p.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on the Cashiers Road.

Feb. 6

• At 2:08 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Lyman Zachary Road.

• At 4:08 p.m., the dept. was called to the Dillard Road to investigate the source of smoke.

• At 6:53 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Horse Cove Road.

• At 7:15 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance on the Cashiers Road.

• At 7:24 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Zermatt Circle.

• At 10:01 p.m., the dept. provided public assistance on Buck Creek Road.

Feb. 7

• At 2:43 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on East View Way.

...BEAR SHADOW continued from page 16

Bear Shadow has developed detailed plans to ensure a successful and safe event in what is an extraordinary time. This includes focus in the following areas:

- COVID-19 Safety - [https://bearshadownc.com/information/safety/o Traffic and parking](https://bearshadownc.com/information/safety/o%20Traffic%20and%20parking) - [https://bearshadownc.com/information/o Environmental Sus-](https://bearshadownc.com/information/o%20Environmental%20Sustainability)

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• We continue to welcome direct contact with any concerned community members. Please reach out via email at info@bearshadownc.com so that we can setup a time to discuss your concerns in more detail.

- Kim Lewicki

...IN-PERSON continued from page 12

fear is that if we rush to Plan A, we would have additional quarantines, and instead of being able to offer Plan A two or three days a week for all schools, we would end up all virtual because of quarantines," Dr. Baldwin.

Jetter noted that the measures Highlands School has taken so far this year have been effective.

"We've been doing well since the start of the year doing 80% of the instruction 'in-person' without any Covid clusters or full-blown student, faculty, or employee infections," said Jetter. "I think everything from enforcing masks, to taking temps, to weekly testing, to limiting visitors and student gatherings, to deep cleaning has allowed us to get

this far with our students in attendance 80% time/four of five school days a week. I'm hesitant to change any of that until Covid is well under control for the safety of students and employees."

Jetter noted that whole both Senate Bill 37 and the Governor's recommendation suggest that social distancing requirements can be relaxed to allow in-person school to continue, Highlands School will continue to 'social distance' in the rooms, in the halls, in desks in ALL grades until Covid is under some control.

SB37 is currently still in the Senate for consideration and if passed in the Senate will move to the House for consideration.

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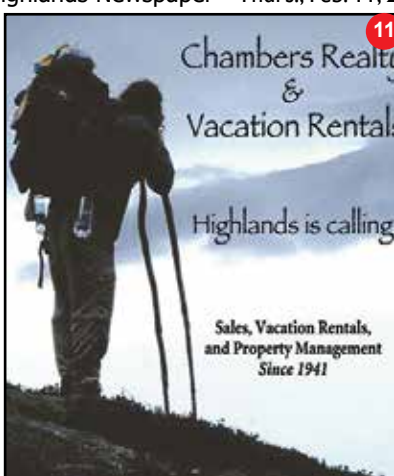
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