

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Jan. 27, 2022

STRs are now on Town Board's plate

Monday night, the Planning Board put the finishing touches on its Unified Development Code amendments in regards to Short-term Rentals. The ball is now in the Town Board's court and according to Assistant Plan-

ning Director Michael Mathis, it will likely be addressed soon during a special-called Town Board meeting.

As Planning Board Chairman Brad Armstrong has said from the start, the work the Plan-

ning Board was doing was for the future. Nothing it is recommending to the Town Board regarding amended uses or amendments to the UDO will have anything to do with properties which are currently

• See STRs page 14

Highlands Hurricanes win home meet

By Steve Hott
Head Coach

Hurricanes Swim Team

On Saturday, January 22, the Highlands Hurricanes hosted Smoky Mountain Aquatics Club for a 2022 Winter Invitation.

Due to weather concerns the North Georgia Rapids and Jackson County Swim Teams chose not to attend. The Hurricanes set three team records and two pool records on their way to a 396 to Smoky Mountain Aquatics Club's 124 win.

All 21 Hurricanes in the meet scored.

The Hurricanes were led by three Jr. Olympians: Chase Kenter, Finneaus Garner, Aniah McKim, Trinity Fernandez Faust and Bella Batista, all who scored

• See HURRICANES page 16



From left: Asst. Fire Chief Robbie Forrester, Fireman of the Year, Jeff Burnette and Fire Chief Ryan Gearhart at this year's Fire Dept. Awards Banquet at OEI's Spring House, Saturday, Jan. 22.

Photo by Kim Lewicki

A year of service is commended at banquet

At the annual Highlands Fire and Rescue Award Banquet held Jan. 22 at OEI's Spring House, the volunteer force with significant others in attendance was recognized by their own and by Mayor Pat Taylor.

"I want to be here to honor you because I know if I need you for anything that happens in Highlands you will be there. You are all first-responders, and you will respond to routine situations and

• See SERVICE page 17

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How ARPA funds are reaching local gov'ts in Western NC

Highlands is receiving a total of \$313,000

By Shelby Harris
Carolina Public Press

As with many aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the legislation providing recovery funds to local governments, is complicated.

What is ARPA?

Federal lawmakers crafted ARPA, signed into law March 11, 2021, with the goal of pulling the nation out of economic distress wrought by the pandemic by improving the country's infrastructure and offering direct financial relief to families.

While the \$1.9 trillion plan funded a third round of stimulus checks and several other tax relief programs, Congress appropriated the majority of ARPA funds — \$401 billion — to state, local and tribal governments, according to

the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

"The state and local program was designed for short-term and long-term recovery support, including helping localities as new variants of COVID emerge," U.S. Treasury spokesperson Dayanara Ramirez said.

What did North Carolina get?

North Carolina is slated to receive \$8.6 billion in ARPA funding, which is being disbursed two ways.

"There are two pots of money," said Jamilla Hawkins, chief of staff for the N.C. Pandemic Recovery Office. "North Carolina as a state received \$5.4 billion for the state fiscal recovery. For local governments, there's a local fiscal recovery."

The \$5.4 billion Hawkins

• See ARPA page 22

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• MAYOR ON DUTY •

Town Board to begin work to address STRs

On Monday night the Highlands Planning Board completed a review of the draft proposal for amending the UDO as related to short term rentals. Their recommendations have now been sent to the Highlands Town Board for review. I anticipate board holding several special work sessions to process the planning board's work and recommendations.



Highlands Mayor
Patrick Taylor

I want to thank all of the Highlands Planning Board members for the hard work and diligence that they put forward in addressing this critical issue. I, along with the Town Board, appreciate their extraordinary effort. Now, the Town Board will have to get to work in moving the process forward without delay.

The town should always continue to review and strive to improve what is done in the public interest. We are now in a period of review concerning the response to the recent heavy snow event. Izzy was not a normal snowstorm. Some areas of the

town got as much as a foot of snow, which made the response from our employees a major challenge.

This week our road crews have been using excavators and dump trucks to remove the mounds of snow in the downtown areas. This time-consuming process is a challenge, but needs to be done. The loads of snow will be transported and downloaded at town sites such

as the sewer plant. It will be a while before it all melts, but it is better to have it melt off location rather than in the business district.

At the January Town Board meeting I asked the public works committee and pertinent staff to review our schedule and protocols for plowing roads. Some folks, especially those on private roads, were concerned that town crews were late in plowing their roads. The huge volume of snow aggravated the situation. I look forward to the staff and committee reporting to the full board on how the town can improve snow plowing practices.

Another area of improvement is in how residents can report power outages. In this storm we had no major outages that impacted the entire town. I had asked folks not to call 911 about outages after hours since a heavy call load could affect emergency response times. But, we do need to develop a better system for folks report power outages, not just in snow storms, but throughout the year. I have asked staff and the public works committee to also review options to address this problem. Maybe the public safety committee will also review this issue since it does impact county emergency services and how the town interfaces with that system.

There are systems and services that the town can use to handle after hours service problems. It will cost the town money, but the improvements to the reporting system will outweigh the incurred additional costs. The staff is looking at options and will work with the committee to develop a proposal to the full board. I want the town to move forward to address this issue without delay.

• HIC'S VIEW •



• WEATHER •

Thu, 27-Jan	Fri, 28-Jan	Sat, 29-Jan	Sun, 30-Jan
42°F 23°F	39°F 12°F	25°F 15°F	40°F 21°F
Sunshine mixing with clouds	Cloudy and chilly	Mostly sunny and quite cold	Mostly sunny and not as cold
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High: 45° Low: 22°	High: 39° Low: 25°	High: 23° Low: 6°	High: 40° Low: 15°

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The Muff – Turkey, Sopressa salami, ham, cream cheese olive spread, smoked provolone cheese and shredded lettuce on sub roll. \$13

The Porker – Shaved ham, Jarlsberg cheese, DJs pickles with homemade honey mustard on ciabatta. \$12

The Hudson – Turkey, Provolone cheese (Have it your way - cucumber, lettuce, onion, banana peppers, black olives, DJs pickles). \$13



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• LETTERS •

Please join B.E.A.R. in opposition to open bear hunting seasons in Pantertown

Dear Editor,

The B.E.A.R. Task Force stands in opposition to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission proposal to open bear hunting seasons in Pantertown Valley (officially known as the Pantertown-Bonas Defeat Bear Sanctuary).

As North Carolina was settled, the hunting of bears was "intensive and unregulated," causing populations to plunge. The state's bear sanctuary system was created in 1971 to provide a safe natural environment where bears could live and multiply without being hunted. It has been "a primary factor in the recovery of bear populations."

With populations rebounding, the state recently decided to "add or remove sanctuary based on bear population objectives, in combination with hunter desires and human-bear interactions."

Pantertown Valley is not just a bear sanctuary; it is a Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and a Mountain Treasures Area. It is also a very popular year-round destination for hiking, camping, bicycling, rock climbing, etc.

Human-bear encounters have been reported in the valley, which prompted the Friends of Pantertown to do educational outreach as well as install bear-proof food lockers at two campsites. Their efforts have been so effective that in 2021 there were 0 reports of problems.

It is our feeling that a hunting season is not necessary. Indeed, it would turn the bears' heretofore peaceful lives into a cycle of harassment, terror and killing. Additionally, it would affect people recreating in the valley and living nearby as they are subjected to dogs running wild and the sounds of gunshots. At the height of the fall color season no less.

Bear biology naturally regulates populations. In response to poor food availability, they have fewer babies. It makes sense that as bears are killed, more food will be available, with a resultant increase in population.

The B.E.A.R. Task Force simply cannot condone the unfair and violent "sport" of hunting with dogs, especially in Pantertown Valley. We are dedicated to education and the promotion of safe, harmonious coexistence between humans and bears. Therefore, we have committed to providing two additional bear-proof storage lockers and educational materials for the Friends of Pantertown to continue their successful efforts to reduce human-bear incidents.

If you oppose the NCWRC proposal, please submit comments by January 31 to: regulations@ncwildlife.org. Include name, phone and mailing address.

Cynthia Strain,
Chairperson
B.E.A.R. Task Force
828-526-9227

• See **LETTERS** page 8

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...LETTERS continued from page 4

The reasons for NCWRC proposed rule change to allow for black bear hunting in Panthertown Valley is unfounded

Dear Editor,

When I first read about the NCWRC's proposed rule change to allow black bear hunting in Panthertown Valley during black bear hunting season (October 18-November 20; December 13-January 1), I laughed because I thought someone was making a joke, as in a "haha" joke. But alas, no, it turns out the NCWRC actually thinks allowing bear hunting with a permit in Panthertown Valley is a good idea.

Panthertown Valley is one of the premier hiking and camping destinations in the state of North Carolina, receiving over 35,000 visitors each year. Peak visitor season (a.k.a – "leaf-peeping-season"),

when the trails are so full of hikers finding a parking space is nearly impossible, coincides with black bear hunting season. What's the one thing that would make this experience better? Why everyone knows the answer is the hunting of black bears during this peak season.

I am no tree-hugging, vegan-long-hair, hippie liberal. I love quail hunting with my black English cocker spaniel; I have an 11-point white-tail hanging on my office wall. But even a guy like me recognizes the stupidity of this proposed regulation change. Imagine hunters, with their bear dogs chasing black bear all through Panthertown Valley, hunting black bear while

thousands of people simultaneously hike the trails. What could possibly go wrong?! Imagine further, those hunters dragging the dead, bloody carcass of a black bear over one of the many trails, into either the Cold Mountain or Salt Rock parking lots. That grown adults need to be told this is a bad idea boggles my mind.

I have spent literally hundreds of hours hiking and fishing Panthertown Valley. I have only seen a black bear once. But even if human/bear encounters in Panthertown Valley are a "problem", they happen primarily with overnight campers. The solution is a bear-box at each campsite (BEAR Proof Food Storage BOX – What

is it? – Outdoor Luxuriez), not hunting of black bears during peak leaf season. The National Park Service uses such boxes all throughout Yellowstone with great effect (I've actually used one on Slough Creek in the northwest part of Yellowstone; they work great.)

If you, like me, think bear hunting in Panthertown Valley is a bad, bad idea, I am writing to ask you to send an email of opposition to the proposed rule change. You can email your opposition to: regulations@ncwildlife.org. Comments are due by 1/31/2022.

Kirk Dornbush
Highlands



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• INVESTING AT 4,118 Ft. •

Snow Down, Highlands!

Ahhhhh. Winter in Highlands. Have you ever seen a topsy-turvy (or flip) book? It's a book, whose story begins from the front cover and goes about halfway, then you turn the book upside down and start from the back cover to read a similar story, or the same story from a different point of view. Lately, I've been thinking of Highlands in the same light.



Jeannie Chambers
Chambers Realty
& Vacation Rentals

be a quiet, little sleepy town, but a man has got to eat and provide, so Highlands began slowly, like a mole coming out of its hole, slowly shortening the winter off season as it was called, to a few brave shop owners staying open, more restaurants opening and staying open, and when hotels couldn't keep up, homes that weren't shut down for the winter (as most still were) would open their homes to vacation renters (or the new derogatory term, Transient dwellers.)

It has taken about

50 years, but now Highlands is making a mountain out of that mole hill.

Up until the '80s, in the summer, Lee's Inn, Mitchell's Motel and King's Inn helped house vacationers. Lee's Inn burned down in 1982, and Kelsey & Hutchison Lodge was built in its place and offered a nice, more upscale kind of place to stay. Kings Inn burned in 1994, and already been closed to guests for a while. I remember that fire, we could see it from our home, over four miles away. All three of those places now belong to the OEI group and offer year-round places to stay, with the latest venture earmarked for employee housing, if the rumor mill is correct.

Look at real estate and property values. You can look at the last 25 years of average Macon County building permit costs to understand the trend. This information was gotten from city-data.com and presumably attained from Macon County records. Note the drop in building when the recession hit. That's when a lot of the rehabbing of older homes started. Contractors who were used to full home-builds were happy to get a job redoing a deck, or a kitchen or bath renovation.

# of Permits	Year	Avg cost of home
347	1997	\$124,600
359	2000	\$194,500
363	2005	\$236,400
77	2010	\$262,900
85	2015	\$152,000
5	2019	\$1,450,000

What happened over the last 50 years was akin to the story of the frog being put in a pot of cold water, with the heat turned

on so low he couldn't possibly know his fate. The same people who cry "Wolf, Wolf," are the same people who claim the sky is falling and are the same people who think the water is getting too hot and Highlands is about at its boiling point. This may be where the topsy-turvy book comes to an end you will need to turn the book upside down to get

another story.

I applaud The Planning Board for the work they've done regarding STRs. They got the assignment right. They are in the business of planning, and plan they have. In this issue you will know the plan they have presented to The Town of Highlands

• See INVESTING page 10



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• OBITUARIES •

Creighton W. Sossomon

Creighton Wolfe Sossomon passed away peacefully at his home in Highlands, NC on January 12, 2022 following a period of declining health.

He was predeceased by his parents, Jane Wolfe Sossomon and Dr. Daniel Creighton Sossomon, as well as his stepmother, Beverly-Matthews Sossomon.

He is survived by his beloved wife, Janet Allison Sossomon (Highlands, NC) and his stepdaughter, Treacy Lois Bergen (Austin, TX), whom he also dearly loved. He is also survived by his stepsisters, Lynn Kilette (Belmont, NC), Beverly Ann Lyda (Powder Springs, GA), Patty M. Hart (Euroa, Victoria, Australia), and Guerry McConnell (Jonesborough, TN), as well as his brother-in-law, sisters-in-law, beloved nieces and nephews, and many cherished friends.

Creighton, known throughout his life by his family and most of his friends as "Zeke," was born in Charlotte, NC. His younger years were spent in Charlotte, Chapel Hill, NC and Memphis, TN. As a teenager, he moved with his family to Cullowhee, NC, where he made many lifelong friends and graduated from the McKee Laboratory School in 1962. Then he attended and graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1966, earning dual degrees in history and economics. He then attended and graduated from the University of North Carolina School of Law, Chapel Hill, in 1969, earning his Juris Doctor. He immediately sat for and passed the North Carolina Bar.

Ever the explorer, he then ventured to Atlanta, GA, where he clerked for a superior court judge.



Once being admitted to the GA Bar, he practiced law with the Fulton County, GA, District Attorney's office until he moved back to Cullowhee, NC, where he began practicing law with Holt & Haire, PA in nearby Sylva, NC.

In 1976, Zeke opened his own law practice in Sylva.

During that time, he served as the County Attorney for Jackson County, NC from 1979 until 1982. He was also an active member of St. John's Episcopal Church, Rotary Club (Paul Harris Fellow), Jaycees, and the Board of Trustees at Western Carolina University (distinguished service award). He was instrumental in the growth of Southwestern Community College, where he taught real estate.

In 1984, Zeke moved his law practice to Highlands, NC, joining with Coward, Coward, and Dillard, PA until 1992, when he opened his solo practice in Highlands.

In addition to practicing law in Highlands, Zeke continued to be a Rotarian (Business leader award); he served terms on both the Zoning Board of Highlands and the Planning Board of Highlands; he served six years as a member of

the Town Board of Highlands; he was a member of the Church of the Incarnation, serving in many capacities, including the vestry, lay reader, usher, and camera operator; he served on the Peggy Crosby Center Board of Directors and the Crosby Center Founding Board.

Throughout his life, Zeke was active in numerous other civic clubs, committees, and charitable endeavors. However, the practice and study of law was his calling and passion; he was a skilled litigator and respected attorney for many years.

In his later years, what Zeke enjoyed most was spending time with his family, his friends, and his pets. He also enjoyed participating in church services and activities, traveling, and helping others through volunteering and work.

His lifelong interests included reading, diligently keeping up with current events and rooting for the Tarheels. He will be truly missed and fondly remembered.

A memorial service will be held Saturday January 29, 2022 at 11 am at the Episcopal Church of Incarnation in Highlands, NC.

For the safety of all, masks will be provided, and social distancing will be observed. In addition, the service will be live streamed.

A link will be provided on www.maconfuneralhome.com.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the American Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.org, the American Cancer Society at www.cancer.org, or the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust at www.hicashlt.org.

Online condolences can be made at www.maconfuneralhome.com

...INVESTING continued from page 9

Board of Commissioners from this point forward. Read those last four words again. From.This. Point.Forward. That's the plan.

Let's turn the book upside down and start over. We all want the Highlands that not only at-

tracts visitors, guests, renters, and future property owners, but we want a Highlands we can ALL be proud to call home, one that can keep some of the Old Highlands charm, because once that's gone it's like trying to put toothpaste

back inside the tube.

For more than 30 years, I've been hearing buyers say jokingly (sort of not joking), "Now that I've found Highlands, I think we need to put up a gate and keep ev-

• See INVESTING page 16

SNOW MUCH FUN!
Snow Fest
at 4118'
HIGHLANDS, NORTH CAROLINA

Cold-Weather Magic, Twinkly Lights & Winter Fun!
January 29 - 30

First Annual Snow Fest

January 29th, 10am - 9pm • January 30th 10am - 5pm

Put on your warmest winter coat and mittens for two adventurous days of **snowballs, ice slides, a merry go round, smores, snow-ga, snow sculptures,** and **more** at Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park.



HIGHLANDS
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THE HEIGHT OF HAPPINESS | ELEV. 4118

visithighlandsnc.com

• HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

Ice Rink Schedule

• Thursdays 1-8pm, Fridays and Saturdays 1-10pm and Sundays 1-5pm. Cost is \$5 per skater.

Rec Pool Schedule:

• Lap Swim Monday-Friday 6am-10am, Monday and Thursday 11:15am-7pm and Tuesday and Wednesday 11:15am-3:30pm 6 lanes AND 3:30-7 (shared Pool) and Saturday 10-11am 6 lanes.

Adult Swim Monday-Thursday 11:15am-7pm.

Call ahead for Public Swim Weekend schedule due to staff shortages. 828-526-1595.

• Tickets for Bear Shadow Music Festival are on sale now. For more information, visit <https://bearshadownc.com/information/>.

Sun. - Sat.

• Open in person meetings are held in Cashiers @ the Albert Carl-

ton Cashiers Community Library, 249 Frank Allen Rd. on Sunday at 5:00 pm, on Tuesday @ 7 pm, on Friday at 5:00 pm and on Saturday at 9 am. Cashiers Open ZOOM Meetings are held on Monday @ Noon and 7 pm and on Wednesday @ 7 pm and on Saturday @ 9 am. ZOOM ROOM 921 817 2966 PASSWORD CVG2020. For more information please visit our website www.aawnc80.org or to speak with a member of A.A. 24/7 call our HELP Line 828 349-4357.

Mondays

• ESL classes are held at the Presbyterian Church in Highlands from 5:30-6:30pm. No registration required – just show up and participate. Questions? Visit www.maconncliteracy.org, call 828-526 – 0863 or email info@maconncliteracy.org

• **American Legion** meets Mondays at 9 AM Highlands United Method-

ist Church. All veterans invited

Second Mondays

• The local chapter of PEO, an off-campus sorority founded in the 1800s that provides grants and loans to women who want to return to school or further their education and have a financial need, meets at 10 a.m. If interested, please call president Paula McDonald at 706-372-3004 for meeting places.

Mon-Fri

• Water Aerobics 18 years plus 10:15-11am.

Mon., Tues., Thurs.

• The Food Pantry behind the Methodist Church on Spring Street is open from 10a to 6p.

Mon. & Wed.

• Cardio Kickboxing with Crystal Corbin 5:30-6:30 p.m. A full body workout that engages every muscle in the body.

• New Mobility Class with Anna Norton It's all about movement. 5:30-6:30pm and Wednesday 6:45-7:45. For more information, call Anna 267-825-0716.

Mon. & Thurs.

• Drive-thru flu clinics at the Public Health Center at 1830 Lakeside Dr. in Franklin from 1-4 pm \$36 for the regular dose and the \$73 for the high dose (recommended for those 65+). Insurances will be filed; please bring your insurance card with you. Questions? Call 828.349.2081.

Mon, Wed, Thurs

• Indoor and outdoor Pickle Ball 10:30 am-1 pm.

Mon, Wed, Fri

• Heart Healthy Exercise Class 8:30-9:30am. \$25 a month. The class is led by Cathy Hodgson. Contact the Recreation Department at 828-526-3556 for more information.

• Aerobics with Tina Rogers 8-9 am.

Mon., Wed., Fri.

• Highlands/ Cashiers Alcoholics Anonymous "Open Meetings" are for anyone who thinks they may have a drinking problem or for anyone interested in the A.A. recovery program. Open meetings are held in Highlands @ the 1st Presbyterian Church, 471 Main St., on Monday at 5:30 p.m. and on Wednesday & Fridays @ 12:00 noon.

Tues. & Thurs.

• Pilates-Strength and Stretch with Autumn Lucas

• New Zumba class with Gay Chal-

pin from 4:30-5:30p.

• Exercise Class with Michelle Lane at 5:30. A combination class with many different types of exercise.

Tuesdays

• Strength Training 8:15-9:15am. Aim for strong, lean muscles using light weights, body weight, and high repetition to shape and tone.

First Wednesdays

• Highlands-Cashiers Hospital is featuring "Walk-in Wednesdays" Hiring Event. Interviewing for RNs, CNAs, Allied Health Professionals and Support Services Professionals, 1-3:30 pm. 190 Hospital Drive, front entrance. On the spot offers, Sign-on bonuses offered for select positions, Bring updated resume. Casual wear.

Thursdays

• Kickboxing 8:15-9:15am. An exhilarating and fun mix of martial arts for a calorie-burning workout.

• Free Covid vaccination clinics – 9 am to 5pm at the Rec Park. (Closed for a half-hour lunch break) Location subject to change. please check <https://myspot.nc.gov/> for the latest location information. Walk-ins are accepted, however we encourage residents to pre-register and schedule an appointment at <https://myoptumserve.com/covid19> or by calling (877) 505-6723 if you do not have internet.

Thurs. & Sat.

• The AL-ANON Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems. An In Person Meeting with Covid 19 Preventive Measures is held each Thurs Noon at the 1st Presbyterian Church, 471 Main St., Highlands. An AL-ANON Zoom Meeting is held each Saturday @ 10:15am ID:889-3772-7928 Password: EasyDoesit or to speak with a member of AL-ANON call 828-342-6866.

2nd Thurs. thru - May

• Story Telling & Listening at Shakespeare & Co. in Village Square from 2-4 p.m.

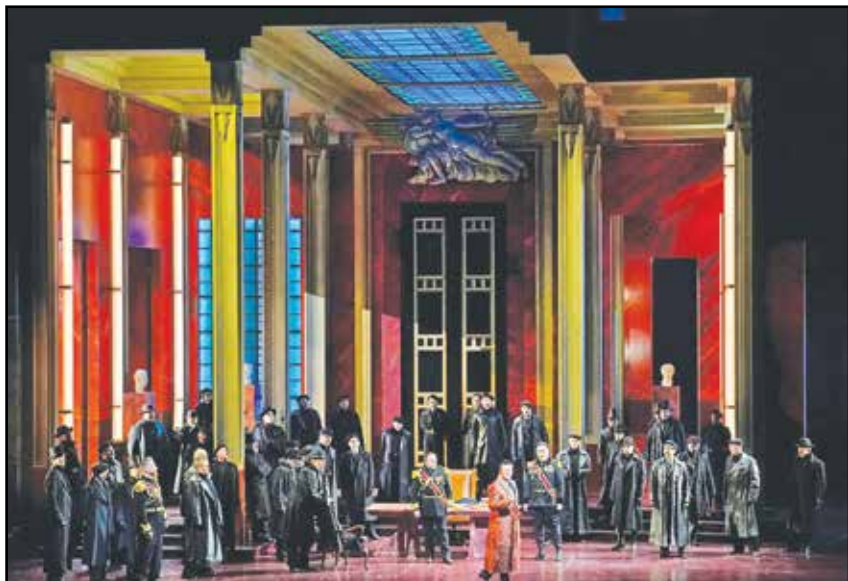
Fri., Jan 28

• Due to increasing demand for testing, Optum has agreed to offer Covid-19 testing offer additional testing at the Highlands Community Building.

Sat. Jan. 29

• The Franklin Amateur Radio

Live HD from the Met Verdi's Rigoletto at PAC on Saturday



The Highlands Performing Arts Center will presents the MET Opera's new production of Verdi's Rigoletto on Saturday, January 29 at 12:55pm. Tony Award-winning director Bartlett Sher creates a bold new take on Verdi's timeless tragedy, resetting the opera's action in 1920s Europe, with Art Deco sets by Michael Yeagan and elegant costumes by Catherine Zuber. Baritone Quinn Kelsey, a commanding artist at the height of his powers, brings his searing portrayal of the title role to the Met for the first time, starring alongside soprano Rosa Feola as Gilda and tenor Piotr Beczala as the Duke of Mantua, with leading maestro Daniele Rustioni on the podium. There will be a pre-opera discussion beginning at 12:30pm. Tickets are available online: www.HighlandsPerformingArts.com

• HIGHLANDS EVENTS •

Club will participate in the annual Winter Field Day, which is an exercise in emergency radio communications in a winter environment in order to maintain operating skills in amateur radio. This is an annual, national event. The event begins at noon at the East Franklin Baptist Church Fellowship Hall at 2057 Lakeside Drive. Anyone interested in amateur radio is welcome to visit the occasion. Several stations will be operating inside the fellowship hall and weather permitting, portable stations will operate on the church grounds on solar or batteries—off the grid. This is an opportunity for anyone interested in becoming a “ham” to explore the opportunity to learn how to become licensed to take part in this hobby, which has 780,000 hams in the United States. World wide there is an estimated 2 million licensed hams.

• The Metropolitan Opera live HD at PAC featuring Rigoletto by Verdi, new

production. 12:55 pre-operat discussion. Show at 12:30 p.m. Tickets are available online at www.highlandsperformingarts.com

Tues., Feb 1

• Regional Prayer Event at First Baptist Church in Highlands hosted by Mark Ford at 6 p.m. For more information visit www.fbchighlands.org

Sat., Feb 5

• Big Brothers Big Sisters of Cashiers & Highlands Ice Skating Party 4-6 p.m. at the ice rink in Highlands at 440 Oak Street. Skates and hot chocolate available at the rink. Children will receive a free ticket when they bring their adult to the BBBS Information Table. For more information call Danielle Hernande at 828-599-9133.

Sun., Feb 27

• Chefs Dinner at the Farm with Hugh Acheson & Christopher Hathcock. Book online at OldEdwardsHospitality.com/AchesonandHathcock

• HS SPORTS •



Undefeated Highlands Middle School girls basketball team keep their winning streak alive with a victory over Nantahala on Monday at home with a final of 43-15. The win puts Highlands at 10-0 this season. Pictured is Highlands Jordyn Borino who puts 2 points on the board with a layup against Nantahala. Highlands next plays at 4 p.m. tonight against Tallulah Falls.



Highlands Middle School boys basketball team takes down Nantahala on Monday at home with a final of 54-32. Pictured is Highlands Carter Smathers launching to grab a rebound against Nantahala. Highlands has an 8-2 record and plays tonight at 4 p.m. against Tallulah Falls at home

— Photos by Brian O'Shea, Plateau Daily News

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\$155 50-Minute Spa Treatments | \$20 Fitness or Yoga Classes

25% Off Entire Purchase at Acorns

For Eligibility and Restrictions, Visit OldEdwardsHospitality.com/LocalLove

...STRs continued from page 1

being used as STRs and as such are grandfathered in.

“We are looking toward the future and the legal ramifications of vested or grandfathered interests are not our concern,” he said.

After hearing numerous comments from those for and against STRs during the public comment period, the board discussed uses in the R2 district – mainly regarding Transient Dwelling Lodging which is defined as the entire unit being rented or occupied by paying guests for a period less than seven consecutive days.

At the close of the last worksession on January 11, members were stymied about whether to require a Special Use Permit (SUP) for Transient Lodging in the R2 district as originally drafted, or to make it a Limited Use or to disallow Transient Lodging in R2 all together.

Though still a mechanism through the Zoning Board of Adjustment for variances, several years ago, the town did away with the need for SUPs for every little thing involving properties because SUPs require legal postings and a hearing before the Zoning Board of Adjustment which is a quasi-judicial board.

Now, if owners meet zoning and prop-

erty requirements and stipulations, SUPs are no longer required for additions to homes or businesses (when a variance isn’t required) – those issues are now being handled by planning department staff.

Therefore, the Planning Board was urged to consider Limited uses in the R2 zone instead of requiring a SUP.

Then the issue came down to figuring out what the criteria would be to allow Limited Transient Lodging in the R2 district.

Helene Siegel said she noticed disparities in the R2 zone in that some R2 properties appeared to be in completely residential areas while other R2 properties were along state and federal roads or near commercial businesses like on Poplar, Hickory, 5th and 4th streets and along US 64 east and other highways.

In the end, the board decided to allow Transient Lodging in the R2 district on a Limited basis if the property wasn’t in a solely residential area. However, since the R2 zone was initiated so that occupants could have soft home businesses in the first place, it’s not clear how the “solely residential criteria” will work in the end.

Both Whole House Rentals (WHSTR) and Tourist Homes will be allowed in R1 and R2 for a minimum of two weeks at a

time with Transient Lodging not allowed in R1 but allowed on a Limited basis in R2.

WHSTRs are defined as a dwelling whereby the entire unit is rented for a period of 7-30 consecutive days.

Tourist Homes are defined as a building or part of a building where not more than four bedrooms are rented and where the owner of the home stays on the property with the guests, like a bed and breakfast.

Tourist Homes will be allowed in R1 and R2 but limited to two bedrooms in R1 and four bedrooms in R2.

Other noted issues are onsite parking of one car per bedroom, a fire safety inspection, owner or operator contact information and the suspension of a WHSTR owners’ rights for six months if three violations are accumulated within a 12-month period.

Violations would be cited if town ordinances regarding parking, noise, or garbage were disregarded.

Public comment circulated among those for and against STRs.

Lila Howland said in August the town attorney clearly stated that the current UDO prohibits STRs in the R1 district; that 62% of those who filled out the Community Plan survey said STRs were a problem; that the three candidates who won the election clearly opposed STRs in residential neighborhoods which equals a clear and compel-

ling mandate to prohibit them in residential neighborhoods.

“So far, the Planning Board seems to have ignored this mandate,” she said. “There has been no public support to open up all Highlands’ neighborhoods to Tourist Homes as your current proposal does. There has been no public support to open all Highlands’ neighborhoods to whole house short-term rentals regardless of the durations which your current proposal does.”

She suggested the Planning Board simply defer the subject to the Town Board rather than passing on its recommendations.

Her husband Slocum said they live in a R1 district where commercial activity isn’t allowed and STRs are a commercial activity because money exchanges hands.

However, David Bee said according to state statute STRs aren’t a commercial use.

“If it is, why isn’t any rental commercial use? Whether it’s three nights or 365 nights, if getting money, what’s the difference?” he asked.

There was a lot of talk about rental properties being in the R1 and R2 districts being owned by LLCs. Those against STRs suggested that LLCs mean business entities are renting the homes which would make it a commercial enterprise.

But those who have been representing STR and Vacation Rental owners for decades said LLCs are also formed because the homes belong to several people in their families and not because they consider their home use a business.

A member of the Save Highlands group said the STR issue is a legal rights issue as outlined in the NC Vacation Rental Act as well as a vested right issue as outlined in NC statutes. She also said as of July 1, 2019, no city or county can adopt an order requiring owners of STRs to obtain a permit to rent their property.

But as part of the Planning Board’s recommendations, owners of STRs would require a zoning certificate and those who have rented would have to prove such with tax records, written leases or other proof that they are vested.

Needed for a zoning certificate is the address of the property, name and contact information of the owner and/or manager, a site plan showing off-street parking spaces, information on the number of bedrooms for rent, a fire safety inspection, a copy of a standard rental agreement, and acknowledgement that the applicant is aware of the occupancy restrictions on the property.

The Town Board isn’t obligated to adopt the Planning Board’s recommendations.

– Kim Lewicki



Rigoletto
by Verdi New Production
Saturday, January 29, 2022

12:55pm
Pre-Opera Discussion 12:30pm
RT: 3:26

Highlands Performing Arts Center 507 Chestnut Street
Tickets available online: www.HighlandsPerformingArts.com

Friends honor Maestro Fletcher Wolfe in hometown of Norlina, NC

**By Lew Hege Correspondent
The Warren Record**

Author Thomas Wolfe was the first cousin of another Thomas Wolfe, Norlina's Thomas W. Wolfe. The world-renowned author was famous for his book, "You Can't Go Home Again." With apologies to the author—you can.

And that's what legendary musician and maestro Fletcher Wolfe did to celebrate his 90th birthday. Friends and relatives gathered at Rachel's Whistle Stop restaurant to honor Wolfe, an amazing man, who graduated from Norlina High School in 1949 and enjoyed a career as a great baritone, pianist, and director of the Grammy-winning Atlanta Boy Choir, which he led for 60 years.

From his early boyhood days, Wolfe was a child prodigy who would go on to make his Carnegie Hall debut in 1964 and would be acclaimed for his work with the Boy Choir.

The choir traveled the world, and Fletcher and the choir would

meet and perform for presidents, kings and queens, and even the Pope in Rome.

In fact, on January 13th, his birthday he was awakened at 4am with a phone message from Saint Petersburg Russia, the famous Glinka Music Conservatory Men's Choir was singing Happy Birthday in Russian.

But the birthday celebration was for close friends and relatives, and a modest Fletcher said that while traveling the world was wonderful, the place he loved most is Norlina. In his remarks, Fletcher recognized fellow nonagenarians Lou Traylor and Esther Delbridge, who organized the celebration.

The town honored the maestro in 2020 with a historic marker in front of his boyhood home on Liberty Street. So it was fitting that one of Norlina's most famous sons chose to return "home" to celebrate his landmark birthday.

In addition to his friends in Norlina, Fletcher shared the day

with his nieces, Cindy Wolfe Beaver and husband David, and Becky Wolfe Harrison and husband Keith, all of Raleigh; along with Fletcher's cousins, Skeeter Price and Frances McKenzie, and friend Trish Gregory, all of Chase City. Also attending was Casey Anglin, who accompanied Fletcher from his home in Sky Valley, GA.

If you'd like to learn more about the life and career of this remarkable man, you can find Luci Weldon's 2020 article about the historic marker dedication in The Warren Record or at warren-record.com, or in Fletcher's two books: "Around the World in 85 Years," by Candace Keach, Volumes 1 and 2. Volume Two was published in 2021.

A very grand celebration was to be held for him in Atlanta at the Cherokee Town & Country Club for some 50 admirers. Sadly, Covid cancelled this with plans hopefully to have this event in May.

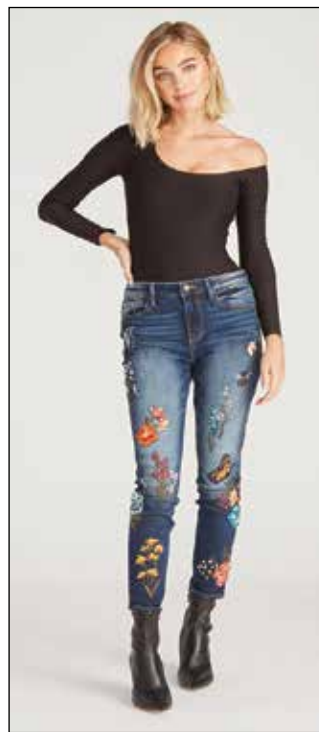


Norlina native Fletcher Wolfe is honored with a 90th birthday celebration at Rachel's Whistle Stop on Saturday. His birthday was Jan. 13.



In the early 1960s, the Broadway musical "Prince of Liederkran" starred Fletcher Wolfe.

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...INVESTING continued from page 10

everybody out. I want it to stay just like it is."

But one thing is certain, vacation rentals and vacation renters have a place in Highlands, and not only outside the town limits. With sensible guidelines and a few

restrictions, we CAN all live together. One last thing. I hope the term TDL (Transient Dwelling Lodging) will be changed to a less derogatory term. We all want a happy ending.

WHOLE LIFE MARKET

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On the corner of 3rd & Spring

...HURRICANES continued from page 1



Tate Wilson and Trinity Faust take off.

28 points. They all won all four of their events. That is the maximum entries allowed in the meet.

Kenter also broke pool records in the 50 Freestyle and 50 Butterfly, broke team records in the 50 Free and 50 Breaststroke, and qualified for the 2022 Jr. Olympics in the 50 Free.

Garner and McKim also swam 2022 Jr. Olympic qualifying times in the 50 Free.

Tate Wilson broke the team record in the 50 Free and scored 26 pts.

Also scoring 26 points for the Hurricanes were Alyse Remery, and Jayce Powell.

Remery had a Personal Record (PR) in the 200 Individual Medley (IM), and Powell had three PRs.

Kailyn Taylor scored 22 pts. With four PRs. Elizabeth Burnette scored 21 pts. also with four PRs. Ian Batista scored 20 pts

with two PRs. Blake Kenter scored 19 pts. Justin Powell and Annie Wilkes scored 17 pts. Wilkes had three PRs. Houston Shutze scored 14 pts in his first swim meet ever and got two PRs. Max Jestin scored 13 pts with three PRs. Alex Lopez scored 11 pts with three PRs. Asa Garner scored 6 pts with three PRs. Mason Johnston and Miller Shutze both scored 5 pts. Johnson had two PRs and Miller Shutze (in his first swim meet ever) had one PR. William Burnette scored 4 pts with three PRs.

The Highlands Hurricanes Swim Team is a Highlands Recreation Park Team. That practices in the evenings at the Highlands Recreation Park Pool. The only requirement to join is that a prospective swimmer must be able to swim 25 yards (one length of the Recreation Park Pool) unassisted. For further information please call 828.421.4121.



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...SERVICE continued from page 1

you are putting your life on the line when you go to answer calls because you never know what's going to happen. We've seen this happen with rescue attempts in this town," he said. "So, I want to express my

extreme appreciation for all do as a volunteer fire department. You are just outstanding."

Mayor Taylor said, at the suggestion of Chief Ryan Gearhart, a plaque will be

mounted at the new station to recognize the retired firefighters and all the firefighters and first-responders and rescue people who have been part of the department.

"And that's what it's all about," said Taylor. "Recognizing all the people who have and do put their lives on the line during their duty of service."

The mayor ended his speech saying he

was really looking forward to the new facility because it's really going to make a difference in how the dept. performs its duties.

Later Chief Gearhart said that the recent storm when three fire-fighters stayed overnight at the station illustrated how having full-time firefighters on-site is beneficial.

The night of Monday, Jan. 17, a fire

• See SERVICE page 19



For 33 years in a row, Roger Lee Wilson got the "Perfect Drill Attendance" award.



From left, Asst. Chief Forrester, Travis Brooks (5 yrs.) David Leffler and Caleb Bowers (10 yrs.) and Chief Gearhart. Not pictured was Tubby Zachary (5 yrs.)



This year's officers are Chief Gearhart and Asst. Chief Forrester with Rescue Lt. Travis Brooks, Capt. Roger Lee Wilson, 2nd Lt. Hunter Leffler, and 1st Lt. David Leffler. Not pictured was Rescue Capt. Eric Pierson, Member@large/Training Officer Eric Fielding and Secretary Davis Picklesimer.
- Photos by Kim Lewicki



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QUESTIONS?

**CALL PROGRAM COORDINATOR,
DANIELLE HERNANDEZ, AT (828) 399-9133.**

• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •



You Can't Always Get What You Want

Rev. W. Bentley Manning
Episcopal Church of the Incarnation

In 1969 the Rolling Stones released their tenth studio album entitled "Let it Bleed" - a chart-topping work which reminded the world that "You can't always get what you want." The problem, however, according to Harvard Psychologist Daniel Gilbert is not that "you can't always get what you want" but that "you can't always know what you want."

Many of us assume we know what we want and believe that happiness is ultimately about aligning the world to our desires. Such a perspective is really another way of saying that we think we know what we want, and that getting what we want will make us happy.

Christians often assume (ether implicitly or explicitly) this means a great deal of life will involve suppressing those desires which don't naturally align with the will of God. Such a view is probably why so many sermons, as one friend has helpfully pointed out, boil down to the two simple words: "Try Harder!" However, living in such a way is an exhausting and immensely discouraging way to walk through the world.

It is a difficult way to be in the world because so many of our desires, as brand strategists and marketing experts know, are socially generated. What we think want is as much a product of what pulls on us from the outside, as what pushes us from within. And this is why we need good friends, spouses, and guides - for it isn't clear that we always know what is good for us.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says (rather provocatively) that He is the the bread of life - a claim which indicates he is the one that will ultimately satisfy the true cravings and desires of a humanity gripped by hunger.

Surely it is not a mere coincidence that God chooses the image of bread for what he offers the world. For bread, in one form or another, is something that almost every human civilization depends on as a staple for survival, something we all desire, something most of us have the experience of craving, and something we value. Bread sustains and nourishes us, bread comforts us, bread tastes good, it is something we share with others, and bread is something that satisfies our appetites.

And so it is, that what God offers us in Christ - what God offers us in his life-giving bread is not a repression of our desires or a denial of our bodily cravings, rather God offers something profoundly satisfying to our truest selves. For it is God who created us and it is God who knows our

• See SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING page 19

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP •

John 3:16

BLUEVALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Oliver Rice. Pastor (706) 782-3965

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

Sunday night services every 2nd & 4th Sunday at 7

Wednesdays: Mid-week prayer meeting: 7 p.m.

BUCK CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

828-269-3546 • Rev. Jamie Passmore. Pastor

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

CASHIERS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Aryn Williams-Reubel. Pastor 828-743-5298

Sundays: School at 9:30 Worship 10:30

Wednesday night Dinner and Service 5:30

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Sundays: 10 a.m. Worship

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www.christanglicancashiers.com

Sun. - 9:30am Worship (no music); 10:30am Sunday

School; 10:30am Worship Service.

Mon. Night Bible Study & Dinner: 6pm. call for details.

CHRIST CHURCH OF THE VALLEY. CASHIERS

Pastor Brent Metcalf • 743-5470

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

Tues. Guys study 8am. Gals 10am.

CLEAR CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

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.

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH

www.cbchighlands.com • 526-4685

3645 Cashiers Rd. Highlands. NC • Sr. Pastor Gary Hewins

Sun.: 9:30am - Adult Sunday School; Worship Service 10:45am;

10:45am Children's Program. Youth-12:15 - 2:30pm Tues:

Women's Bible Study 10am-noon

Thurs: Men's Bible Study 7:30-8:30 a.m.

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH OF SKY VALLEY

706. 746.3144 • 696 Sky Valley Way #447

Pastor Steve Kerhoulas

Worship: Sun. 10:30 a.m. Holy Communion 2nd Sunday

EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION

Rev. W. Bentley Manning, Rector • 526-8152

5th and Main streets • www.incarnationwnc.org

Sunday Services in the Chapel:

8 am Rite I spoken, 10:30 Rite II with Choir

Morning Prayer Mon-Thurs 8:30 am in the Chapel

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HIGHLANDS

828-526-4153 • www.fbchighlands.org

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

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Curtis Fussell & Emily Wilmarth, pastors

828-526-3175 • fpchighlands.org

Sun.: Adult Ed.: 10 a.m.; Worship 11 a.m.

Tues: Men's Group 10 a.m. Wed: Bell Choir 4 p.m.. Choir: 6p

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

Wed. Bible Study: 6 p.m.; Sundays: Worship: 11

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Pastor Dan Robinson • 11339 Buck Creek Road

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Sunday Worship is at 9a. Wednesday Worship is 6:30p

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Rev. Marty Kilby

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Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands Police entries from Jan. 12. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor or public officials have been used.

Jan 12

• At 10 a.m., officers responded to a call of larceny, stolen property and trespassing at the Emergency Council where someone stole a flat screen TV valued at \$250 front of a building on Poplar Street.

• At 8:25 p.m., a 82-year-old woman was pulled over on Oak Street for driving under the influence.

Jan 15

• At 9 a.m., officers responded to a call of a burglary and breaking & Entering at a residence on Mirror

Lake Road.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from Jan. 21

Jan. 21

• At 2:27 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Cook Road.

• At 3:47 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a possible gas leak at a residence on the Dillard Road.

Jan. 22

• At 11:09 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Panther Mountain Road.

• At 1:46 p.m., the dept. provided mutual aid to Cashiers FD.

Jan. 23

• At 8:55 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to residence on Holt Road.

...SERVICE continued from page 17

broke out at one of the cottages at Half Mile Farm and since the three were on call and in town at the station, they were able to respond quickly.

The plan is to have six full-time firefighters on call over a 24-hour period at the new fire station. Gearhart said he has three on the force who have expressed interest in being paid, full-time fire department employees.

During 2021, the dept. responded to 640 calls – in 2020 it was 563 calls.

There were 274 calls within the town limits; 129 off or on the Cashiers Road; 45

off or on the Franklin Road; 41 off or on the Dillard Road; 84 off or on the Walhalla Road; 14 off or on Horse Cove Road and 53 off or on the Buck Creek Road/Cashiers Road.

Most of the calls – 48.12% were rescue and EMS calls; 20.47% were false alarm calls; 16.09% were good intent calls; 8.12% were service calls; 5.31% were hazardous condition calls and 1.88% were fire calls.

In addition, firefighters logged 1,098.92 training hours.

– Kim Lewicki

...SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING continued from page 18

deepest hungers, our deepest joys, and it is God who knows our deepest desires.

As Saint Augustin wrote: “God is closer to me than I am to myself.”

Far from insisting that we change our desires, God comes to us in inexhaustible beauty and grace - seducing, rather than demanding, our hearts to share in his very own life and love. And surly, this is how most people find their way to Christ and the Christian faith - not through some careful argument or detailed apologetic but because they find Christ beautiful. They find something particularly attractive about

following Jesus, something inviting about regular patterns of prayer, forgiveness, and grace - something captivating about fellowship with others - something enchanting and deeply satisfying about worship, such that the world around them becomes transformed with meaning, value, and purpose in unexpected, life-giving ways.

God gives food to those who are hungry - God gives himself in the person of Christ who is the bread of life - the bread of life which nourishes our souls, comforts our appetites, and satisfies our deepest cravings. Thanks be to God.

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“Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done”

Matthew 6:10



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HIGHLANDER MOUNTAIN HOUSE DINING ROOM SUPERVISOR - HMH is seeking a full time shift supervisor to coordinate reservations and oversee all aspects of service in the front of the house at TRG. This role will act as Maitre' D to the dining room, work service for lunch, dinner and brunch and be responsible for the proper execution of each service period. This position will begin as an hourly position and has the potential to grow into a salaried position based upon performance. This candidate should be positive, reliable, hard working, have a love of people, service and have aspirations to lead and grow with the company. (st. 12/16)

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...ARPA continued from page 1

referenced has yet to be distributed, as it's a part of the fiscal year 2022-'23 budget, which still awaits certification by the N.C. Office of State Budget and Management.

The ongoing OSBM budget certification process includes reviewing the individual budget plans of each program to which lawmakers allocated funds. Those plans were due Dec. 15, and Hawkins said it usually takes a few weeks for OSBM to certify.

When the budget is certified, the state will dole out funds to state departments and organizations in accordance with Gov. Roy Cooper's recommendations for the money, which include expanding broadband access, fixing infrastructure issues and addressing housing and employment deficits.

The U.S. Treasury Department has been distributing the other tranche of North Carolina's ARPA funds — \$3.2 billion — directly to North Carolina's 100 counties and 26 most populous cities.

The Treasury disbursed half of this money beginning in May 2021. The other half comes 12 months after the first payment.

The amount of ARPA money that counties received depended on population, according to a formula set by the Treasury Department, but was also adjusted based on other funding each community received.

The formula for cities' allocations included consideration not only of population, but also population growth, number of people in poverty and housing-related variables.

County and city government officials will allocate the funds in their communities. All ARPA funds must be spent by Dec. 31, 2026.

"I do think people are really taking their time," Hawkins said.

What can ARPA funds be used for?

The federal government has rigid guidelines for what ARPA funds can be spent on. Every expense must fall into one of four categories: COVID response and adaptation, premium pay, revenue loss or infrastructure investments.

Examples of acceptable expenses, according to a state Pandemic Resource Office fact sheet, include fixing water and sewer systems, improving pay for essential workers and providing direct economic assistance to small businesses.

At the January 20 Highlands Town Board meeting, Town Manager Josh Ward

Little of the millions of ARPA funding has been spent yet across the region, with more disbursements coming.

Since every North Carolina county — and many cities and towns — has received or will receive ARPA funds, Carolina Public Press is taking a look at how and where many of them are allocating and spending the money. This article is the first in a year-long project that will put ARPA funds in 18 Western North Carolina counties under the microscope.

Much of the information here, however, will also be applicable to the entire state.

ARPA spending by county As of July 31, 2021

Avery County received \$3,410,241 and spent \$0.

Buncombe County received \$50,733,290 and spent \$16,433.

Burke County received \$17,575,650 and spent \$0.

Cherokee County received \$5,557,546 and spent \$72,764.

Clay County received \$2,181,490 and spent \$0.

Graham County received \$1,639,565 and spent \$0.

Haywood County received \$12,104,347 and spent \$256,742.

Henderson County received \$22,806,876 and spent \$0.

Jackson County received \$8,534,441 and spent \$0.

Macon County received \$6,964,996 and spent \$0.

Madison County received \$4,225,654 and spent \$0.

McDowell County received \$8,887,567 and spent \$0.

Mitchell County received \$2,906,582 and spent \$0.

Polk County received \$4,025,394 and spent \$91,648.

Rutherford County received \$13,019,597 and spent \$0.

Swain County received \$2,771,974 and spent \$341,115.26.

Transylvania County received \$6,678,883 and spent \$0.

Yancey County received \$3,509,691 and spent \$952,606.97.

Examples of acceptable expenses, according to a state Pandemic Resource Office fact sheet, include fixing water and sewer systems, improving pay for essential workers and providing direct economic assistance to small businesses.

explained the ramifications of Highlands being a recipient of ARPA funds.

"The Town of Highlands has received half of its ARPA allocation — \$156,480.45 of the \$313,000. The town will receive the second half of the amount later this year," said Ward.

Ward said the Federal Government has finally issued instructions on how to proceed with spending those funds.

"As we looked through the projects budgeted for this year, we feel like after re-

viewing the guidelines, the project that best meets the requirements is the Morewood Waterline Replacement Project which is in this year's current budget," said Ward. "That project is getting ready to start."

The budgeted amount in the FY 2021-'22 budget was \$670,000 for the project.

"We will receive approximately \$313,000 so that will leave about \$357,000 to be budgeted instead of the original \$670,000," Ward said. "We expect to get it by the end of this fiscal year."

Thursday night, the budget for FY 2021-'22 was amended to reflect the ARPA grant funds coming in. Obviously, the town will no longer have to pay the complete amount budgeted for the project, so the budget was amended to reflect that change and was accepted.

Each North Carolina county or municipality that received ARPA funding last summer was required to submit an interim spending report to the U.S. Treasury Department by Aug. 31, 2021.

These reports, however, only cover money spent through July 2021.

"Since then, (the U.S.) Treasury knows that states and localities have only increased their pace of budgeting and spending relief funds," Ramirez said.

What's been spent so far?

According to the U.S. Treasury Department, \$174,123,543 has been disbursed to the 18 Western North Carolina counties. Asheville and Morganton, the only two cities in the region to receive funds, alone got slightly over \$13 million.

Other cities and towns across the region will receive ARPA funding through the state.

By the end of July, Asheville had used about half a million in ARPA funds for housing services, which stands in stark contrast to much of the region. Just six of Western North Carolina's counties — Buncombe, Cherokee, Haywood, Polk, Swain and Yancey — have spent any ARPA money at all, according to their interim reports.

The documents show the six counties have spent about \$1.7 million on COVID vaccination efforts, administrative costs, public health initiatives, broadband expansion and payroll expenses.

That's only about 1% of the total ARPA money received so far in WNC.

But Ramirez said that shouldn't be alarming. "Many states and localities have legislative or other governmental processes that they must complete before deploying funds or signing contracts," she said. "While this can lead to a delay, it importantly allows for the community to engage on the plans around these historic investments."

The next due date for ARPA spending reports is Jan. 31 for counties and cities with at least 250,000 residents that received more than \$10 million, and April 30 for those with fewer than 250,000 residents receiving less than \$10 million.

— Contributed to by Kim Lewicki

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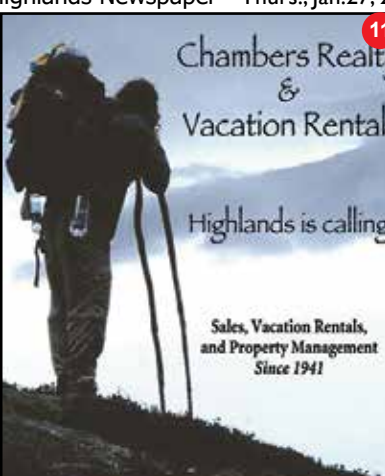
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