

# Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., March 24, 2022

## Commissioner Hehn asked to be recused from last two TB agenda items

While going over the agenda at the start of the March 17 Town Board meeting, Commissioner Marc Hehn asked Town Attorney Jay Coward if he could be recused

from item 16 – Powerline Removal Request and soon after asked to be recused for item 15 -- Redline Draft of Fiber Contract as well. In both cases he said would leave the

room if that was best.

“I didn’t ask for item 16 to be put on the agenda and I don’t think it’s appropriate to discuss it or for

• See HEHN page 9

## Millions is headed to WNC for broadband

*Citizens are asked to fill out 5-minute survey*

By Brittney Lofthouse

Highlands Mayor Pat Taylor joined a dozen of elected officials from across Western North Carolina to attend an information session about Broadband in Franklin Monday afternoon hosted by Senator Kevin Corbin and Representative Karl Gillespie.

The event featured Angie Bailey, Director of Broadband Infrastructure Office within Division of Broadband and Digital Equity, Deputy Secretary Nate Denny for Broadband and Digital Equity, as well as broadband providers and elected officials to discuss expanding broadband in Western North Carolina.

• See SURVEY page 15

## Spring has finally sprung



The ups and downs of winter has made spring seem even sweeter this year and the garden ladies and JB are more than ready.

– Photo by Kim Lewicki

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## Meadows and Cawthorn dominate headlines

By Brittney Lofthouse

Last week, District Attorney Ashley Welch released a statement recusing herself from investigating allegations of voter fraud against former North Carolina District 11 Representative & former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows due to a potential conflict of interest and also stated she had no prior knowledge of the alleged actions.

“Until being contacted by the media, I was unaware of any allegations of voter fraud surrounding Mark Meadows,” she said

Welch also requested the assistance of the General Attorney’s Office in handling the investigation, which resulted in the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation opening a probe into potential voter fraud.

• See HEADLINES page 16

## District 1 contenders to face off on May 17

*Independent candidate is in the wings*

By Brittney Lofthouse

When voter registration ended in North Carolina, the Macon County Board of Commissioners District 1 race featured two names on the ballot – Don Willis and John Shearl. Both Willis and Shearl are registered Republicans and will appear on the May 17 primary bal-

lot for the seat.

Highlands resident Jerry Moore is hoping to have his name added to the November ballot as an independent candidate. In order to be eligible, Moore would have to secure the 1,087 required signatures from registered voters

• See CONTENTERS page 22

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# • THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

## • MAYOR ON DUTY •

### Commissioner Hehn has gone too far

I've written this column for over eight years. I try to keep things positive. Unfortunately, I can't do that this week. I have to respond to the lawsuit that Commissioner Hehn has filed against Josh Ward, our Town Manager.

At last Thursday's Town Board meeting I expressed disappointment that Mr. Hehn had filed a personal lawsuit against Josh. It wasn't against the Town of Highlands, the mayor, nor the Town Board. It was against Josh Ward.

Filing a personal lawsuit against a town employee, especially by a town elected official, is a bad precedence. It is simply unacceptable if the community wants to have a functioning government.

I can't understand why the commissioner took such action, except to coerce and intimidate Josh Ward. Josh has three children. One is about to start college, another two in elementary school. As a parent Josh faces years of financial obligations. As a Town Manager he is under constant pressure to deal with town issues. The last thing Josh needs is a town commissioner suing



Highlands Mayor  
Patrick Taylor

him in Macon County Superior Court for an action he was doing under the direction of the Town Board and mayor.

In a previous letter to Josh marked confidential, Mr. Hehn demanded that Josh privately pay him for attorney fees that Mr. Hehn incurred in his quest to see broadband documents. These documents were part of a nondisclosure statement that the

Town Board had signed with Wide Open Networks. Mr. Hehn was not on the board when this agreement was approved.

He also contends in his filing that Josh did not provide him copies of the redline drafts that attorneys representing the town exchanged with Hotwire attorneys. Neither Josh, nor I, nor the board, nor the staff have these documents. These redline drafts are not public documents. At the February board meeting commissioners voted 4 to 1 not to ask the attorneys for these documents. Commissioners felt there was no need for Mr. Hehn, or anyone else, to micro-manage and second guess a finalized contract by scouring through multiple attorney drafts and notes.

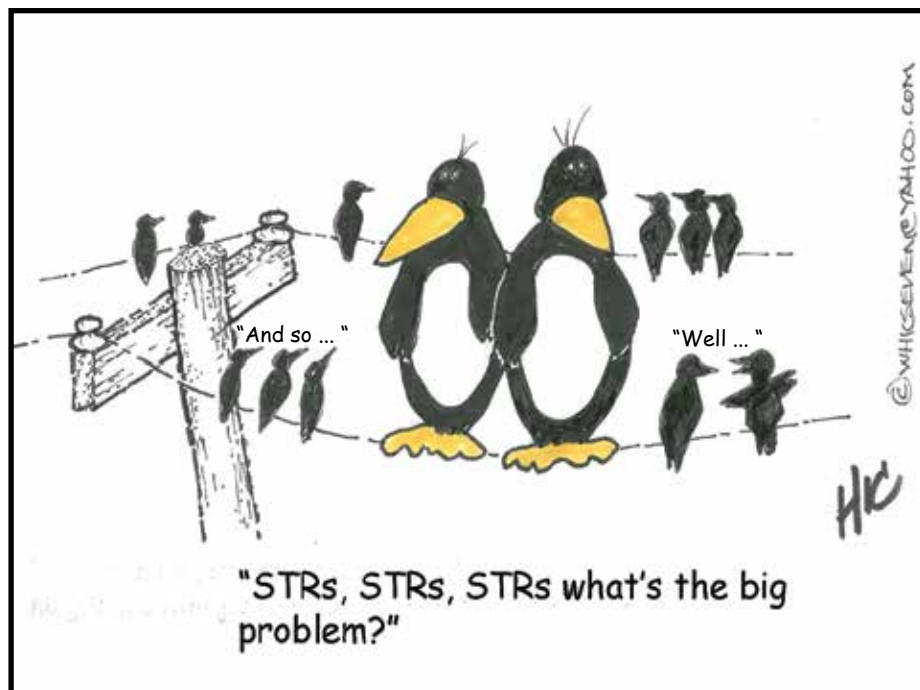
In his filings Mr. Hehn made several assertions that were incorrect. One was that Josh personally withheld the redline documents from Mr. Hehn. Josh simply followed the board's directive. I addressed other misleading filing statements at Thursday's board meeting.

It's regrettable that Hehn is now attacking Josh with a lawsuit. Josh was not intimidated and refused to comply with Mr. Hehn previous coercive letter. Now Josh is facing a new personal attack.

I was gratified that the board of commissioners voted to pay for Josh Ward's defense fees. I am not surprised that Mr. Hehn decided to file a lawsuit against a town employee. He has a history for filing lawsuits against government entities that he has been associated with. But now he is making it personal.

Josh is a good Town Manager and public servant. He is an honest and hardworking employee. This situation sends a bad message to other town employees, either comply with Commissioner Hehn's directives or face a lawsuit.

## • HIC'S VIEW •



## • WEATHER •

Thu, 24-Mar	Fri, 25-Mar	Sat, 26-Mar	Sun, 27-Mar
55°F 37°F	49°F 34°F	46°F 27°F	51°F 31°F
Partly sunny	Mostly cloudy and cooler	Windy in the afternoon	Mostly sunny
RealFeel® High: 61° Low: 42°	RealFeel® High: 46° Low: 35°	RealFeel® High: 42° Low: 26°	RealFeel® High: 52° Low: 26°

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# • OBITUARY •

## Charles Arnold, Jr.



Charles Arnold, Jr. died at home on March 20, 2022 after a long illness. Charlie was born May 11, 1927 in Newnan, GA to Mary Branch Arnold and Charles Arnold Sr. He graduated from high school at Sewanee Military Academy. He was accepted to the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, and while awaiting the appointment for the following year, Charlie enlisted in the Navy.

During that year he decided that a career in the Navy was not what he wanted. He returned to The University of the South at Sewanee on the GI bill, graduated as the salutatorian of his class and was a member of the Phi Beta Kappa society. He did post graduate work in economics at Harvard University on a Rockefeller scholarship.

Charlie joined Trust Company Bank (now Truist) in 1953 and remained there until he retired 44 years later as a Senior Vice President. He attained Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) status and throughout his career managed the investments of some of the bank's most prestigious individual, pension and endowment accounts. After retirement, Charlie was an active volunteer working five mornings a week at the Highlands Cashiers Hospital.

He is survived by his wife of 40 years, Linda Beville Arnold, daughter Katherine Arnold Evenson and husband Scott, Granddaughter Emily Evenson Hanley and husband Michael, Grandson Benjamin Arnold Evenson and wife Katherine, great grandson James Wright Hanley, sister-in-law Barclay Beville Darden and husband Dick and many loved nieces, nephews and great nieces and nephews.

His ashes will be interred in the garden at the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation following a celebration of his life on March 26, 2022 at 11 a.m. The family is grateful for the compassionate care given by Four Seasons Hospice, particularly Patty, Melissa, Lisa and Dr. Hinton. In lieu of flowers, charitable donations can be given to Four Seasons Hospice or the Outreach Ministry at the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation in Highlands, NC.

Moffitt Family Funeral Care is honored to serve Mr. Arnold's family. Online condolences may be made at [www.moffittfunerals.com](http://www.moffittfunerals.com)





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# • FINANCIAL MATTERS •

## The Rate Hikes Have Begun

In my last article, I touched on much of this and discussed how the Chair of the Federal Reserve, Jerome Powell had signaled a change in their mindset that inflation perhaps wasn't so "transitory" after all.

And so, it finally happened. The Federal Reserve finally began raising interest rates on March 16th with a much anticipated .25% hike. The reaction in the markets was a collective yawn and the consensus seemed to be "it's about time".

### The Feds conundrum

Now what? The Fed is boxed into some degree. Inflation is far higher than they expected, will likely last longer and raises the chances of a possible recession. Add in a war and much higher oil prices (if they continue to stay elevated), and the threat of recession grows.

The good news is that we're coming into all this with a very strong economy and full employment. We know the Fed is behind the curve, but even so, we probably have more margin for error than we've had in other tightening cycles.

### Where are we headed?

First, the most important thing to watch for is a recession, and the potential for the war in Ukraine to widen or spiral out of control. Since none of us know how or when it's going to end, let's stick to something we have some experience with – namely rising interest rate cycles.

Historically, the Federal Reserve only controlled very short-term interest rates known as the Fed Funds Rate. This is the interest rate banks charge to borrow money overnight and the Fed raised them yesterday from 0% to .25% along with signaling the likelihood of between 5 and 7 more hikes in subsequent meetings. In the past, this was really the only tool in their toolbox.

### Quantitative easing

Since about 2010 though, the Fed has embarked on a previously unused strategy called Quantitative Easing (or QE). This strategy involves the Fed purchasing various debt instruments, mostly mortgage-backed securities and Treasury bonds, and parking them on their balance sheet, or as I like to say, "their coffers". Currently, they are hold-



Michael P Henderson, CFP® CKA®  
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ing approximately \$8.5 trillion, which is \$7.5 trillion more than normal. By doing this, they've been able to drive up the price of bonds, which in turn drives down interest rates. This has allowed the economy to heal and weather the pandemic. However, now, because of all the excess money that has been pumped into the economy via money printing and stimulus, the economy has overheated, and the Fed needs to do something to cool it off in order to meet its mandate of "price stability".

### Interest rates short and long

How will they accomplish this? As I mentioned earlier, part of the plan is to begin raising very short-term interest rates. It's my belief that this will have little if any effect on the economy and things like mortgage rates, car loans and credit cards. Historically, long-term interest rates would follow. However, this time, with the massive amount of debt instruments that are not trading (reducing supply and thereby raising the price of these instruments), there is really no reason for long term interest rates – the ones that affect the average American – to move much higher than they already have. But in addition to this, the Fed has stopped buying these securities, and will now allow them to "roll off" their balance sheet as they mature. In other words, each of these debt instruments has a defined maturity date at which time the Fed will get its principal back for the bonds, which will then likely be re-financed by someone in the open market. If they simply allow them to roll off over time, some analysts believe this could take as long as 20 years.

The real danger of recession comes if this strategy doesn't adequately cool the economy and forces the Fed to act more aggressively. They could do this in two ways. First, they could simply raise rates faster, higher, and more often than people expect. And second, instead of allowing the \$8.5 Trillion of securities simply roll off as they matured, they could begin actively selling them in the open market, which would drive up long-term interest rates and would indeed affect us all. We'll see....



## ...HEHN continued from page 1

me to be in the room when it comes up due to financial interests,” he said. “I don’t want any appearance of impropriety.”

Coward said permission for recusal wasn’t up to him – the board had to vote on the matter – but did say that usually recusal isn’t granted unless there is a financial interest.

“But it does involve a private property that you own and a right-of-way assuming that Highlands may have control,” said Coward. “But you have to ask the town for recusal otherwise you have a job as commissioner to stay here and vote.”

Hehn then asked Coward if he had a recommendation.

Coward said pointedly, “No, I do not. My opinion doesn’t matter. It’s what the board thinks.”

Both Commissioners Amy Patterson and Brian Stiehler said they didn’t think recusal was necessary on either account but since Commissioner Hehn asked, they had no problem with it.

When the time came, Commissioner Hehn was recused and he left the room.

### Agenda Item # 15

Mayor Taylor said Commissioner Hehn didn’t want Redline Draft of Fiber Contract item discussed in public, but he put it on the agenda because he had several concerns, because it appears Hehn is targeting Town Manager Josh Ward.

“First of all, I have an issue with the letter he sent our Town Manager requesting that he pay Mr. Hehn money for the cost of his attorney and, if not it would become a public embarrassment to Mr. Ward,” said Taylor. (See the Feb. 24 edition: Hehn asks town to make Town Manager Ward pay him for lawyer fees).

“Then when I saw this filing this week (see Hehn threatens litigation against town, March 17) I thought we needed to have a public discussion because what is disappointing to me is the only person named in this is Josh Ward which puts personal pressure on Josh.

“I wish and would like for Mr. Hehn, if he wants to do a filing to do it against the town of Highlands. If he would like to file it against the mayor of Highlands for working with Josh Ward, that would be fine, and the board, instead of just targeting and focusing on Josh,” said Taylor.

### Background

On Friday, March 11, Town Manager Josh Ward received a subpoena, stamped March 9, from Macon County Superior Court regarding a request for pre-litigation mediation of public records.

The mediation is about an ongoing dispute between the town, the Board of Commissioners, Town Manager Josh Ward and Commissioner Marc Hehn concerning the Hotwire contract’s draft redline documents.

At the Feb. 17 Town Board meeting, with a vote of 4-1, the board of commissioners thought they put the red-line document request to bed, but Hehn is still demanding the documents, which the town and its attorney Jay Coward say they don’t have. Now Hehn’s pulled the courts into the dispute by filing for mediation.

Mayor Taylor said he also wanted to set the record straight concerning the first company the town considered to run the broadband highway, Wide Open.

“Also, in the filing for mediation Mr. Hehn contends that we the board when dealing with Wide Open, didn’t seek bids for a company to manage the network. That’s sounds like we were trying to bypass a process and I want to state for the record that we were following all the rules we were aware of concerning HB 129. We were using our three attorneys for guidance to make sure we were complying with all the statutes and regulations at the time,” he said.

In closing Taylor said he hoped Hehn would change his approach and not just target Town Manager Josh Ward because Ward, who works at the pleasure of the board not just for one commissioner, did what the board told him to – to not waste his time trying to locate redline documents that likely no longer existed.

“I would hope that he would include us, the mayor and the board in any kind of court action he is considering,” said Taylor.

But Attorney Coward said Hehn isn’t “considering” court action, he already started it.

“I would like to state for the record that he is not only considering litigation; he has started litigation. This 22CVS157 is the file number. This litigation has already been commenced by Mr. Hehn,” said Coward.

Coward went on to explain again, that what Hehn is requesting is a redline version of the contract with Hotwire.

“The redline version is simply a draft that you work on. I worked on the contract myself for many pages with our attorneys in Washington, DC. We had many drafts and when we finally got to the last draft we agreed upon and signed it and I threw away my drafts and I am assuming the other lawyers did as well,” he said. “If you had to keep all the drafts of every document you finally execute you would have to have a warehouse

• See HEHN page 14

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# • H-C HOSPITAL NEWS •

## Volunteering at Highlands-Cashiers Hospital and the Eckerd Living Center Brings Joy Not Just to Patients and Residents, But to You, the Volunteer

I am anticipating the arrival of spring even more than usual this year. Of course I'm looking forward to the milder temperatures and the explosion of green on our Plateau, but I'm also elated that we

are in a different place with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic we have faced these past two challenging years.

Thankfully, virus transmission is down, mask requirements are easing, and people

are going out again. That doesn't mean we can let down our guard completely, however. We are still observing universal masking here at the hospital, practicing excellent handwashing hygiene, and distancing as appropriate to assure our hospital and nursing home are safe.

One of the things I'm most excited about is welcoming volunteers back to Highlands-Cashiers Hospital (HCH). Since we've been in "shutdown mode" for so long here at the hospital, I know every HCH team member and Eckerd Living Center (ELC) resident can't wait to see some new friendly faces. Not only do volunteers perform essential work and beautification here at the hospital and ELC, they bring a loving spirit that permeates our spaces. We so deeply appreciate that intangible but critical spirit.

If you have volunteered in the past at HCH, we will happily welcome you back; if you haven't volunteered here yet, but are looking for a great opportunity to help your community, this is definitely it. And as any volunteer will tell you, the gifts they get back in return from giving their time and energy to HCH is immeasurable.

There are a multitude of work opportunities here, depending on what your individual interests and talents are. You can help at our main reception desk, welcoming people and ushering patients to their destinations, assist staff in other ways, such as helping with administrative tasks and distributing reading materials to patients, and work with clinical staff on whatever needs doing, from cleaning a screening machine and restocking supplies to offering a patient some comfort.

For volunteers with green thumbs, the Mountain Garden Club keeps the ELC gardens looking beautiful. The ELC gardens, as you can imagine, offer much healing to our residents and their visitors. Volunteers also keep ELC residents company and offer important opportunities for them to socialize. I've known that our residents have really missed interacting with our volunteers and the energy volunteers bring to the facility.



**Tom Neal, CEO/CNO  
Highlands Cashiers  
Hospital**

Volunteers have even been drafted for calling BINGO games, so the possibilities are endless.



We've talked many times in this column about how healthcare providers are called to the work, and to truly making a difference in people's lives. Volunteering at HCH gives people who aren't in healthcare the same opportunity to be rewarded by working with patients and supporting our great health-

care workers.

If you're interested in finding out more about volunteer opportunities with us, go to our hospital website, [mission-health.org/member-hospitals/highlands-cashiers](https://mission-health.org/member-hospitals/highlands-cashiers), and click on the "Volunteer at Highlands-Cashiers Hospital" link, or call our Volunteer Coordinator Jeannie Macleod at (828) 526-1345. Our volunteer application can be accessed on that page as well. We will contact you and support you in completing required activities to become a volunteer. You will be required to complete some pre-volunteer activities which include background checks, health screening, and education.

In thinking about ways you can give back to your community, there's no better choice than to volunteer your time and service to HCH, and we deeply appreciate it.

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

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# • BIZ/ORG NEWS •

## Blue Ridge Health – Highlands Cashiers launches Telehealth program at Blue Ridge School



This March, Blue Ridge Health–Highlands Cashiers (BRH-HC) launched a new telehealth program at Blue Ridge School and Early College, thanks to a grant from the Fullerton Foundation providing the medical technology, and to ongoing financial support for BRH-HC from the Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation.

The partnership between the local school and clinic provides telehealth services to students and staff. During visits with the school nurse, students with a signed permission form from a parent or guardian can receive quicker access to care by connecting to a board-certified physician at BRH-HC.

“Blue Ridge Health has been providing school-based telehealth services in other counties and wanted to extend these services to Blue Ridge School and Early College,” says Tammy Greenwell, Chief Operations Officer at Blue Ridge Health.

Utilizing telehealth technology, the provider can listen to the heart and lungs; visualize ears, nose, and throat; order flu, strep, or COVID tests; and prescribe medication as needed. This can allow students to receive quicker access to the care they need through a rapid diagnosis of medical conditions, which in turn can support a faster recovery.

Participating providers Ann Davis, M.D., and Kristy Fincher, M.D., along with BRSEC school nurse Danielle Rice, R.N., received on the device training in February, and paperwork has been sent to

school families allowing them the option to participate in the program.

“I am thrilled to get the chance to work with kids in Jackson County in a school-based health setting,” says Dr. Davis. “It’s an invaluable resource for the parents, kids, and teachers at the school, and a great chance for us to get to reach out to the community.”

“We at Blue Ridge School and Blue Ridge Early College are thrilled to have this telehealth unit to increase access to care for our staff and students,” says Nurse Rice. “We are incredibly appreciative to Blue Ridge Health and the Fullerton Foundation for funding the machine, as well as to the Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation for bringing more opportunities for healthcare to our area.”

For more information, visit [brchs.com](http://brchs.com) or call 828-692-4289.

### About Blue Ridge Health

Blue Ridge Health (BRH) is a nonprofit healthcare system that works closely with communities to meet the ever-changing healthcare needs of our region with high-quality, comprehensive, and accessible healthcare services. With 35 locations throughout Western North Carolina, BRH offers primary care, dental, pharmacy, behavioral health and nutrition services that prioritize the patient care experience. For 58 years, BRH has served as the leader in community-focused healthcare, providing services to communities in Transylvania, Henderson, Rutherford, Buncombe, Polk, Jackson, Macon, Haywood, Swain and Cherokee Counties. If you would like more information about BRH, call 828.692.4289 or visit [brchs.com](http://brchs.com).

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# Attorney General's Office Had 'Great Concerns' the Mission-HCA Deal Was Rigged 'From the Beginning'

2018 Memo Says "Deck Had Been Stacked" by Then-CEO

By Peter H. Lewis and Sally Kestin

Asheville Watchdog

The North Carolina attorney general's office had "great concerns about how HCA was selected" as the purchaser of the Mission Health System, including that "the deck had been stacked in its favor from the beginning" by then-CEO Ronald A. Paulus and his advisor Philip D. Green, according to a 2018 internal document obtained by Asheville Watchdog.

"[W]ith no outside advice other than Phil Green," whom the investigators wrote had an undisclosed "prior business relationship with HCA," Mission Health's board of directors decided not to issue requests for competitive bids or to hold an auction before agreeing to sell Asheville's flagship hospital system to HCA Healthcare for \$1.5 billion, according to the document, prepared in advance of a meeting between Department of Justice lawyers and HCA representatives on Oct. 30, 2018.

Instead, as Paulus "coached HCA behind the scenes on how to best present its case to the Mission Board," the board invited only one other healthcare company — identified in other documents as Novant Health of Winston-Salem — to present a formal offer.

"In the end," the document stated, "an outside observer could conclude that HCA rose to the top among a limited number of bidders because the deck had been stacked in its favor from the beginning by Dr. Paulus and Mr. Green."

The attorney general's office was so concerned about potential conflicts of interest by Paulus and Green that it requested the Mission board revoke on the transaction, the attorney general's deputy chief of staff, Laura Brewer,

wrote to Asheville Watchdog this week. After considering the information, the Mission board voted again, unanimously, to approve it.

Paulus did not respond to Asheville Watchdog's requests for comment. Green declined an interview request but noted that the attorney general, after an extensive review, did not object to the sale.

## Only HCA, Novant, and Atrium Considered

The Oct. 30 document, written by Special Deputy Attorney General Jennifer T. Harrod, who led the North Carolina Department of Justice investigation, was among more than 6,000 records released Feb. 25 by the office of Attorney General Josh Stein in partial response to public records requests filed by Asheville Watchdog over the past two years.

The documents contain details not previously made public about the sale of the 133-year-old nonprofit hospital system, including that, other than HCA and Novant, Carolinas HealthCare System (now Atrium Health) was the only other healthcare company that the Mission board seriously considered. But Carolinas was rejected quickly and not even invited to make a presentation to the board, the records show.

The documents confirm and expand on Asheville Watchdog's previous reporting on the role played by Paulus and Green. They show Green negotiated proposed term sheets — nonbinding proposals — for both a \$1.5 billion sale of substantially all of Mission's assets to HCA and for a \$650 million joint venture with HCA that would have preserved some local control. HCA provided Paulus with a written affiliation proposal on Aug. 12, 2017, six weeks before the Mission board authorized Paulus to engage in calls and meetings with potential affiliation partners.

Overall, the newly released documents raise serious questions



Then-CEO of Mission Health Ronald A. Paulus

about the role of Paulus, Mission's president and CEO; his longtime personal friend and advisor Green; and the 18-member Mission board of directors, which investigators said seems to have accepted HCA's arguments about cost-savings and improved quality of care "uncritically."

## Paulus's emails examined

Under state law, the attorney general has the right to review any transaction in which a nonprofit corporation sells substantially all of its assets. The investigation of the proposed Mission deal began in May 2018.

By October 2018, Harrod and other lawyers in the attorney general's office had examined thousands of documents related to Mission's decision to sell, including Paulus's and Green's email exchanges with HCA and other potential partners, and minutes of Mission board meetings.

On the afternoon of Oct. 30,

2018, Harrod, at least two other lawyers with the North Carolina Department of Justice, and four representatives of HCA met at the attorney general's office in Raleigh. No one from Mission attended, the records show.

"We see that HCA's purchase of Mission brings something new and dynamic to the region," Harrod wrote in an opening statement. She said the Department of Justice investigators had met the previous week with the chairman and vice-chairman of Mission's board, who talked "about how much HCA's efficiency, commitment to patient care, and sophisticated data analytics impressed them."

"At the same time," she continued, "we have great concerns about how HCA was selected to be the entity that purchased Mission."

"Here are the facts as we currently understand them," Harrod wrote:

- Paulus and Green "steered

the process by which other bidders were identified. Mission decided, with no outside advice other than Phil Green, not to put out a request for bids or hold an auction."

- Green had "a prior business relationship with HCA" that "was never disclosed to the Mission board."

- When Mission's board members visited HCA headquarters, "Dr. Paulus and Mr. Green both thought it was critically important for Mr. Green to attend that meeting to ensure its success."

- "Dr. Paulus coached HCA behind the scenes on how to best present its case to the Mission Board. On two occasions, he pointedly told HCA that Mission's peers were and would favorably consider being acquired by HCA."

- Paulus discussed his con-

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## ...RIGGED continued from page 1

tinued role with potential buyers. One wanted him to be chief information officer. "Later, that partner was dropped from consideration on grounds that appear pretextual to us ... Reading his email exchanges with HCA, an outside observer could conclude that he was working hard to demonstrate his value to HCA," the memo states. (Just days after the Mission sale closed, Paulus announced he was joining HCA as a strategic advisor. Tax records show Paulus received more than \$4 million for his final four months at Mission. The terms of his employment agreement with Mission and his consulting job with HCA remain unknown. A spokeswoman for HCA's North Carolina Division said Paulus is no longer a strategic advisor to HCA.)

- "Neither the board nor its advisors seems to have given any thought to the fact that certain transaction partners offered Dr. Paulus greater scope for advancement versus others or versus no transaction at all," Harrod wrote.

- "In our opinion, Dr. Paulus's conduct violated the Mission conflict of interest policy, which requires an officer or board member with even a potential conflict to not merely recuse himself from voting on the matter, but also from advocating for an outcome. Dr. Paulus offered to recuse himself, but was advised that it was unnecessary. The rationale was that since all of the potential partners wanted Dr. Paulus to continue in some capacity, therefore he had no conflict of interest."

### "Just have to trust HCA"

Harrod had already expressed concerns to Mission that the terms outlined in the Letter of Intent (LOI) negotiated by Paulus and Green did not go far enough in protecting the public's interests.

"Given Mission Health's strong operating and financial position, we believe Mission should be well positioned to negotiate

for strong terms to protect public health interests, as has been done in other similar transactions," she wrote to Mission officials on Aug. 8, 2018.

PHOTO: Philip D. Green, Mission's strategic advisor

Instead, on Aug. 30, 2018, HCA and Mission signed an official contract, called the asset purchase agreement (APA), on terms the attorney general's office believed favored HCA.

"Dr. Paulus and Mr. Green were principal negotiators of the APA," Harrod wrote in her memo in advance of the Oct. 30, 2018, meeting. "It appears to us comparing the terms of the LOI to the terms of the APA, HCA improved its position considerably."

"One of the major inducements for Mission to enter the LOI with HCA was the promise that hospitals and services would be maintained," Harrod wrote. "We and others advised Mission prior to signing the APA, that such commitments needed to be specific and measurable in order to be enforceable."

"The emails we have seen demonstrate that Dr. Paulus ultimately buckled in the face of resistance from HCA and decided that Mission would just have to trust HCA," she wrote.

Harrod wrote, "Even now, the board believes that HCA has committed to maintaining the current level of services ... even though the APA says no such thing." For example, the agreement allowed HCA to eliminate some services and close facilities if they became "commercially unreasonable," documents show.

Harrod also wrote that "Mission agreed to let HCA use its existing charity care policy, even though it appears to us that for most patients, they would be much better off under Mission's policy." Weeks earlier, lawyers for both HCA and Mission had written to Harrod that HCA's charity care policies were "more generous in most respects" than Mission's policies.



Highlands-Cashiers Hospital is one of Mission Health's five member hospitals in Western NC. They are also Angel Medical Center in Franklin, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital in Spruce Pine, McDowell Hospital in Marion and Transylvania Regional Hospital in Brevard

HCA's \$188 Million Settlement

In January 2017, six months before beginning discussions with Paulus and Green, HCA agreed to pay \$188 million to settle litigation over its failure to abide by the terms of its purchase of non-profit Health Midwest hospitals in the Kansas City area, a transaction similar to its later deal with Mission Health.

In a letter Sept. 10, 2018, Harrod asked Mission senior vice president Donald R. Esposito to "[d]etail the assurances Mission has received that HCA will honor its contractual obligations, in light of its failures to do so in connection with its acquisition of Health Midwest."

In her document for the Oct. 30, 2018, meeting, Harrod stated: "Despite the experiences of the health care foundation in Missouri, Mission agreed to dispute resolution terms that overwhelmingly favor HCA."

"These are examples, not an exclusive list," Harrod concluded.

"The best possible deal"

The attorney general's investigation intensified over the next two months and included ensuring that Mission's board knew about Green's prior business relationship with HCA.

"We requested that the board be fully informed of this relationship and then take another vote on the deal," Brewer, the deputy chief of staff, told Asheville Watchdog this week. "We also ensured that Mr. Green would not receive any compensation dependent on closing of the transaction, including any 'bonus' or 'success fee,' and that neither he nor his company would otherwise benefit from the transaction."

The Mission board held special sessions Dec. 13 and Dec. 20, 2018, and Jan. 8, 2019, to discuss final details of the pending deal, including the findings of Harrod's investigation.

In the end, Mission Board chairman John R. Ball wrote, in a letter to Stein after the Jan. 8 meeting, that the board considered the attorney general's concerns and "concluded that Mission's management team and its outside advisors were committed at all times to securing for Mission the best possible transaction with potential merger partners, ultimately leading to the transaction with HCA."

"No member of Mission's management or its advisors took any action, or failed to take any action, that was detrimental to Mission's interests," Ball wrote.

The Mission board, Ball

wrote, "believes it has been, and remains fully informed with respect to all these issues," and was "steadfast" in its goal to close the sale to HCA. The board's re-vote was once again unanimous.

Ball could not be reached for comment.

### Letter of Non-Objection

In an August 2021 interview with Asheville Watchdog, Stein said state law limited his authority to halt the sale despite the information uncovered by his investigation. Because of the law's restrictions, Stein said, he sought specific enforceable agreements, a number of concessions from HCA, and 15 additional conditions to be added to a revised asset purchase agreement.

Stein's conditions included the hiring of an independent monitor to oversee HCA's compliance with the agreement; enforceable commitments to maintain current levels of service at all six hospitals in the Mission system, not for the five years Paulus and Green negotiated in some cases, but for 10 years; and requiring HCA to adopt what he viewed as Mission's more generous charity care obligations.

Stein also got HCA and Mission to agree that the attorney general could enforce the terms

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## ...RIGGED continued from page 13

of the contract.

On Jan. 16, 2019, Mission and HCA agreed to the attorney general's changes and signed an "amended and restated" asset purchase agreement. Harrod then informed them that the attorney general would not object to the sale.

### Green:

#### "Concerns were baseless"

Green declined to speak with Asheville Watchdog but emailed a statement. "The Attorney General, after reviewing thousands of pages of documents and conducting an inquiry into ensuring a fair process and the absence of any conflict of interest, concluded that any concerns were baseless

and wrote a Non-Objection letter," he wrote.

The letter of non-objection, written by Harrod, actually said the Attorney General's investigation had identified "potential concerns." But, it said, "Mission Health has represented to the Attorney General that ... no one on Mission's board and no one responsible for advising Mission's board will receive any direct or indirect benefit as a result of the sale of the operating assets of the Mission Nonprofit Entities to HCA."

Green is still listed as an independent advisor for large health-care mergers and acquisitions and has a consulting company based in Arlington, Virginia. Paulus is still

a principal of RAPMD Strategic Advisors, based in Asheville.

### Update From Stein's Office

Harrod, who led the investigation into the Mission-HCA sale, is no longer with the Attorney General's office. She declined to comment for this story.

In a statement to Asheville Watchdog last week, Brewer, Stein's deputy chief of staff, wrote, "Under North Carolina law (unlike in many other states), the Attorney General's authority in these kinds of deals is quite limited" to ensuring a fair purchase price and "that the charitable mission of the nonprofit is being carried forward."

"North Carolina law does not give our Office the general authority to police health care transactions based on how they would impact patients, quality of care, rural access, and other issues," Brewer wrote. "Even though the Attorney General's legal authority over this type of transaction is quite limited, we succeeded in negotiating a number of significant improvements to the agreement."

#### "Paying More and Getting Less Care"

## ...HEHN continued from page 9

for your drafts. Nobody does that. And Josh didn't keep all the drafts. He has the final document that was signed by the town."

Coward brought up a memo that Hehn forwarded him and the board from Freida Bluestein of the NC School of Government that states that there is no requirement under public record law of NC to keep a redline draft.

"It's a transitory document; once you're done with it you can throw it away. We told Mr. Hehn that we don't have a redline draft available for him, yet he is suing Josh Ward, the Town Manager, to produce a redline version that we have told him doesn't exist. That is what this lawsuit is about," said Coward.

Mayor Taylor asked if the town could handle the case for Ward or does he have to engage his own attorney to defend this suit.

Attorney Coward said he thought the town should defend

HCA officially took control of the Mission system on Feb. 1, 2019.

Novant, the lone other bidder that Mission's board rejected in favor of HCA's \$1.5 billion offer, went on to sign a \$5 billion deal, including \$2 billion in cash, to acquire a smaller and less profitable hospital in Wilmington.

The Attorney General's office denied Asheville Watchdog's request for a comparison of Novant's and HCA's offers for Mission, citing state statutes that exempt confidential business information from public records requests.

Ashton W. Miller, Novant's manager of public relations, declined to comment.

In the statement she prepared for the Oct. 30, 2018, meeting with HCA representatives, Harrod wrote: "We understand that HCA plans to do further acquisitions in North Carolina. This may not be the last time we are across the table from each other."

Last week, when Asheville Watchdog asked what lessons were learned from the Mission sale, At-

torney General Stein responded:

"Too often, when one hospital swallows up another, patients end up paying more and getting worse care. North Carolinians need better safeguards to review transactions to put the patients' interest first. I'm working with partners in the legislature now to determine how our laws can better protect patients in these health care transactions."

• Asheville Watchdog is a non-profit news team producing stories that matter to Asheville and Buncombe County. Peter H. Lewis is a former senior writer and editor at The New York Times. Email [plewis@avlwatchdog.org](mailto:plewis@avlwatchdog.org). Sally Kestin is a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter. Email [skestin@avlwatchdog.org](mailto:skestin@avlwatchdog.org).

Asheville Watchdog gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Duke University School of Law's First Amendment Clinic, with special thanks to Danielle Siegel, Alexandria Murphy, Ben Rossi, and Dillon Farnetti.

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making notes on what the other person is submitting for consideration. And there you have it. There is no 'redline' document per say that can be produced," he said.

Commissioner Patterson said she felt like Hehn was harassing town staff.

"Why in the world is he going after Josh? Hehn is the one who sent us the email from Bluestein in the first place that says you have to ask the board [to authorize a search for redline documents]. And we, the board said no. So that should have been the end of it right there. To me he is just harassing Josh," she said. "Josh doesn't work for him, Josh works for the board. So why the heck is he going after him?"

Commissioner Patterson went on to say even if there was a document, the Town Manager and town staff work for the

• See HEHN page 22

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## ...SURVEY continued from page 1

"I want to salute Senator Corbin and Representative Gillespie for organizing this very important meeting on broadband funding and resources. This federal and state funding will have a tremendous impact for underserved residents living in Western Carolina. These funds literally secure the future prosperity for businesses, educational institutions and rural communities which must have access to this essential technology," said Mayor Taylor.

While state leaders were hesitant to put an exact dollar amount on the amount of potential funding that will be earmarked for WNC, Senator Corbin said he thinks it would be upwards of \$25 million. The \$25 million touted by state officials on Monday are part of American Rescue Funds allocated for broadband infrastructure growth and improvements. Those funds are in addition to \$350 million available in the state's GREAT (Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology) grants.

According to Denny, North Carolina will be dividing \$1 billion for this purpose between the state's 100 counties to reach underserved homes still without reliable internet access.

The state will determine the amount of funds distributed to each county based on an online survey, which only takes about

five minutes and is designed to gather specific information on locations in the state without adequate internet access and speeds.

Funding will be competitive and discovering where broadband is lacking within the county is vital to securing money from this one-time opportunity.

Highlands recently culminated a five-year process of constructing a fiber network throughout town which it has leased to Hotwire Communications which will run the operation over the next 25 years.

At the March Town Board meeting, Highlands Mayor Pat Taylor said at the end of the process once the contract was signed, an inspector from Palmetto said Highlands had sloughed through the protracted process and had made it across the finish line.

"He said he has worked with many communities throughout the U.S. that have tried to create fiber networks. There's a lot of enthusiasm at the beginning and there are lot of challenges to address," said Taylor. "But because we took some bold steps and some initiatives a number of years ago, we are flipping the switch now."

Seven years in the making, Hotwire Communications will provide service to local residents and businesses. The terms of the lease will pay for the cost of constructing the network.

"This town network will also

enable the Town of Highlands to become a Smart Digital City when it comes to managing our utilities," he said.

Taylor went on to say that the inspector said even with all the government money coming forward, it will take other communities three, four and even five years to realize a broadband network because it takes time to design, plan and implement those types of systems. But the time is now.

Meanwhile, Broadband and Digital Equity needs to hear from residents.

Denny said state residents can also call or text in to participate in the survey. Residents without internet service but with phones capable of text messaging can text "internet" to 919-750-0553. Standard text messaging rates will apply.

Residents with landlines or cellphones that do not have texting capability may place a voice call to 919-750-0553. An interactive voice response system will guide them through a series of short questions to obtain the caller's address and register it in the database as having no internet capability at all.

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## West boys team wins in OT



The boys West team took Mid-West to overtime and clinched the win 98-95 at the West versus Midwest All-Star Game on Saturday in Highlands. LSCM representatives on the court included Highlands Jeffrey Olvera and Blue Ridge Early College Michael Martinez. HS Coach Brett Lamb said it was the first time the boys West team has won the All-Star Game. Highlands Jeffrey Olvera was awarded a scholarship.

— By Brian O'Shea, Plateau Daily News

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## Highlands Hurricanes Swim Team win close meet in Waynesville

On Saturday, March 12, 21 members of the Highlands Hurricanes Swim Team traveled to Waynesville, NC to swim in the SMAC March Madness swim meet against host team Smoky Mountain Aquatics Club (SMAC), and the North Georgia Rapids (NGR) from Blairsville, GA. The Hurricanes won with a score of 1219, SMAC-1151, and NGR-1122.

They were led by Jr. Olympian Chase Kenter and Bella Batista who both won all 4 of their events. On the way, Kenter broke the team record in the 100-yard freestyle.

With 80 swims the Hurricanes had 46 personal records (PRs) and won in a team effort where all 21 swimmers scored.

Jr. Olympian Aniah McKim

scored 77 pts winning 3 events and getting a 2nd place finish. Jr. Olympian Corena Dearth scored 70 pts, won 2 events and scored a 2nd. Emilina Hernandez and Jr. Olympian Conner Hughes each scored 68 pts. Both bringing home a 1st, 2nd and a 3rd place finish.

Elizabeth Burnette scored 66 pts with a 1st and 3rd, Jr. Olympian Paolo McRae 65 pts with a 2nd and 3 3rds. Alyse Remery and Jr. Olympian Jack Sumner both scored 63 pts, Remery with a first, and Sumner with 2 2nds. Penelope McRae scored 61 pts with 2 3rds.

Margaret Cole scored 56 pts and a 2nd place finish, Jayce Powell added 53 pts and 2 first place finishes to the tally, while older

brother Justin contributed 52 pts and a 1st and a 2nd. Ian Batista scored 48 pts and 3 3rds, Max Justin racked up 46 pts and a 2nd. Brothers Chris and William Burnette both scored 45 pts, Chris with a 2nd and William with a 2nd and a 3rd. Charlie Wilkes scored 44 pts, Blake Kenter 37, and Jelehna McKim 32.

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

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## ...HEADLINES continued from page 1

Reports of alleged voter fraud surfaced after news outlets uncovered evidence that Meadows registered and voted using the address of a single-wide Macon County mobile home where owners and neighbors say he never lived or visited. Meadows voted in Macon County by absentee ballot by mail in North Carolina in the November 2020 presidential election.

North Carolina law requires voters to live at their registered address for 30 days before the election in which they vote. Lying on voter registrations is a felony.

In the letter — which was addressed to a Ms. Dismukes with the NC District Attorney's Office and sent out by her office, Welch said that she would recuse herself from the matter. She noted that Meadows, a former congressman from the area, contributed to her campaign for DA and appeared in political ads endorsing her.

While Meadows is still cur-

rently legally registered to vote in Macon County according to Board of Elections Director Melanie Thiabult, public records show that Meadows is also registered to vote in Alexandria, VA and that he registered to vote in Virginia almost exactly one year after registering at an address located in Scaly Mountain.

He and his wife reportedly voted in person in Virginia in the November 2021 gubernatorial election after registering to vote in that state in September 2021. The couple owns a condominium in Alexandria, VA.

The same time Meadows' dominated headlines for potential felony charges, Western North Carolina's current Representative Madison Cawthorn shared the stage with his own allegations of legal troubles.

Last week, Congressman Cawthorn settled at least one of three traffic violations he's faced

in the past five months in counties across WNC.

Cawthorn was charged with speeding in Buncombe County and court records showed he was speeding at 89 miles per hour. According to NC state law, anything over 80 MPH can also include a charge of reckless driving, however Cawthorn did not receive that charge. Buncombe County court records show that Rep. Cawthorn closed out his speeding violation with a plea by consenting to the lesser charge of improper equipment, speedometer on March 4, 2022.

With the Buncombe County speeding charge finalized, Cawthorn now awaits court dates for additional speeding violations pending in Polk and Cleveland counties in North Carolina in addition to the Driving with a License Revoked after his NC driver's license was suspended.



# • HIGHLANDS AREA EVENTS •

## 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.

## 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](http://www.maconncliteracy.org), call 828-526 – 0863 or email [info@maconncliteracy.org](mailto:info@maconncliteracy.org)

## 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 10:30-11pm.

## 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.

## Tues. & Thurs.

• Pilates-Strength and Stretch with Autumn Lucas

• New Zumba class with Gay Chalpin from 4:30-5:30p.

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

## 1st Tuesdays

• Indivisible Highlands from 5-6:30 pm at the Hudson Library.

## Tuesdays

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

## 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.

## Every Fri., Sat. & Sun.

• 1st run movies at the Playhouse on Oak Street. This week: March 25-27 - The Lost City. 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. [www.mountaintheatre.com](http://www.mountaintheatre.com)

## 2nd Saturdays

• The Western North Carolina Woodturners Club meets in Highlands at The Bascom at 10 a.m. March and November.

## 3rd Saturdays

• The American Legion Post 370 meets on the 3rd Saturday of every month at the First Methodist Church at 315 Main Street in their Community Room/ 909 Chapel. We serve breakfast at 9AM and hold our monthly meeting at 10AM We invite ALL Veterans to attend. Contact Ed McCloskey, Commander for any information @828-787-1660

## Thurs., March 24

• Performer Duquette Johnston at the Ruffed Grouse at the Highlander Mountain House at 9 p.m. Tickets are \$25. Call 828-526-2590

## Fri., March 25

• Portrait Sittings with Morgan Johnston 10a to noon by appointment. Email [morgan@ruggedandfancy.com](mailto:morgan@ruggedandfancy.com)

## Thurs. April 14

• Italian Inspired Spring Fling at The Farm with Executive Chef, Craig Richards. Book online at [OldEdwardsInn.com](http://OldEdwardsInn.com)

• Winter stories will be held at the High Dive from 2-4 , a casual gathering of story swapping. Come, Tell, Listen.

## Sun., April 24

• Chef Dinner at OEI's The Farm, Italian-inspired Spring Fling with chef Craig Richards. Book at [OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners](http://OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners)

## April 29-May 1

• Bear Shadow Music Festival. For tickets go to [bearshadownc.com](http://bearshadownc.com).

## Thurs., May 12

• Winter stories will be held at the High Dive from 2-4, a casual gathering of story swapping. Come, Tell, Listen.

## Sun., May 15

• Chef Dinner at OEI's The Farm, May Day Celebration with Celebrity Chef, author and lifestyle expert Chadwick Boyd. Book at [OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners](http://OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners)

## Fri., June 10

• Chef Dinner at OEI's The Farm, Red, White and 'Que with the Fox Brothers. Book at [OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners](http://OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners)

## Sun., July 24

• La Fete de Champagne. Book at [OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners](http://OldEdwardsHospitality.com/chefdinners)

## Sat -Sun, June 25 & 26

• Highlands Mountaintop Rotary Art & Craft Show will be held in Kelsey-Hutchinson Park on Pine Street in downtown Highlands from 10a to 5p. Now in its 17th year, this popular event showcases talent from the area and features fine art, folk art, crafts and furniture. Attendance is free, dogs are allowed, and food will be available. For info contact coordinator Cynthia Strain at (828) 318-9430 or visit: [www.mountaintopshow.com](http://www.mountaintopshow.com)



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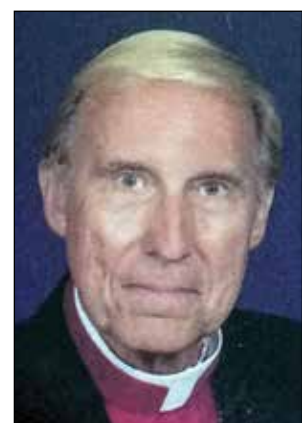
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# • SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •



Archbishop  
John S. Erbelding

## When the wine runs out

"They have no wine."

With those words Mary speaks a truth about our lives, a truth that at some point we all experience. There comes a day when the wine gives out. The glass is empty. The party is over.

On that day life seems empty and dry. There is no vibrancy or vitality. Nothing is growing or fermenting within us.

Our world is colorless and tasteless. The bouquet of life is absent and we are living less than fully alive.

Mary's words hold before us some serious questions and wonderings.

Where has the wine of our life given out? What relationships have run dry? What parts of us remain empty?

Each one of us could tell a story about the day the wine gave out. It might be about the death of a loved one or the loss of a friendship or marriage. Some will speak about their search for love and acceptance. Some will describe their thirst for meaning and significance. Others will tell of their guilt, disappointments, or regrets. Many of the stories will be about fear of what is or what might be.

They are not all stories from the past, however. Some of us are living those stories today.

Behind each of our stories is the hope and desire for a wedding of our life.

We come to the wedding at Cana not simply as guests and spectators, but as participants, as a bride or groom, seeking union, intimacy, and wholeness.

Despite our best efforts, good intentions, and hard work, however, it seems that the wine of our life is always giving out.

No matter how often we refill it, our glass remains empty. There is never enough wine.

As the day wears on we become increasingly aware that we cannot replenish the wine from our own resources.

That day seems like a disaster, an embarrassment, a failure.

That must have been what it was like for the bride and groom at the wedding in Cana. "They have no wine," Mary tells Jesus. That is not a condemnation or judgment but simply an observation, a diagnosis. This is not about the wine but about the people. It is a statement about the human condition. It is about you and me as much as it is about the wedding in Cana of Galilee.

• 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

### CHAPEL OF THE SKY

Sky Valley, GA • 706-746-2999

Sundays: 10 a.m. Worship

Holy Communion 1st & 3rd Sundays

### CHRIST ANGLICAN CHURCH

828-743-1701 • 464 Hwy 64E. Cashiers, NC 28717

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 • 526-2968

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

Ash Wed. services March 2, 12 p.m., & 5 p.m.

### 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

### GOLDMINE BAPTIST CHURCH

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Sunday School: 10 am. Worship Service: 11 am

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www.gracecashiers.com • Pastor Steve Doerter 743-9814

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### HAMBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Hwy 107N. • Glenville, NC • 743-2729 • Nathan Johnson

Sunday: School 9:45a. Worship 11a & 7p. Bible Study 6p

Wed. Kidsquest 6p.; Worship 7p.

### HIGHLANDS ASSEMBLY OF GOD

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

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

### HIGHLANDS CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Dan Robinson • 11339 Buck Creek Road

The Highlands Central Baptist Church is temporarily

sharing the facilities of the Shortoff Baptist Church.

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

### HIGHLANDS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Dr. Randy Lucas. Pastor 526-3376

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909 Bluegrass and 10:50 Traditional

www.highlandsmethodist.org

### HOLY FAMILY LUTHERAN CHURCH: ELCA

Rev. Angie Ballard • 2152 Dillard Road • 526-9741

Worship/Communion: 10:30 All are welcome.

We wear masks and social distance.

### MACEDONIA BAPTIST CHURCH

8 miles south of Highlands on N.C. 28 S in Satolah

Pastor Zane Talley

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

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

### MOUNTAIN SYNAGOGUE

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### MOUNTAIN BIBLE CHURCH

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### SCALY MOUNTAIN BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Marty Kilby

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

Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg.: 7 p.m.

### SCALY MOUNTAIN CHURCH OF GOD

290 Buck Knob Road; Pastor Donald G. Bates • 526-3212

Sun.: School: 10 a.m.; Worship: 10:45 a.m.; Worship: 6 p.m.

### SHORTOFF BAPTIST CHURCH

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

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

### ST. JUDE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

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### UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP

85 Sierra Drive. Franklin • ufranklin.org

Sunday Worship - 11 a.m.

### WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers

Sunday School: 10 am. Worship Service: 11 am



# • POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

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

## **March 12**

• At 5:27 p.m., officers responded to a 2-vehicle accident on US 64 west and Hickory Hill Road.

## **March 16**

• At 8:20 a.m., officers responded to a 1-vehicle accident on N. 3rd Street.

## **March 19**

• At 11:59 p.m., officers responded to a call about graffiti

and vandalism where property was defaced with a pen or permanent marker and spray paint on several signs and buildings in town. Coming soon sign for PAC, Roll off Trash Container, street signs- stop, speed, announcement sign, public restrooms on Pine Street, mailbox at the Community Building, Electrical box at corner of Chestnut and US 64 and traffic light control box at Maple St. and U.S. 64.

• Officers responded to a call of the larceny of a utility trailer valued at \$4,000 from a residence on NC 106.

## **March 20**

## ...SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING continued from page 18

It is, if you will pardon the pun, a spiritual condition.

It is about our inner life, our way of being, more than the circumstances outside us.

Too often we live with the illusion of our own self-sufficiency. That illusion is shattered on the day the wine runs out and the jars of our life stand empty and dry.

That day confronts us with a new truth as old as creation itself. We are the recipients and not the creators of our life. We were never intended nor expected to live by the sufficiency of our own resources. Christ is the true vintner and chief steward of our lives.

Regardless of how it feels or what we think about it, the day the wine runs out is the beginning of a miracle.

Christ does not simply refill our glasses. He transforms our lives, turning water into wine.

It is, after all, the third day, the day of resurrection and new life. That which was colorless is now vibrant red. That which had no taste now tingles the tongue. That which had no fragrance now has a full bouquet. That which had no life is now fermenting, active, and alive.

On the third day our lives are filled to the brim with the good wine, intoxicating us with the life of God, inebriating us with

the blood of Christ, and leaving us under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

That's the miracle at Cana and it has never ceased happening. Every moment of every day Christ pours himself into the empty jars of our life. He is the good wine, extravagant, abundant, endless. Every time that good wine is poured, our lives are changed and transformed.

I can't tell you how that happens. I don't know how it happens. I only know that it does happen. I have tasted the good wine. I have experienced the miracle at Cana in my life and seen it in the lives of others.

I have experienced moments when death is turned into life, sorrow into joy, and despair into hope. I have seen that happen in the lives of others. I have been surprised by fear that was transformed into courage and seen people do things they never thought possible. I have watched empty lives be filled back up.

I know of broken marriages that became vibrant and life-giving.

Those and a thousand others like them are the miracles of Cana.

Those are moments Christ's glory is revealed and we are illumined, shining with the radiance of his glory.

His glory becomes ours, two lives, one glory.

"They have no wine," Mary said.

• A little past midnight, officers responded to a call of simple assault where a man was punched in the mouth at the High Dive on Carolina Way.

**The Highlands Fire & Rescue log from March 15.**

## **March 15**

• At 11:22 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on NC 106.

• At 1:49 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on W. Church Street.

• At 4:38 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Bowery Road.

• At 8:16 p.m., the dept. responded to a call of a brush fire on Forrest Trail.

## **March 16**

• At 11:01 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Hummingbird Circle.

## **March 17**

• At a little past midnight, the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Talley Road.

• At 11:01 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Owl Gap Road.

• At 1:34 p.m., the dept. responded to a call about a rescue at a residence on NC 106.

## **March 18**

• At 11:37 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a location on Main Street.

## **March 19**

• At 1:24 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Falls Village Court.

## **March 20**

• At 8:31 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Buckberry Road.

## **March 21**


• At 7:58 a.m., the dept. responded to a motor vehicle accident on Buck Creek Road.

# • BIZ/ORG NEWS •



From left: Nicole Lui, Katie Fox, Wren Dalton, Madeline Reyes-Reyes, Frances Ortiz Figueroa, and President Tom Graham.

Rotary Club of Highlands honored Highlands School students at its March 15. Meeting. In addition to their Students of the Month Awards, each youngster was gifted with Highlands Aerial Park gift certificates from Rotarian George Powell.



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## ...HEHN continued from page 14

board, not for an individual of the board.

“This board, as a board, made a decision not to have him waste his time looking for a redline document that doesn’t exist or exists in 27 deliberations that means nothing. So, it shouldn’t be Josh at all. We are the ones who made the decision, and he works for us,” she said.

The board voted unanimously to provide legal counsel to litigate 22CVS157 at the town’s expense. The town has 21 days from March 9 to select a mediator.

### Agenda Item #16

The Powerline Removal Request – was the last item on the agenda. Like for item #15, Commissioner Hehn wasn’t in the room for #16.

The issue of removing a power line from his property was the subject of a letter from Commissioner Hehn to Town Manager Ward.

“We purchased the subject Lot 8 Revised, Glendale Subdivision on Nov. 20, 2019. When we purchased the lot, we asked Attorney Fred Jones if there were any easements across our lot and he reported none were recorded.

“To the best of our knowledge and belief, in 2018, the town constructed an underground power line across our lot to serve 950 Wilson Road without benefit of an easement. And, the town located a new pad mounted transformer on our lot at the same time, also without benefit of an easement. We understand the town’s position is if there is no objection in seven years, the line and transformer can remain.

“We are making plans to construct a new home on our lot. Please remove the power line ... remnants and the transformer which damages our lot and restricts the location of the new home,” the letter reads.

Mayor Taylor said Hehn said this was a

private matter and asked that it be kept quiet but because Hehn’s request would involve town expenses and because it wouldn’t just impact Hehn’s property but also his neighbor’s property, that of Derek Taylor, the mayor thought it should be brought to light.

Originally, an aerial line serviced the parcel now owned by Hehn as well as the adjoining parcel currently owned by Taylor.

A buyer purchased the property and planned on building a house. He asked the town to put the aerial line under the driveway leading to the potential home site and to install a pad mounted transformer. This the town did at his request.

The owner ultimately decided not to build.

When Hehn purchased the property, he asked the town to remove the underground line because he claimed the town didn’t have a right-of-way.

Town Manager Ward said the town explained that the line went through his property and had been servicing the neighboring property for many, many years and the previous owner requested that it be put underground. It was an implied right-of-way because it had been there for seven years.

“However, Hehn believes that when the line was put in the ground, that right-of-way went away,” said Ward.

Public Service Director Lamar Nix said the underground line had to be located where it is because that’s where the power pole still exists.

“There would be a problem locating it differently within the property,” said Nix. “And we would have to work out another way to feed Mr. Taylor’s home. Now he wants the underground power removed along with the pad transformer so he can build a house on the property. The neighboring property is fed with power from that direction so the

line would have to be reworked to feed his and the neighbors’ property somehow.”

Derek Taylor said he assumed he was at the mercy of board but didn’t understand why the town would want to go through a lot of expense when the existing utility works.

“Mr. Hehn bought the lot and he knew [the line and transformer box] were there and it was also put in with the purpose of feeding whatever house was to be put in there,” said Taylor. “That was the set up from the beginning – that it would do both properties when the time came. So now you want to take it all out and put it back in somewhere else. As a taxpayer I don’t like that,” said Taylor.

Mayor Taylor asked If the town had an easement for that line, and if not does it have to be removed?

“Is that our legal interpretation?” he asked.

Attorney Coward said if there isn’t a written right-of-way – which is the preferred way to go – it may be that that line has been located in that place for long enough time that the town gained some sort of possession and rights like a right-of-way.

“In most instances when you get a right-of-way to a piece of property there is a written document that gives the electric company the right to cross the property to get to a certain spot typically where the pole is to the house,” said Coward. “But a town can acquire property rights by adverse possession. It happens all the time. But to satisfy Mr. Hehn, you would have to talk to Mr. Taylor because it would affect his land, too. So you can’t just say I am going to change it for Mr. Hehn, without Mr. Taylor saying, I’m OK with that or else it would be a trespass on him. So, it’s not a simple thing to tell Lamar to go move the line.”

In the end, Commissioner John Dotson offered information that clarified the issue.

“In 2017 Mr. Reynolds [who owned the parcel now owned by Hehn] changed possession of ownership from he and his wife to BuildinloveLLC which is essentially the same thing. In that deed – itself specific to the property we are talking about it says – all existing rights-of-way, easements, encroachments, and matters that appear upon set plat or survey or would appear upon inspection of lands appearances and other matters that may appear of record.

“In 2017, there was a survey done in his name that shows the existing power pole

and electrical easements coming to it. No matter who it serves.

“In 2019, Mr. Reynolds acting as the BuildinLoveLLC had the property resurveyed and at that point the existing power pole was shown and the service box was shown on the survey along with the driveway going into the property so on and so forth.

“In 2019, after the survey was done and referencing the survey, which shows the power box on the survey, Mr. Hehn and his wife took possession of the property with full knowledge that the box was there. However, his attorney didn’t transfer the verbiage -- all existing rights of way, easements, encroachments, and matters that appear upon set plat or survey or would appear upon inspection of lands appearances and other matters that may appear of record – which in my judgement should have been part of the rights of transfer with the deed description.

“The plats are recorded. The first was done by Woodow Wilson, the second one was done by Steve Foster. Mr. Hehn’s attorney actually referenced in his deed, the survey which shows the box in existence.

“My take is that if Mr. Hehn wants the box removed more power to him at his expense. The box was there when he bought it. He knew it was there when he bought it. Also, if Mr. Hehn is going to move it, Mr. Hehn needs to take care of Mr. Taylor’s power at Mr. Hehn’s expense.

“This survey is in the deed. This is the nail in the coffin. When you take possession of something that is shown on the ground and you reference it in your deed, you’re done.

“Based on that, if Mr. Hehn wants to move the box to a more appropriate location for himself, OK. But he must take into full consideration Mr. Taylor’s existing electric service which needs to start and stop exactly where it is now; unless Mr. Taylor decides he would like his service to come to another place. At which point he can dictate to Mr. Hehn what is allowable.”

Subject to Attorney Coward’s review, the board voted unanimously to deny Commissioner Hehn’s request that the town move the underground power line and to put the burden of moving or changing anything regarding power to his and Taylor’s house on him.

– Kim Lewicki

## ...CONTENDERS continued from page 1

of Macon County. North Carolina law requires candidates to get four percent of registered voters within the county to sign a petition to be able to be added to the ballot as an unaffiliated voter.

As of Monday, Moore was around 400 signatures shy of the 1,087 signatures he needs to appear on the November ballot. Petitions are available in Highlands at Kilwins and Highlands Decorating Center.

A petition is a formal written request, signed by citizens affected by or having an opinion on the issue in question. In North

Carolina, citizens use petitions to put candidates and issues on the ballot, waive filing fees, or form state-recognized political parties.

In Macon County, there are 5,476 registered Democrats, 12,047 registered Republicans, and 9,678 registered unaffiliated voters.

Although unaffiliated is not a political party in North Carolina, currently, there are 2,503,997 unaffiliated voters in the state — which is more than both Republicans and Democrats.



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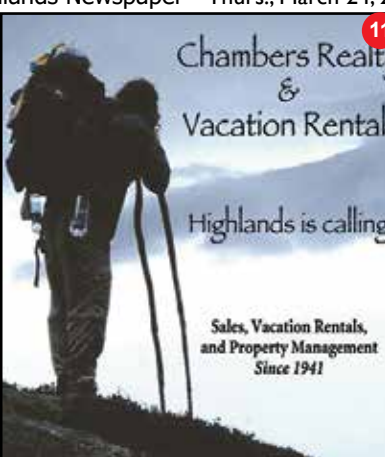
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