

# MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL

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## Vance wins sheriff's seat in primary

**Marief Williams**  
editor@mitchellnews.com

cent, or 1,989 votes).

Unofficial results are in for the March 3 primary election, in Mitchell County and across the state.

The local race with the most candidates was the Republican primary for the Mitchell County Board of Commissioners. The Mitchell County Democratic Party did not have candidates registered to run for commissioner.

In the commissioners' race, six candidates signed up to run for three seats. The winners were incumbent Steve Pitman (20.51 percent, or 2,181 votes), incumbent Harley Masters (19.28 percent, or 2,051 votes) and newcomer Vic Burluson (18.7 per-

cent, or 1,989 votes). Of those who didn't make it past the finish line, Donald Street had the most votes (1,968, or 18.5 percent), followed by incumbent Jeff Harding (1,795/16.88 percent) and newcomer Becky Grant (652/6.13 percent). Street is the retiring Mitchell County sheriff.

Shane Vance won the Republican primary for the Mitchell County Sheriff seat with 2,265 votes (51.5 percent), versus Cecil Hobson's 2,133 votes (48.5 percent).

There also was not a Democratic primary election for the position of sheriff.

In the clerk of superior court, incumbent Shana Buchanan won with 3,618 votes (84.93 percent).



Vance



Pitman



Masters



Burluson

Challenger David Wheeler received 642 votes (15.07 percent).

Eric Eller won the Republican nomination for district judge, defeating S. Justin Ray.

In state and regional races, the open U.S. Senate

seat had the most interest from candidates. Former Gov. Roy Cooper easily won the Democratic nomination, with 88.82 percent of the Mitchell County Democratic vote (405 votes total).

In the Republican primary, Michael Whatley, former

chairman of the Republican National Committee, also handily won the nomination for U.S. Senate. In Mitchell County, he received 1,947 votes (55.58 percent), with the other half of Mitchell County Republican voters divided between the remaining six

candidates.

In the U.S. House of Representatives District 11 race, incumbent Chuck Edwards won the Republican nomination again, and he will face off in November against Democrat Jamie Ager.

## For the love of animals

### Artists, community come together for annual fundraising event

**Steffen Silvis**  
MNJ Contributor

"Well, it was there a minute ago."

Artist Vicki Essig had just pointed out a piece donated for the annual Art for Animals' Sake fundraiser by a renowned local glass artist, but it had just been quickly whisked off to the cash register at Burnsville's Mica Gallery.

"That's a good sign," Essig went on.

Now in its third year, Mica Gallery's spring fundraiser for Mitchell County Animal Rescue (MCAR) drew area crafts folk and collectors to the artists cooperative to help raise money for the shelter and its services through the sale of art. While Friday's event was an opportunity for the art community to meet over wine and cheese, it primarily served as a preview of the donated work that's on sale until April 4 to benefit MCAR.

But far from a simple preview, sales were brisk. Mica's president, Penland potter Robbie Bell, wasn't able to fully enjoy the party on the gallery floor, as he was stationed at the crowded cash register.

"While this is our third fundraiser for the animal rescue," Bell said, "this is the first year we've had area artists and collectors outside of our cooperative donating work."

Bell described the first fundraiser as being very much an organizational affair.

"To be honest, we took inventory of our work here and wanted to clean out our closets," Bell said, "but in a way that would benefit some group. We were surprised by the success. Last year, the event was based solely on art pieces that were bequeathed to us, which again proved to be successful. This year, more people wanted to be involved."

As the donated items on view Friday sell, Bell said the shelves will be replenished with other work.



MNJ Photo/Steffen Silvis

Mica Gallery President Robbie Bell helms a busy register.

See **Art** on page 9

## Quartz workers split on ousting union

**Noreen Nickolas**  
MNJ Correspondent

On Oct. 14, 2025, union workers at The Quartz Corp in Spruce Pine filed a petition to decertify the United Mine Workers Local 0140 as their bargaining representative. Despite having 30 percent of the employee signatures that is required to launch a vote, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), Region 10, used the board's "blocking charge" rule to obstruct the request.

Blake Davis, a union member and the lead petitioner, followed up with a Request for Review requesting that the NLRB overturn the blocking charge policy.

The policy, which was first adopted in 1937 and has been used off and on during different administrations, was recently rescinded in 2020 under the Trump administration, but was then reinstated in 2024 under Biden. The policy permits NLRB regional directors to delay representation or decertification elections if the union alleges that the employer has engaged in unfair labor practices.

"Basically, it says that if a union files an unfair labor practice charge against an employer, it can be grounds to block the employees like Mr. Davis from exercising their right to vote out the union," said Patrick Semmens, vice president, National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation.

Under the federal National Labor Relations Act, workers have the right to remove a union.

"We feel this (blocking charge rule) is an unfair and unwarranted policy," Semmens stated.

While the union has alleged several labor violations against The Quartz Corp, so far, the NLRB has not identified or ruled on any of them.

"An employer cannot promise benefits or discourage union support in an effort to encourage voting against a union," Joe Pittman, president, UMWA Local 0140, said in a written statement.

If the union suspects and/or has witnesses come forward who say that management engaged in these activities while

See **Quartz** on page 9

## Saving sacred sites



Submitted photo

Local activist Scott Ashcraft has filed a lawsuit to protect what he believes are important archaeological sites in local forests.

### Local activist seeks to preserve history

**Kiesha Kay**  
MNJ Correspondent

For thousands of years, the soil and rocks of Western North Carolina have been mined for minerals. Rivers foamed white with runoff and silicosis, white lung choked miners. In the 1970s, environmental measures arrived to stop destruction, and other laws came, too, to keep Native American cultural sites and artifacts on public lands safe from harm.

Ignoring these laws to expedite development and projects has caused irreparable harm, said Scott Ashcraft, who worked for the U.S. Forest Service for 32 years. Ashcraft has

filed suit hoping to halt the harm.

"When you dig up our history, you can't get it back," Ashcraft said. "It's gone forever."

Almost half a century ago, officials for the U.S. Forest Service believed that significant archaeological sites would be found solely on flatlands and not on the steep slopes of the Appalachian Mountains. That theory has been disproven, Ashcraft says, but the practices have not changed, and that failure to protect cultural heritage and adhere to federal

See **Ashcraft** on page 9



MNJ Photo/Noreen Nickolas

The Quartz Corp's headquarters is in Drag, Norway. Its history in Spruce Pine began in 1957, and after several name changes and acquisitions became The Quartz Corp in 2011. According to the company, it mines exceptionally pure quartz used in solar panels, semiconductors, and fiber-optic cables. Another co-product of its quartz processing is the naturally occurring mineral sodium feldspar used in ceramic tile, sanitary ware, and glass manufacturing.

#### CONTACT US

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#### INDEX

Classifieds	8
Arrest report	4
Opinion	5
Puzzles	6
Calendar	6

One section, 10 pages

Thank you,  
**Brenda W. Wood**  
of Spruce Pine,  
for subscribing  
to the News-Journal.

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# Community



Submitted photo

Blue Ridge Regional Hospital recently celebrated the retirement of long-time colleague Mark Thomas. From left are Dave Bryant, facility technician; Bill Casperson, facility manager; Thomas, facility technician; Brandon Cannon, facility technician; and Aaron Holiman, facility technician.

## Blue Ridge Regional Hospital honors Mark Thomas after 19 years

Blue Ridge Regional Hospital (BRRH) celebrated the retirement of Mark Thomas, a longtime member of the Facilities Department, following a 19-year career.

Since joining the hospital in 2007, Thomas has played a vital role in maintaining the infrastructure and safety of the facility, ensuring a seamless environ-

ment for both patients and staff. Known for his technical expertise and “can-do” attitude, Thomas has been a constant presence behind the scenes, managing everything from critical system upgrades to daily operational needs.

“Mark has been more than just a member of our Facilities team; he has been a cornerstone of Blue Ridge Regional

Hospital for nearly two decades,” said Dr. Tonia W. Hale, CEO/CNO of Blue Ridge Regional Hospital. “His unwavering commitment to excellence ensured that our caregivers could focus on what matters most — our patients. We are deeply grateful for his service and wish him nothing but the best in this next chapter.”

## Spruce Pine wins nomination in international “March Madness” style contest with 15 other cities

Spruce Pine will go head-to-head with 15 other North American cities in the 10th annual Strongest Town Contest presented by Urban 3, with voting happening now. In this bracket-style voting tournament, Spruce Pine will compete for the “Strongest Town” title by shining a national spotlight on the work it’s doing to become a stronger, more resilient city.

Cast your vote for Spruce Pine at [strongesttown.com](http://strongesttown.com).

According to a release, the Strongest Town Contest celebrates progress, not perfection. A “strong town” is any town, big or small, that is taking tangible steps to overcome its transportation, hous-

ing, or financial challenges.

Strong Towns refers to this methodology as the “Strong Towns Approach,” and this contest spotlights the work of city residents and leaders who are using this approach to become more resilient over time.

Here’s how voting works. Competitors advance over the course of four rounds. Anyone can vote once per round, and votes are tallied Monday through Friday morning. Winners are notified each Friday.

In the first round, Spruce Pine will compete to determine seeding when the tournament format begins with the “Elite Eight.” The top

eight vote getters in Round 1 advance to the bracket-style elimination. From that point, winners will advance based head-to-head competitions of votes collected that week:

- R1: The Showcase (March 2–13).
- R2: Elite Eight (March 16–20).
- R3: Final Four (March 23–27).
- R4: Championship (March 30–April 3).

Strong Towns is a 501c(3) non-profit and media advocacy organization that shifts conversations around the North American development pattern.

Through reports, articles, podcasts, videos, live events

and professional coaching, it provides knowledge and tools to help cities transform their communities. Learn more at [strongesttown.com](http://strongesttown.com).

## Mission Health lifts flu-related visitor restrictions

Mission Health has lifted all flu-related visitor restrictions across its hospitals and affiliated facilities in Western North Carolina.

With influenza activity decreasing across the region, normal visitation policies have resumed at Mission Hospital and all Mission Health member hospitals and affiliates, including Angel Medical Center in Franklin, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital in Spruce Pine, CarePartners in Asheville, Highlands-Cashiers Hospital

in Highlands, McDowell Hospital in Marion, and Transylvania Regional Hospital in Brevard.

“We are pleased to resume normal visitation and welcome families and loved ones back without limitations,” said Peter Deyoung, chief medical officer for Mission Health. “We are grateful to our community for their cooperation and understanding during flu season. These temporary precautions help protect our patients, visitors, and care teams, and we appreciate

everyone’s efforts to keep one another safe and healthy.”

Mission Health continues to encourage everyday prevention practices, including frequent handwashing and staying home when feeling unwell, to help reduce the spread of seasonal illnesses.

Mission Health thanks patients, families, staff, and the broader community for their partnership and patience throughout flu season. Working together helps ensure a safe and healthy environment for everyone.

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# Spay/neuter clinic opens at Yancey Humane Society

The Yancey Humane Society (YHS) held a ribbon cutting celebration for the opening of a low-cost spay/neuter clinic recently.

The clinic, called JJ's Fix-A-Friend, is housed in a newly built facility just steps away from the main animal shelter. The clinic will be a vital resource for this area, helping reduce overpopulation and providing low-cost services to other shelters, and the public.

"It seriously is a dream come true," said Renee Tomberlin, executive director of YHS. "Many of us have been working on bringing this to reality for at least a decade. The need is critical because shelter animals cannot be adopted until they have been spayed or neutered. For many years we partnered with the ASPCA spay/neuter clinic to do our surgeries. At one time, we had at least 40 slots for shelter animals each month and 20 or more for the public, but circumstances changed there during covid, and it became a situation where we only had about 40 slots a month total."

For a long time, YHS was just getting by because they could have animals transported to Appalachian Animal Hospital and Cane River Veterinary Wellness as spots opened up, but they were few and far between.

"We were still always about 100 animals behind, which amounts to longer times for adoption, tons of extra paperwork and extra medical expenses," Tomberlin said.

YHS takes in around 1,100 animals a year, most of which need to be spayed or neutered before they can be officially adopted. While un-neutered animals can go home with families as fosters, they cannot be officially adopted. This means that all medical expenses during that period of time are still the responsibility of YHS. Those expenses

include vaccinations, flea and tick prevention, and of course any veterinary services should a cat or dog become sick.

"Those bills add up quickly," Tomberlin said.

Last year medical expenses for YHS were around \$22,000. The backlog also means that animals are staying in the shelter longer. The goal is to get them to their forever homes as quickly as possible to keep them healthy and happy, and to allow for room to serve more people.

Members of the YHS Board of Directors and staff began fundraising in earnest for a spay/neuter clinic several years ago. The goal was to raise \$250,000 specifically designated for the construction and development of the clinic. This was in addition to fundraising to keep the main YHS shelter running effectively.

The shelter budget is close to \$1 million dollars a year. Those funds come from proceeds from Barkin' Basement Resale Store, a small stipend from Yancey County Government, donations from community members, and grants from both corporate entities and foundations. Some of the main financial support for the clinic was obtained from the ASPCA, the National Veterinary Association, and Petco Love.

"In 2025, we had a large Gala in the Spring at Hatley Point," said Steve Reif, President of the YHS Board of Directors. "We had music, dinner, and a silent auction. We raised about \$10,000 with that one fundraiser toward construction of the building."

One of the shelter's main benefactors, Janicke Glynn, was killed during Hurricane Helene. Glynn and her husband, John Glynn, were deeply involved in the community, and were donors to the shelter for



Submitted photos  
From left: Veterinarian Dr. Rachel Suter, left, and Christina Stamper of the Burnsville UPS Store show off a sign for the new JJ's Fix-A-Friend Clinic. The Yancey Humane Society (YHS) held a ribbon cutting celebration for the opening of a low-cost spay/neuter clinic recently. John Glynn stands in front of the new clinic named for his late wife, Janicke "JJ" Glynn. JJ's Fix-A-Friend Clinic is located in Yancey County.

years. After her death, John Glynn contributed significant funding in honor of his wife. That donation moved the dial, and the clinic dream started to come into sharper focus.

The clinic is named after Janicke Glynn, whose nickname was JJ. Thus, the name JJ's Fix-A-Friend.

Meanwhile, another significant factor began to solidify completion. Dr. Rachel Suter, who was Chief of Staff at the Appalachian Animal Hospital in Weaverville, began doing surgeries one day a week at YHS.

"The YHS Board of Directors, and staff had been working tirelessly for almost a decade, and I was able to take the torch and begin to plan for the layout of the building, the purchase of the proper equipment, and making sure that we met

all regulations. This is not something that someone who doesn't have veterinary experience could have done," Suter said. "I've been a vet for 26 years, and I knew what boxes we needed to check to get licensed and operate efficiently."

As of January of 2026, Suter is now full time with YHS.

Even though Suter, along with Dr. Erin Purvis, were already spending one day a week at YHS doing surgeries, the shelter was still always about 100 animals behind. Now surgeries will be done four days a week.

Services will be provided regularly to animal shelters in Mitchell and Madison County, and any other rescue or shelter facility can schedule appointments. One day a week will be reserved for providing low-cost surgeries to the public.

The clinic has also been awarded a grant for TNR (Trap, Neuter, Return) and will work with citizens to help control feral cat colonies. One spayed cat prevents the potential for 10,000 offspring within four years. Also, studies show that a cat or dog that has been spayed or neutered has a longer life expectancy and faces significantly less chances of developing infections or cancer.

For more information on any of the services, you can check the Facebook page for JJ's Fix-A-Friend, or send a question to [jjsfixafriend@yanceyhumanesociety.org](mailto:jjsfixafriend@yanceyhumanesociety.org). The YHS campus, including the new clinic, is located at 211 Kind Hearts Way, off Cane River School Road.

YHS thanks all the donors, volunteers, and staff who have worked to bring this project to reality.

## Transportation program offered for veterans

Veterans who live in Mitchell County, along with widows and widowers of Mitchell County veterans, can take advantage of a new program that provides free rides on Mitchell County Transportation vans and buses.

Some examples of trips veterans can take include rides to the doctor, running errands, or getting groceries. Trips can be both in-county and regional. There are some requirements: If the trip is inside Mitchell County, the veteran must give one day's notice; if it is outside the county, a three-day notice is required.

To register for a trip, the veteran calls Mitchell

Transportation at 828-688-4715 during regular business hours. They will be asked to provide the day and time of the trip, the destination, and approximately how long the trip will last. The veteran can have one other person travel with them. Service animals only are welcome on the vans and buses. When being picked up, please have an ID. If the veteran must cancel or reschedule the trip, please contact Mitchell Transportation as soon as possible to make changes.

Trips are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, so the sooner they can be scheduled, the better.

The program is the result of a partnership between

Mitchell Transportation, the Mitchell County Veterans Service Office, and Mitchell County Chapter 58 of the Disabled American Veterans.

Marsha Biddix, Veterans Service Officer for Mitchell County, hopes veterans will make use of the transportation opportunity.

"Our veterans have given their service to our country. This is one small way for us to say 'thank you' for your service," said Biddix.

Ron Stirling, adjutant with Mitchell County Chapter 58 of the Disabled American Veterans, is glad his organization has the chance to be involved.

"The local DAV chapter is glad we could be a part of this

project. We thank all veterans for their service and sacrifice for our country and hope that they will take advantage of programs like this partnership with Transportation and Veterans Services."

"I am pleased to announce this new program for our veterans," said Sheila Blalock, director of Mitchell Transportation. "We want to thank Mitchell County Veterans Services and the DAV for their financial support that makes this possible."

For more information, visit [mitchellcountync.gov/veterans](http://mitchellcountync.gov/veterans) or call Mitchell Transportation at 828-688-4715. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday.

## Spay-ghetti 2026: Supporting spay/neuter efforts in Mitchell

Grab a fork and make a difference at Mitchell County Animal Rescue's Spay-ghetti 2026, a family-friendly spaghetti dinner fundraiser supporting critical spay and neuter efforts.

The event will be held on Saturday, March 28, from 4:30-7 p.m. at the Mitchell Senior Center.

Spay-ghetti is one of Mitchell County Animal Rescue's most anticipated annual fundraisers and plays a vital role in preparing animals for adoption and preventing unwanted litters. Funds raised will directly support the organization's spay/neuter programs, which are designed to improve animal health, reduce shelter intake, and strengthen the overall well-being of the community.

Guests will receive a spaghetti dinner that includes a choice of traditional spaghetti with meat sauce or vegan and gluten-free pasta and sauce, along with salad, bread, a drink, and dessert. Vegan and gluten-free dessert options will also be available. Both dine-in and drive through options are offered.

Dinner prices are \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors, and \$8 for children ages 12 and under. Tickets may be purchased at the door or pre-purchased in advance.

In addition to dinner attendance, community members and businesses are invited to support the event through sponsorships ranging from \$50 to \$1,000. Sponsorships are an impactful way to demonstrate commitment to animals in need and help ensure Mitchell County Animal Rescue can continue providing lifesaving care for homeless, abused, and abandoned animals.

"Our spay and neuter efforts are foundational to everything we do," said Katie Elkins, executive director. "Spay-ghetti is not only a fun community event, but a meaningful way for supporters to directly impact the lives of animals and help them find healthy, loving homes."

For more information about Spay-ghetti 2026, to purchase tickets, or to become a sponsor, visit [mitchellcountyanimalrescue.org](http://mitchellcountyanimalrescue.org).



Submitted photo

The Spizzwinks of Yale University will bring their vocal harmonies for a rare performance in western North Carolina. The free concert will be held at Banner Elk Presbyterian Church on Thursday, March 19, at 6 p.m.

## Yale a cappella group world tour stops in Banner Elk

The Spizzwinks of Yale University will bring their vocal harmonies for a rare performance in western North Carolina.

The free concert will be held at Banner Elk Presbyterian Church on Thursday, March 19, at 6 p.m. This acclaimed a cappella group performs around the world with close-harmony arrangements. The singers deliver performances that mix jazz standards, pop hits, rock ballads, and Broadway tunes — all performed without a single instrument.

Now in their 112th year, the 'Winks are producing

another album and touring throughout the United States, Peru, and New Zealand. They are the world's oldest underclassman a cappella group.

When traveling internationally, the Spizzwinks often perform on television and radio or at large public events. They also promote cultural exchange, singing joint concerts with choirs from universities and other organizations.

Why come to Banner Elk? According to Spizzwinks music director, Nate Stein, "My parents built a second home in Beech Mountain as a little getaway from our home in Kentucky. Additionally,

my pastor and his wife in Kentucky are from the Banner Elk area, and Banner Elk Presbyterian Pastor Mike McCracken was in my pastor's first youth group. It was a completely random 'small world' moment when they mentioned that to me."

The Spizzwinks have released several dozen albums, sharing a diverse repertoire of more than 600 arrangements. They are a registered 501(c)3 non-profit, dedicated to the promotion of group harmony singing to foster support for music and the arts.

Every member of the

group will travel to all six inhabited continents and their hometown during their three years in the group, with travel and lodging funded entirely by the annual performance schedule.

Doors open at 5:30 p.m. for general seating. Admission is free with donations collected to support the tour and educational outreach.

Banner Elk Presbyterian Church is located at 420 College Drive SW, Banner Elk. The concert is part of BE•PREsents, a series of music and arts productions presented by the church for the entire community to enjoy.

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# Banff Mountain Film Festival features diverse line-up

The Banff Mountain Film Festival returns to Appalachian State University's Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts from March 19–21.

The film lineup for each night is now available. Some highlights include:

- “The Finisher: Jasmin Paris and the Barkley Marathons” — following an ultrarunner pushing her limits.

- “Old Man Lightning” — a comedy-comeback story about a climber, blending humor and heart.

- “Best Day Ever” — featuring adaptive mountain bikers conquering the challenges of their disabilities.

Hosted by University Recreation at App State, the festival's World Tour — celebrating its 50th anniversary — has been making stops in Boone for 29 years, with films from around the world that highlight mountain adventure, culture and the environment.

The Road Warrior — a representative from Banff, Canada who travels to festival sites to give insight into films

and their production — will be returning to App State and curating selections specifically for the university.

Each night will show three completely different film screenings and will also have live music and vendors.

The festival was established in 1976 as a program of the Banff Centre of Arts and Creativity in Canada and has since become the largest international mountain film festival.

This year's World Tour is planning screenings in over 600 communities and more than 40 countries across the globe, and the screenings at App State are among the highest attended in North America.

“This festival is a highly anticipated event that has been an important part of the Boone community for over 20 years,” said Jacob Norris, App State University Recreation outdoor programs coordinator. “I believe that our audience will continue to be inspired by the diversity, enthusiasm and energy that each film highlights.”

Tickets for the festival are



The Banff Mountain Film Festival returns to App State's Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts from March 19–21. Tickets are on sale now.

\$15 for App State students and \$20 for the general public. Tickets can be purchased online at [schaefercenter.appstate.edu/tickets](http://schaefercenter.appstate.edu/tickets), by phone at (800) 841-2787, or in person at the Schaefer Center Box

Office. Online tickets are limited to eight tickets per buyer. The list of films can be found at [urec.appstate.edu/banff-mountain-film-festival](http://urec.appstate.edu/banff-mountain-film-festival). Presenting partners for

this year's festival include Footsloggers Outdoor and Travel Outfitters, App State's Department of Geological and Environmental Sciences, VPC Builders, Appalachian Ski Mountain, Bear Trail Studios and Western Carolina Eye Associates.

For more information, email [theschaefercenter@appstate.edu](mailto:theschaefercenter@appstate.edu).

## Penland summer camps are still available

Penland School of Craft has spaces available in many of its art-based summer camps. These camps give young people a chance to learn new skills, express themselves creatively, and have fun while getting to know other kids.

Each camp is five-days long, plus there are two weekend workshops for teens. Penland camp begins on June 1 and runs through the end of July and is available for ages 4 - 17. All camps will be led by experienced teaching artists in a dedicated classroom on Penland's campus in Mitchell County.

Some camps have filled already. The sessions still available include hand built pottery, drawing and painting, exploring ancient art forms, making glowing lanterns, building with cardboard, jewelry making, and wood turning. Special programs for teenagers will cover pottery making, experimental photography, and textile techniques for fancying-up your clothing.

Camps are available at regular and reduced tuition; some full scholarships may still be available. The full list of camps plus registration information can be found under the Community tab at [penland.org](http://penland.org).

Penland School of Craft is a national center for craft education dedicated to the creative life. Located in Western N.C., Penland offers workshops in books and paper, clay, drawing and painting, glass, iron, metals, printmaking and letterpress, photography, textiles, and wood. The school also provides artists' residencies, an outreach program, and a gallery and visitors center. Penland is a nonprofit, tax-exempt institution that receives support from the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Natural & Cultural Resource. More information at [penland.org](http://penland.org).



A student makes a pot in Penland summer camp.

## Obituaries

### Lydie Gouge

GRASSY CREEK - Lydie “Wendell” Gouge, 85, passed away Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026, surrounded by family and friends. Born April 1, 1940, he was the son of the late Fred and Ruth McKinney Gouge.

A devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, uncle and friend, Wendell lived a life defined by faith, kindness and a deep love for family. He was married to his beloved wife, Linda Edwards Gouge, for 62 years. He is also survived by daughters, Karen Gouge (Steven) Glenn of Spruce Pine and Lisa Gouge Little of Morganton; and sisters, Mary Alice Gouge (Jim) Wiedenhaupt and Linda Gouge (Jack) Medford both of Spruce Pine.

Wendell cherished his role as a grandfather and great-grandfather. He is survived by grandchildren, Dalton (April) Green of Bakersville, Clayton (Kayla) Glenn of Little Switzerland, Emily (Ethan) Rowe of Bakersville, Darren Little, Cassidy Lydie Little and Ian Little of Morganton; and great-grandchildren, Stevie and Johnny Rowe and Owen and Amos Glenn.

A faithful lifelong member of the Grassy Creek Baptist Church, Wendell passed down his love for God and led by example to everyone around him. His kindness was infectious and his strength and faith touched many lives.

Wendell was a 1958 graduate of

Harris High School and a 1972 graduate of the 49th class of the National Hardwood Lumber Inspection School in Memphis, Tennessee. He worked for more than 30 years as a lumber inspector for Henredon, Georgia Pacific and International Hardwoods. He also served his country in the Army Reserves as a drill sergeant.

He took great joy in the outdoors and in sharing his knowledge with family. His hobbies included carpentry, fishing, gardening, woodland walks, camping, bird watching and identifying trees and flowers. He loved to write stories and poems and enjoyed playing the harmonica and dulcimer — small gifts he often shared with family and friends.

Wendell's legacy is one of faith, gentle leadership and a lifelong devotion to family and community. He will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved him.

The family received friends Sunday, Feb. 8 from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m., in the sanctuary at Grassy Creek Baptist Church. Funeral services followed with Reverends Matthew Mills, Steve Glenn and Nate Silver officiating. Burial followed at Grassy Creek Memorial Gardens.

The care of Wendell and his family has been entrusted to Webb Funeral Home. Online condolences can be made [webbfh.com](http://webbfh.com)

### Glen Braswell

In memory of Glen Braswell: Just Call Him Glen You'd hear his voice — “What do you

know?” As if he'd already been thinking of you,

And if you answered, “not much,” He'd jest, “you ought to have more to do.”

And if you asked what to call him, He'd chuckle and grin — Just call him Glen.

You'd hear that diesel miles away, His white truck coming in faster than most would,

In a plaid shirt, blue jeans, and polished shoes,

A strong will and always a job to do —

Just call him Glen.

He built his life with steady hands, laying tile and shaping wood, making things that still stand strong, the way a good man's work should — Just call him Glen.

Out in the yard on his red Troy-Bilt, rows of the garden, green and true, working until the daylight faded, like he'd always known to do — Just call him Glen.

Coon hunts and the woods of Maine, through cool night air and the break of day,

He never really had too much to say — You felt his love in lots of quiet ways. Just call him Glen.

And if you listen close, you'll still feel him,

in an engine's low, familiar tone, in the work he left behind, and in the love we'll always know — Just call him Glen.

Jesse Mann

## Red Cross holds blood drives

March is Red Cross Month, and for more than 130 years, American Red Cross volunteers have provided relief to families in communities across the country.

This March the community is invited to join in the lifesaving mission of the Red Cross by rolling up a sleeve to give blood at any of the following drives:

- **Friday, March 13** from 10 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. at the Buladean Community Center, Yoga Room 12190 NC-226, Bakersville, NC 28705

- **Tuesday, March 17** from 1:30 – 6 p.m. at the First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine, Fellowship Hall, 125 Tappan Street, Spruce Pine, NC 28777

According to the Red Cross, someone in the U.S. needs blood every two seconds to respond to patient emergencies. Accident and burn victims, heart surgery and organ transplant patients, and those receiving treatment for leukemia, cancer or sickle cell disease may all require blood.

All blood types are needed. To make an appointment or to learn more, download the American Red Cross Blood Donor App, visit [RedCrossBlood.org](http://RedCrossBlood.org), call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or enable the Blood Donor Skill on any Alexa Echo device.

Completion of a RapidPass® online health history questionnaire is encouraged to help speed up the donation process. To get started, follow the instructions at [RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass](http://RedCrossBlood.org/RapidPass) or use the Blood Donor App.

A blood donor card or driver's license or two other forms of identification are required at check-in. Individuals who are 17 years of age in most states (16 with parental consent where allowed by state law), weigh at least 110 pounds and are in generally good health may be eligible to donate blood. High school students and other donors 18 years of age and younger also have to meet certain height and weight requirements.

## Crime & Arrest

The following are arrests made and citations issued by the Spruce Pine Police Department Feb. 21 – March 5, 2025. Arrested persons should be presumed innocent until convicted in a court of law. Information is provided by the Spruce Pine Police Department.

### Arrests:

Joseph Christian Hardin of Asheville was arrested by Officer M. Tehandon for carrying a concealed weapon and on a previous Order for Arrest.

Christopher Blake Fowler, 39, of Marion was arrested by Capt. M.P. Burleson for felony larceny, removing an anti-shoplifting device, trespassing and two counts of misdemeanor larceny.

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# Opinion

## Our View

### Thanks to the candidates

Now that the 2026 primary election has come to a close, we want to thank all the candidates who took the time to run for local office.

Obviously, there will always be people who run for county and town office for the wrong reasons, but at the local level, it's somewhat harder to use politics for personal gain than it is at the state or national level.

The pay is low or non-existent, there are far fewer fundraising opportunities available for a campaign, and both running and serving are time-consuming and demanding. There might be bragging rights available for local officeholders, but nothing on the level of introducing yourself as a U.S. senator or congressman.

Also, in a small community, running for office can lead to friction with friends, relatives and neighbors. Sometimes it's hard to accept that someone you have known and respected for years is on the opposite side of a political issue, and at the local level it's harder to avoid taking these kinds of differences personally.

So, now that all the politicking is over — at least until the General Election in November — we want to thank everyone who took a risk and chose to run, winners and losers alike.

Thank you for the effort you put into raising specific issues that need to be addressed; people will remember those, even if you're not in office to fight for them.

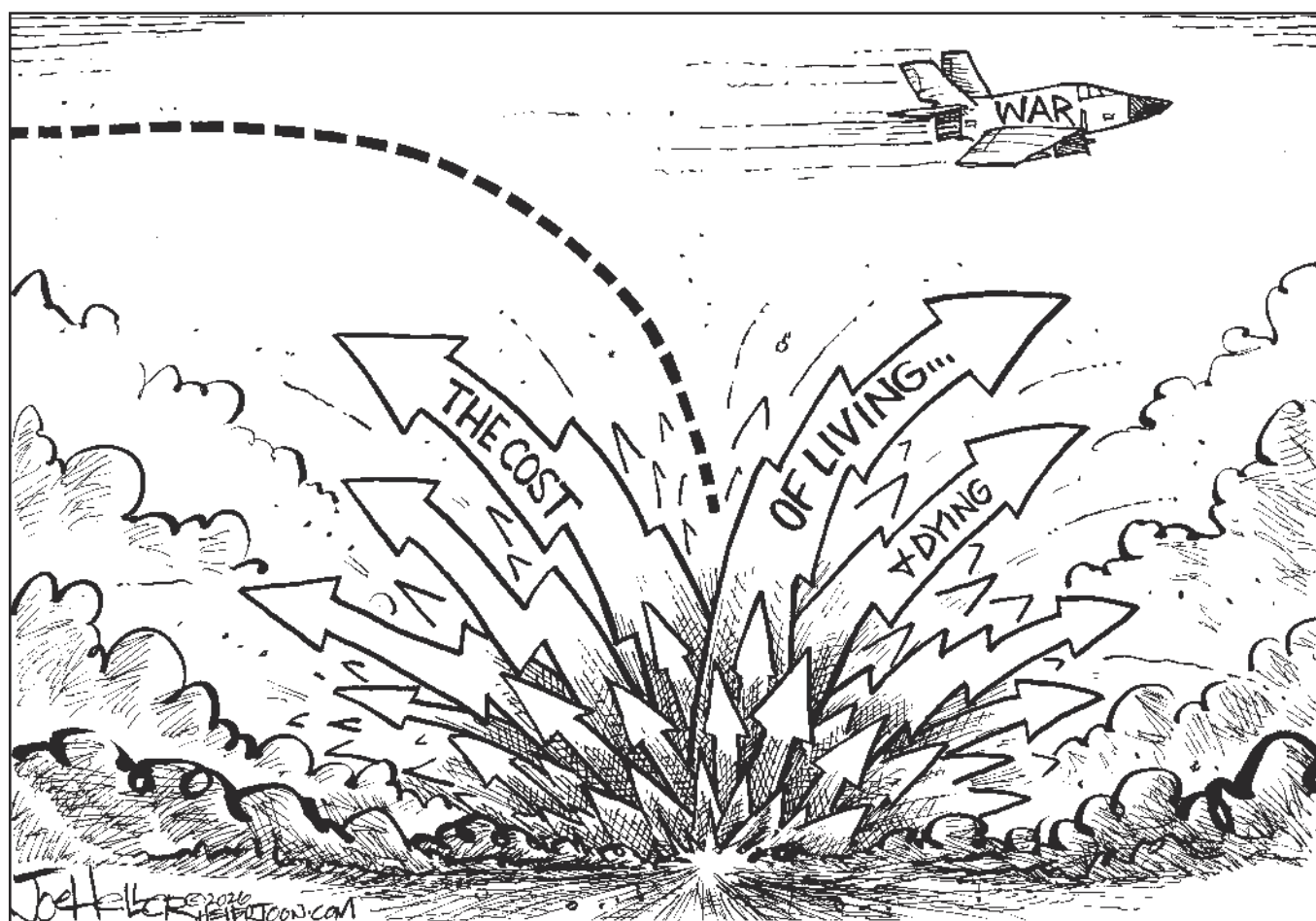
Thank you for all the awkward moments when you tried your hand at public speaking. Thank you for the awkward moments when your friends and neighbors tried to offer encouragement and sympathy while talking around the fact that they were voting for the other guy.

Thank you for any effort you made to keep things civil with your opponents. Thank you for the time you spent researching local government and what it takes to fill that role.

And now, going forward, we hope you will use everything you've learned about Mitchell

County and its needs to be a better citizen, whether as an officeholder or just another member of the voting public.

See you in November!



## Letter to the Editor

### The soul of the nation

"A fight for the soul of the nation" — and it really is, just not the Democrat or state-run media ("fake news") narrative.

It's an election year, and I ask how anybody in good conscience vote Democrat? Let's take a look at email. Back in the day Democrats were focused on murdering babies (abortion) and taking the guns.

Their failed policies are big government (waste, fraud and abuse), big spending (\$38 trillion in debt=unsustainable) and big taxes. Today's Democratic party protects illegal aliens (terrorists, murderers, gang members, drug dealers, human traffickers, etc.). They protect criminals, vilify and want to defund law enforcement. They're all about DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion), drag queen story time for kids, males in women's sports and open borders (no borders, no rule of law=no civilized country). Which, by

the way, was a voter drive to keep them in power (and the money that comes with it).

Their leaders are liars, hypocrites (Isaiah 5:20), insurrectionists and seditionists guilty of treason and insubordination. Their platform is to hate and resist Trump and everything he's for. That's all they've got. They're rooting for America to fail.

Today's liberals are intolerant and violent, unhappy, unreasonable, unstable, unhinged, full of hate with a sad and miserable existence (Psalm 7:11, Proverbs 13:15, Isaiah 48:22). They can't win a debate because science, biology and history prove them wrong on climate change, socialism etc.

They can't define what a woman is, can't figure out which bathroom to use and can't answer the question "can men have babies?" (Romans 1:22, 2 Timothy 3:7). If they don't get their way they might bite your finger off (Acts 7:51, 54, 57), set things on fire, shoot you, etc.

Their protestors are useful idiots encouraged and/or funded by foreign and domestic enemies of our country to destabilize, divide, conquer and destroy it. As conservatives we work jobs, so to the protestors I have question — how you get off work? Do you work? How do you make a living? (Oh, on the backs of taxpayers.)

How about channeling all that energy into something constructive, a righteous cause. Try cutting firewood for the elderly, visit in the rest homes, serve in a food kitchen, work at a homeless veterans shelter, etc.

By the way, Matthew 18:6, 20:12-13 tell us how the Jesus of the Bible feels about child abusers, fraud and irreverence towards Church (a Minnesota thing). Thank you for your service to law enforcement, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Border Patrol and our Military.

**Greg Gardner  
Newland**

### Letters to the Editor

Have something to say? Send us a letter!

Letters must be 500 words or fewer and may be edited to fit that constraint. Letter writers may submit one letter every 30 days.

The News-Journal makes no guarantee of publish date or if a letter will be published but we will do our best to publish all submitted letters.

The News-Journal reserves the right to edit letters for style, brevity and libel. The News-Journal does not print form letters, letters endorsing a political candidate, or letters endorsing or criticizing a business.

Letters must include the writer's name, place of residence and phone number (for verification). Name and town are published.

#### HOW TO SUBMIT A LETTER:

**Mail letters:** Mitchell News-Journal, PO Box 399, Spruce Pine, NC 28777

**Deliver letters:** 261 Locust Street, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Mon-Fri.

**Email letters:** editor@mitchellnews.com.

## MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL OUR MISSION

The Mitchell News-Journal is published with pride for the people of Mitchell and adjoining counties by Community Newspapers Inc., in Athens, Georgia.

We believe strong newspapers build strong communities - "Newspapers get things done!"

Our primary goal is to publish distinguished and profitable community-oriented newspapers. This mission will be accomplished through the teamwork of professionals dedicated to truth, integrity, loyalty, quality and hard work.

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## Remember the walking bridge

**Diane Duncan**  
Guest columnist

If you lived in Spruce Pine from the 1940s to 2024, you probably walked across the walking bridge that connected the town to either the first high school — then later the elementary school, as it was for me and my brothers — or the greenway and park after they were built, along with the hotel at Pinebridge.

It's not really known the exact year the bridge was built or really who built it — somewhere in the late 1930s early '40s — but I do know my father, who lived on Walnut near town, walked to school every day.

He always liked to tell his children about the winters he walked in snow. He said by the time you got across the bridge it was so cold and slippery that he couldn't wait to get inside the school building where it was nice and warm.

Also, he told us about the Harris High school band that used to cross the bridge marching to perform in town on special occasions. Apparently, they won many awards and people loved to gather in town to listen and watch them come marching across the bridge.

And then the incident we heard many times about a New Year's Eve implosion or explosion of a prank that blew out most of downtown's windows. He said he was glad the bridge was not harmed in that since it was the site of the ball field near the bridge.

Many stories can be told of the many generations that walked the bridge and it was part of what made the ole' walking bridge special.

I walked the old bridge in the early '60s, going to first grade, and it was something I would do for three more years, first through fourth grade. My brothers walked with me and even in cold weather it was a Monday through

Friday occurrence.

The scary part for me was the decline as you started the downward slope with boards going intermittently across part of the ways to stop you from going full steam ahead.

Once you reached the straight part of the bridge we stopped to always look off at the river and sometimes paused too long to see how far our spit went on breezy days. Once across the bridge you had a climb up a big set of steps to get to the warmth of the old school building.

Returning home we took our time but always the same route day after day, year after year.

The bridge was also there for us in our teen years as the carnival came in the spring or summer. Armed with extra change in our pockets we walked across the bridge to quite a different scene and

See **Duncan** on page 10

## Lunch this week? Wait while I check my calendar

Friends about my age always need to check their calendars when I ask about getting together for lunch. They have appointments.

Not appointments for a new job. Heck, they're all retired and happy.

They have doctors' appointments. That's doctors with an s.

"Let's see," one of them will say, "the only day this week I don't have a doctor's appointment is Friday. Can we make it a late lunch? I'm going to This Little Piggy to get my toenails clipped. I can't reach them anymore."

I understand. I see those same doctors—well, maybe not the same people, but doctors for the same ailments my friends talk about.

I see my dermatologist, and she tells me I have dry skin. I know that, of course, but she tells me anyway. "You need to use a good moisturizer every night," she says, "and be sure to put on sunscreen before you go outside."

She wasn't through.

"You should limit your showers to three minutes. With only warm water."

Sitting there in my backless gown, I thought about asking her how long she stays in the shower, but decided it wasn't an appropriate thing to ask an attrac-



**Phil Hudgins**  
Columnist

tive, white-coated woman who's running her fingers through my hair. She might revoke my Medicare card.

I see my regular doctor regularly, and he tells me I'm "doing pretty well for my age. ... You have a little neuropathy, I think," but he doesn't say where.

"Did that shot of steroids in your knee help ease your arthritis pain?"

"Yes, it did... some," I say, slipping off the examination table and limping back to a chair.

Next comes my kidney doctor. "Your kidney function is pretty good for a man your age," he says. "Kidney function normally goes down as we age, you know."

He wasn't through.

"Are you drinking plenty of water?"

"Well, yes, enough to make me get up at least two times a night."

My heart doctor figures into the cal-

endar somewhere along the line.

"Your EKG looks good," he says. "Are you still exercising regularly?"

"Yes, my wife gets me up early three mornings a week, and we go down to a church gym and work on aerobics and dumbbells, including me."

"That's good," he says. He wanted to say I'm doing well for a man my age, but he held back.

The sleep doctor's assistant allows me to do my checkup by Zoom.

"Looks like you're doing well with your CPAP," she says, examining my rheumy eyes via Zoom. "What do you think?"

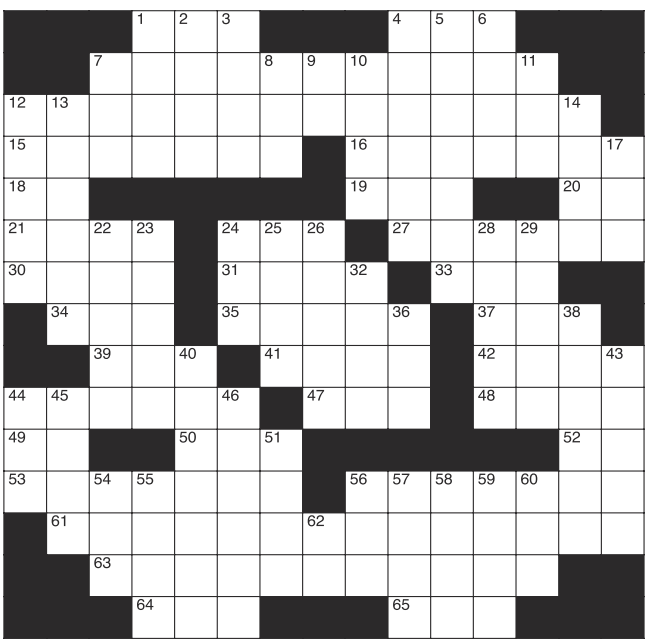
"Most nights it's fine. It just took some time getting used to a garden hose protruding from the top of my head. But it's OK."

About noon Friday, my cellphone rings. It's my buddy for the late lunch.

"Look, Phil," he says, "I can't do lunch today. The toenails guy at This Little Piggie said I need to see a podiatrist. I got an appointment today."

"Lunch maybe one day next week."

Phil Hudgins is a retired senior editor with Community Newspapers Inc. Email him at phudgins@cnnews.com.



**CLUES ACROSS**

1. Blockchain-based entity
4. A woolen cap of Scottish origin
7. Painted with glue
12. Legendary crooner
15. Structure made with strips of wood
16. Tropical fruits
18. Commercial
19. Comedienne Gasteyer
20. The Ocean State
21. Ancient Scot
24. Basics
27. Stated propositions
30. Scottish island group
31. Expression of annoyance
33. Large tree
34. Engine additive
35. Conspiracy
37. Drunkard
39. Someone who is morally reprehensible
41. Ancient Syrian city
42. Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls
44. Carry (slang)
47. Sweet potato
48. European river
49. The Golden State
50. Windy City ballplayer
52. New Testament
53. Possess spiritually
56. A treeless grassy plain
61. Popular historical novel
63. In a law-abiding way
64. A place to sleep
65. Criticize

**CLUES DOWN**

1. Impression in a surface
2. Computer language
3. Relating to the ear
4. Occupant
5. Member of Great Plains people
6. Social media firm
7. Digital audiotape
8. Midway between east and southeast
9. Chronic, progressive disease
10. Chinese lute
11. Not wet
12. Moves wings up and down
13. Communication devices
14. Swiss river
17. Female sibling
22. Receive
23. Relating to a type
24. General's assistant (abbr.)
25. Steep bank
26. Taxi driver
28. Moves into without difficulty
29. Bicycle manufacturer
32. Traditional rhythmic pattern
36. Fugitives are on it
38. Bitter-tasting organic substance
40. Die
43. Matched
44. Literary genre \_\_\_-fi
45. Cannot
46. Pounded
51. British rock group
54. Debt relief order
55. 2006 NL Cy Young winner
56. Green vegetable
57. Tough outer skin of fruit
58. \_\_\_ Spumante (Italian wine)
59. Ailments
60. Famed singer Charles
62. Camper

# HOROSCOPES

**ARIES: Mar 21-Apr 20**  
A collaboration brings out your best side, Aries. Someone else's strengths may complement your drive right now. You'll get a lot of things done this week.

**TAURUS: Apr 21-May 21**  
Your patience pays off in a relationship, Taurus. A long-term goal you share with a partner starts to move into the planning stages this week. Enjoy the excitement ahead.

**GEMINI: May 22-Jun 21**  
Gemini, joyful news arrives via a friend in the next few days. Celebrate the successes of others, as your own turn for good news is right around the corner.

**CANCER: Jun 22-Jul 22**  
This week you may have the opportunity to find beauty in small things, Cancer. A simple walk or a quiet meal with a loved one can bring about peace and insight.

**LEO: Jul 23-Aug 23**  
You are the life of the party right now, Leo. Your warmth draws people to you, making this a great time for networking. A job offer may come from your efforts.

**VIRGO: AUG 24-SEPT 22**  
An act of kindness you performed recently may come back to you in surprising ways, Virgo. The universe will reward your generous spirit. You may continue to pay it forward.

**LIBRA: Sept 23-Oct 23**  
Figure out the perfect middle ground between work responsibilities and fun this week, Libra. If you delegate some of your tasks, you may free up time for personal enjoyment.

**SCORPIO: Oct 24-Nov 22**  
Scorpio, optimism is your guiding light this week. Your "can-do" attitude may inspire others who cross your path in the days to come. Lots will get done in little time.

**SAGITTARIUS: Nov 23-Dec 21**  
Deep conversations may lead to a breakthrough, Sagittarius. You might start to understand someone else or a situation on a whole new level.

**CAPRICORN: Dec 22-Jan 20**  
Capricorn, financial stability is something you should carefully consider this week. A smart decision you made in the past may not be the best way to continue forward.

**AQUARIUS: Jan 21-Feb 18**  
Aquarius, you may feel a strong draw toward community or giving back this week. Helping out a neighbor will bring you satisfaction, or you can volunteer.

**PISCES: Feb 19-Mar 20**  
It's important to trust your intuition, Pisces. This is leading you toward a very happy coincidence by the end of the week. Someone special becomes involved.

# SUDOKU

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	5					7		1
		4					3	5
		1	3			6		

Level: Intermediate

## Looking back

# Remembering Benton McKinney

Charles Benton Francis McKinney was born in Bakersville in Mitchell County Sept. 26, 1919 to William Martin and Bessie Lee Byrd McKinney.

He was likely named after his father's brother Charles and his maternal grandfather Hutson Benton Byrd. The name Francis never shows up in official documents related to him to date. He had two older sisters, Margaret and Blanch, a younger sister, Willie Amelia, and deceased infant sister Helen.

Known by most as Benton, he attended Bowman High School. In the spring of his senior year, he and two friends organized a protest of the new principal who replaced the former one that was well liked by all. The boys led some 90 boys to the gym where they formed the Future Citizens of America Club and marched from the high school through the town of Bakersville and back to the school.

Benton graduated from Bowman High School May 8, 1939, signed up for the draft Oct. 16, 1940 in Bakersville, and likely completed the paperwork in Asheville as a volunteer in the U.S. Army Air Corp. He likely took a Greyhound bus to Charlotte then on to Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Ga. where he enlisted on Dec. 2, 1940.

The next step for Air Corps' new enlisted replacements was to be taken by train to Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri which was established in 1940 specifically to handle basic military training and classification tests for Air Corps recruits. Family stories indicate that because he had good handwriting and was personable, he was routed into administration and records. Apparently, after he objected to being assigned to an office job when, in his words, "I volunteered to kill Germans, not work in an office," he was assigned to general maintenance on the aircraft, which entailed a good deal of grease.

The Eighth Air Force was activated Jan. 28, 1942 at Savannah, Ga. When Benton learned this and demand for bomber crews was great, he requested a change in assignment. Volunteers were welcome and he passed all the physical, medical, and aptitude tests which meant he was accepted into training at one of the four Flexible Gunnery Schools.

Benton most likely was assigned to the one at Buckingham Army Airfield, near Fort Myers, Fla. Evidence for this is a photograph of him in uniform with a female relative taken in Florida along with additional credible family stories.

Tail gunners required specialized training because it was one of the most demanding and dangerous positions on the aircraft. Tail gunner training during World War II varied but recruits were assigned to specialized gunnery schools, often lasting around six weeks to three months for initial qualification.

The 92nd Bombardment Group trained in Florida at MacDill Field (now MacDill Air Force Base) and Sarasota Army Airfield (now Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport) in 1942, focusing on B-17 operations and gunnery. At Sarasota, the 92nd conducted significant training from May to July 1942. At Sarasota Gunnery Ranges (Longboat Key area) pilots and gunners used nearby ranges for practice, firing at targets in the water. While in Florida (May – July 1942), they performed anti-submarine patrols off the Florida coast.

Training completed, the 92nd headed to England in two groups. The Air Echelon including flight crews but not



Submitted photo

Staff Sgt. Benton McKinney was born in Bakersville in Mitchell County Sept. 26, 1919.

gunners were the first heavy bomb group to fly their B-17 Flying Fortresses non-stop from Gander, Newfoundland, to Prestwick, Scotland. The 407th Squadron completed this, with its last plane arriving at the group's initial station in England at RAF Bovingdon on Aug. 28, 1942.

The Ground Echelon, composed of support personnel including gunners like Benton, were transported by sea. The 407th ground echelon left Bradenton, Fla., on July 18, 1942 aboard railroad cars to Fort Dix, N.J. They sailed on the USS West Point from New York on 6 Aug. 6, 1942, bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia, arriving at Liverpool on Aug. 18, 1942, before moving to Bovingdon they operated as a Replacement Training Unit (CCRC) until May 1943, and then began their main combat missions, which continued through 1944.

The USS West Point was a luxury liner designed originally for 1,049 passengers but would at times sail with over 8,000 GIs. Comfortable suites for two now slept 36. The ballroom was fitted with bunks for 545 men. Narrow canvas-covered pipe-framed bunks stacked up to five high provided a bare sixteen inches from the bunk above. Horizontally, they were so close there was hardly room to walk between them.

Despite the crowded conditions, the ship, referred to as a "monster" of the sea, was known for its speed, which was considered essential for avoiding enemy attacks during the dangerous transatlantic crossing.

During his 23 months overseas with the 92nd Bomb Group, Charles Benton McKinney lived a life of long stretches of waiting interrupted by moments of extreme danger. Most days were not combat days but were filled with early mornings, briefings, aircraft inspections, and constant uncertainty about when the next mission would come, all of which had to be mentally exhausting.

Combat missions followed a tense and demanding routine including pre-dawn wake-up calls, target briefings, hours in freezing high-altitude conditions, and then the terrifying passage through flak and fighter attacks. As a tail gunner, Benton occupied one of the most exposed and isolated positions on the aircraft, constantly scanning the skies behind the bomber, enduring intense cold and vibration, and knowing the tail position carried one of the highest casualty rates in the Air Forces.

Living conditions in England were basic and often uncomfortable with cold huts, mud, and limited comforts. What sustained men like Benton through the long deployment was mail from home and camaraderie. According to many accounts, crew members bonded tightly, relying on dark humor, ritual, shared stories, and one another to endure the strain.

Benton's wartime decorations reflect both sustained combat service and distinguished courage under fire. He received the Air Medal with three Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters and two Silver Oak Leaf Clusters, representing a total of 14 Air Medals. In the Eighth Air Force, the Air Medal was awarded for meritorious achievement in aerial combat and required the successful completion of credited combat missions. Accumulating that many awards indicate that Benton flew dozens of missions. According to family records, over 30, while the life expectancy was 18. He consistently performed his duties under intense conditions which meant remaining at his post through flak bursts, fighter attacks, freezing temperatures, and extreme fatigue.

He was also awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), a decoration given not for time served but for heroism or extraordinary achievement in aerial flight. This strongly suggests that on at least one mission, Benton's actions during enemy attack contributed significantly to the survival of his aircraft or formation, distinguishing him even among experienced combat airmen.

In addition, he received the Distinguished Unit Badge (Presidential Unit Citation) as a member of the 92nd Bomb Group, recognizing the unit's extraordinary heroism in action against heavily defended targets. This indicates he participated in operations of exceptional danger and effectiveness.

Taken together, these awards tell a clear story. Benton was not merely present. He was a highly experienced, battle-tested airman who served extensively, performed consistently under pressure, and demonstrated distinguished courage in combat.

Benton returned to a relatively quiet life, giving back to his community in many ways including membership in the Bakersville Baptist Church and Bakersville Masonic Lodge #357 AF&AM. He retired as the Director of W.A.M.Y. Community Action and passed away at 92 on Aug. 19, 2012. He rests in the Bakersville Memorial Cemetery along with his wife, Frances Marie Hobson McKinney and son Charles Patrick "Pat" McKinney.

When specific details of Benton's training, daily routine, or combat experiences are unknown, this account describes what was typical for an Army Air Forces airman serving in the Eighth Air Force and/or the 92nd. These descriptions are not intended as speculation but are within historically grounded contexts, unit histories, official Army Air Forces procedures, and shared biographical experiences.

*Thank you for reading. The Mitchell County Historical Society is dedicated to the preservation of our county's history. We are glad to help anyone with local history or genealogical questions and welcome comments, picture identifications, or questions. Contact us at the Historical Courthouse (11 N Mitchell Ave., Bakersville), (828) 688-4371, mitchellnchistory@gmail.com, or http://mitchellnchistory.org.*

# Community Calendar

**Now – April 4**  
From March 6 - April 4, Mica Gallery will host **Art for Animals' Sake**, its annual fundraising sale of art given to support Mitchell County Animal Rescue (MCAR).

**Now – April 15**  
The free **PATH Home Remedies Movement for Health Series** will be held March 11 - April 15 on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. with check in at 9:45 a.m. The classes will be at Spruce Pine Fire & Rescue (100 Fire Fighter Way in Spruce Pine). Classes include "Chair Yoga & Relaxation," taught by Joe Falco of Mineral City Yoga — a gentle movement and relaxation practice to help ease chronic pain, reduce stress, and improve balance, flexibility and circulation. Email [homeremedies@path-wnc.org](mailto:homeremedies@path-wnc.org) or call

**Thursday, March 12**  
• **JAM** will perform at City Drive-In.  
• **Toe River Music** presents the classic rock and roll cover band Orion's Mystery from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. in the side rooms of Burnsville Town Center.

**Friday, March 13**  
**Devin Harris** will perform at City Drive-In.

**March 13 – 15**  
The **Business Bestie Networking Experience** will be held at The Switzerland Inn in Little Switzerland, with host Shonte Youmans, Fresh Start

Consulting in partnership with Vernita Council-Howard and Rhonda James-Wooland. The cost is \$354 per person.

**Saturday, March 14**  
• **RuthFest** will be held at 3 p.m. at the Burnsville Town Center. This event is an annual fundraiser in honor of the late Burnsville Town clerk and cornbread-maker Ruth Banks. From 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. judges will taste, share, and declare the winners of a cornbread and chili cook-off. The Brevard-based band Red Clay Revival will perform beginning at 6 p.m. The contestant entry fee is \$10; \$25 for entry fee plus T-shirt. Register at the door or contact Taylor Banks Kirkman at [taylor@mountainstrong828.com](mailto:taylor@mountainstrong828.com) for pre-registration. Proceeds will benefit non-profits Southern Waters and Mountain Strong, helping the community rebuild.  
• **Chris Long** will perform at City Drive-In.  
• A **Saturday Pop-Up Book Sale and Jewelry Swap** will be held from 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. in the Community Room of the Spruce Pine Public Library. All are welcome to join Friends of the Library in a costume jewelry swap, including a jewelry-crafting table for children.

**Sunday, March 15**  
**W.A.M.Y. Community Action is set to host a fundraising experience** on Sunday, March 15, beginning at 5:30 p.m. The evening centers around a murder mystery production written and produced by Shane Lee Miller and directed

by Corey Babay. Tickets for this experience are \$1,500 per couple, and limited tickets are available.

**Thursday, March 19**  
• **Mitchell County** will host a **tourism summit** March 19. The summit will take place on March 19 at 31 Cross St. in Spruce Pine, beginning with the Tourism Summit from 1–5 p.m., followed by the official brand launch of the Mitchell County Tourism Development Authority from 5 –7 p.m., with hors d'oeuvres served. To register, please email [tda@mitchellcountync.gov](mailto:tda@mitchellcountync.gov)  
• **Andy Buckner** will perform at City Drive-In.

**Friday, March 20**  
**Music trivia** will be held at City Drive-In.

**Saturday, March 21**  
• **Tasha Ann** will perform at City Drive-In.  
• The Mayland Amateur Radio Club, Inc. will be holding an **Amateur Radio License Testing Session** (all classes) at 11 a.m. at the N.C. Cooperative Extension Building located at 10 S. Mitchell Ave. in Bakersville. Pre-registration is required. The deadline for pre-registration is March 19 at 6 p.m. For additional information and registration, go to <https://hamstudy.org/sessions/695c224562990953a5eeab2a/1>.

# Outdoors

## Critical trail connection reopens in Pisgah National Forest



Photo/Professional Trail Builder Trase Sowell of Geosculpt Trails

A trail of rocks form a narrow staircase on the Lower Heartbreak Trail.

The Lower Heartbreak Ridge Trail, a popular route connecting Pisgah National Forest to the town of Old Fort North Carolina, reopened this month after an 18 month closure due to Hurricane Helene, restoring critical access to the region's outdoor economy.

"The trail is part of a community-led effort to strengthen rural prosperity by expanding recreation infrastructure and drawing visitors to the area," said James Melonas, forest supervisor for the National Forests of North Carolina. "We're thankful for the steady local support behind this project."

The 3-mile trail opened in April 2024 and quickly became a central piece of a 42-mile trail initiative designed to support businesses in Old Fort and improve access for residents. The route links to the longer Heartbreak Ridge Trail, which draws mountain bikers, hikers, and runners from across the

country. Local partners said reopening the connection was essential for sustaining visitor traffic and helping the town recover from recent storms.

The trail sustained heavy damage during Hurricane Helene, including three large landslides that took out entire portions of the trail and a half-mile of blowdown. The Forest Service, working with the G5 Trail Collective and local contractors, rebuilt the damaged areas and rerouted segments to withstand future storms. The work supports broader disaster recovery across the Grandfather Ranger District and restores an important entry point to one of the East Coast's most traveled recreation destinations.

Repairing and reopening this iconic trail connection was a priority for national forest recovery and for rebuilding an economic engine and growing identity for the people of Old Fort.

A newly signed disaster recovery agreement combined congressionally appropriated disaster recovery funds with local resources to share stewardship and recovery efforts in Pisgah National Forest. The Lower Heartbreak rebuild is the first of many recovery efforts to be completed under this new agreement.

Visitors will experience a new series of rock steps, placed to sustainably manage trail use over a 100-foot gain in elevation from Jarrett Creek to the ridge—bikers should prepare for a "hike-a-bike." With this new climb, it means an even longer descent into Old Fort and maintaining a much-loved ridge section with wide-ranging mountain views. The south end of this challenging hike or ride can be accessed from Mill Creek Road in Old Fort. The north end access is at the end of Jarrett Creek Road coming from Heartbreak Ridge, Star Gap or the Gateway Trails.

### About the Forest Service

The USDA Forest Service has for more than 100 years brought people and communities together to answer the call of conservation. Grounded in world-class science and technology—and rooted in communities—the Forest Service connects people to nature and to each other. The Forest Service cares for shared natural resources in ways that promote lasting economic, ecological, and social vitality. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, maintains the largest wildland fire and forestry research organizations in the world. The Forest Service also has either a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 900 million forested acres within the U.S., of which over 130 million acres are urban forests where most Americans live.

## NCFS urges public to use best practices and common sense ahead of wildfire season

With North Carolina's spring wildfire season arriving at a time when most of the state is experiencing moderate to severe drought, the N.C. Forest Service is urging the public to apply best practices and common sense with all outdoor fire, especially yard debris burns.

"With the recent rainfall combined with multiple winter storms earlier this year, some folks may not realize that most of North Carolina is still experiencing very dry conditions," said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. "Our state's gradual descent into drought and prolonged dry conditions means wildfires can ignite more easily, burn more intensely and spread quicker. The best defense against wildfires will always be to prevent them from starting."

Escaped yard debris burns, largely due to carelessness, continue to be the leading cause of wildfires across the state, accounting for nearly half of all wildfires in North Carolina.

In general, human activity is responsible for 99 percent of wildfires, and spring weather tends to draw people outdoors to work in their yards with many choosing to burn as a method to dispose of leaves, limbs and

other yard debris.

"A fire can escape in a matter of seconds, especially on warm days when winds are gusty," Troxler added. "This means you never leave a fire unattended until it is completely out and cold."

Other forms of human caused wildfires stem from machine and vehicle use, dragging tow chains, arson and escaped campfires.

Western North Carolina counties that suffered substantial forest damage during Hurricane Helene remain especially vulnerable to wildfires due to dead and dying timber contributing to an excessive debris and fuel load.

Before starting an outdoor fire, contact your local NCFS county ranger's office. For safe burning practices to help prevent wildfire, the NCFS offers the following guidance:

- **Check local burning laws.** Some communities allow burning only during specified hours. Others forbid it entirely.

- **Make sure you have a valid permit.** You can obtain a burn permit at any N.C. Forest Service office or authorized permitting agent, or online at [www.ncforestservice.gov/burnpermit](http://www.ncforestservice.gov/burnpermit).

- **Keep an eye on the weather.** Don't burn on dry, windy days.

- **Local fire officials can recommend a safe way to burn debris.** Don't pile vegetation on the ground. Instead, place it in a cleared area and contain it in a screened receptacle away from overhead branches and wires.

- **Be sure you are fully prepared before burning.** To control the fire, you will need a hose, bucket, steel rake and a shovel for tossing dirt on the fire. Keep a phone nearby, too.

- **Never use kerosene, gasoline, diesel fuel or other flammable liquids to speed up debris burning.**

- **Stay with your fire until it is completely out.** If it's too hot to touch, it's too hot to leave.

These same tips apply to campfires and grills as well: Douse burning charcoal briquettes or campfires thoroughly with water. Drown all embers, not just the red ones. When soaked, stir the coals and soak them again. Make sure everything is wet and that embers are cold to the touch. If you do not have water, mix enough dirt or sand with the embers to extinguish the fire, being careful not to bury the fire. Never dump hot

ashes or coals into a wooded area.

The public is reminded to never fly a drone near, around or over a wildfire. Firefighting aircraft that respond to wildfires fly low in support of ground personnel. Drones can pose a serious threat to pilots and public safety. A drone that disrupts air operations also puts firefighters, residents and property at risk of loss to wildfire.

Where there's fire, there's smoke, and if you live in an area where wildfire risk is high, staying smoke-ready can be critical to personal health and well-being.

Take steps now to prepare for wildfire smoke. This is especially important for smoke sensitive individuals including children, active people, older adults and people with heart or lung disease such as asthma.

Being prepared means knowing where to find information about air quality and utilizing the air quality index. Use resources like [www.ncair.org](http://www.ncair.org), <https://airquality.climate.ncsu.edu/> and [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov).

To learn more about preparing for and preventing wildfires, visit [www.preventwildfire.org](http://www.preventwildfire.org).

## High Peaks leads Bailey Mountain hike Friday, March 13

Community members are invited to join High Peaks for a fun, moderate hike on Friday, March 13 at Bailey Mountain near Mars Hill.

This early-Spring outing will cover 4.5 miles and should offer a chance to see blooming flowers and mushrooms.

Hikers should assemble at the Rose's Shopping Center parking lot overlooking U.S. Highway 19 in Burnsville at 9 a.m. and carpool to the trailhead. If you prefer to meet the group there, the address is 889 Forrest Street in Mars Hill and the group will probably arrive around 9:30 a.m.

Participants are recommended to bring sturdy boots, hiking poles if you use them, clothing suitable for the weather forecast, snacks and plenty of water. Leashed, well-behaved dogs are welcome, but hikers should be prepared to clean up after their own pets.

Hike leaders will be Diane Schramm and Candie Smith. Call or text Diane at (904) 349-0479 with questions. It's also helpful to let her know if you plan to attend.

As always, check the High Peaks Facebook page or website, [www.nchighpeaks.org](http://www.nchighpeaks.org) for last-minute changes due to the weather.

## 2026 Wildlife Science Summer Program now accepting applications

**Registration deadline is May 10**

Current high school students with an interest in the natural environment, conservation, and ecology are invited to apply for the Lees-McRae College Wildlife Science Summer Programs.

These weeklong sessions introduce students to the fields of wildlife biology, wildlife rehabilitation, and veterinary medicine through hands-on experiences around Banner Elk.

The bulk of the programs take place on the Lees-McRae campus, where students conduct experiments, participate in labs, and conduct research under the guidance of Lees-McRae faculty.

Past sessions have included activities like mammal trapping, salamander hunting, invasive plant species removal, bird and plant identification hikes, and education presentations with the ambassador animals at the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center.

Each session also includes field trips to locations like Grandfather Mountain, Linville Caverns, Western North Carolina Nature Center and the Greensboro Science Center, where students can learn more about pursuing a career working with wildlife.

The first session will be held Sunday, June 7 – Saturday, June 13 and will focus on exploring plant and animal ecology, veterinary sciences, and wildlife rehabilitation.

The second session takes place the following week, Sunday, June 14–Saturday, June 20, and is designed for students actively interested in studying wildlife biology or pre-veterinary medicine at the collegiate level.

Session two involves more clinical experiences and concludes with each student giving an education presentation with an ambassador animal. Students interested in session two should have attended the first session or have previous experience in a related setting.

All students entering 11th or 12th grade in fall 2026 (aged 15–17 years) are welcome to apply. Home-schooled students are also encouraged to apply, as are students from outside of the state and country. Registration for the Wildlife Science Summer Program will remain open until Sunday, May 10.

The program cost is \$2,100 for one session and \$3,600 for both sessions. This cost includes lodging and meals, camp insurance, instruction, materials and supplies, field trips, transportation during camp, and a camp t-shirt/souvenir.

With questions regarding your student's eligibility, please email [wildlifecamp@lmc.edu](mailto:wildlifecamp@lmc.edu).



Submitted photo

Asheville organization EcoForesters is encouraging landowners to fight the spread of invasive species.

## EcoForesters concerned about invasive species

Asheville organization EcoForesters recently released tips on combatting invasive species in honor of National Invasive Species Awareness Week.

National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW) is an interorganizational initiative to raise awareness about invasive species, the threat that they pose, and what can be done to prevent their spread, according to the EcoForesters release. This year it was held Feb. 23-27.

The theme of NISAW 2026 is Defending Our Health by Stopping the Spread. Non-native invasive species (NNIS) degrade forest health and reduce biodiversity, with some species even increasing wildfire risk or impacting hydrology.

It is estimated that invasive plants are present on one out of every 10 southern forest acres, and are likely to double their reach in the next 50 years due to the effects of climate change.

Additionally, the canopy openings caused by Hurricane Helene (downgraded to a tropical storm after slowing down over land) have created optimal growing space for invasive plants.

### Local invasive species

The Southern Appalachians are one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world, but that diversity is being threatened by NNIS infestations. In the Appalachian-Cumberland highland region, it is estimated that 4.4 million acres are affected by invasive plants.

NNIS crowd out native plant species, reduce food and habitat available for wildlife, inhibit forest productivity, and impact biodiversity. Some species can also increase wildfire risk or reduce water quality.

Common examples of NNIS in the Southern Appalachians include multiflora rose, Japanese honeysuckle, tree of heaven, and Asiatic bittersweet, along with

forest pests such as the emerald ash borer and the spotted lanternfly.

Invasive plants are also extremely productive, growing and reproducing rapidly to outcompete other species. Additionally, they have no native predators, allowing them to grow without natural control.

Identification is the first step towards NNIS control. The NC Invasive Plant Council (<https://nc-ipc.weebly.com/nc-invasive-plants.html>) lists the most common invasive species found in WNC, including identification tips and control methods.

The council encourages landowners to landscape with native plants, and avoid buying invasive species (even those that are labeled "sterile").

Targeted and carefully planned control methods are essential to reduce the spread of NNIS, especially for large infestations. Landowners with a significant amount of inva-

sive species may consider hiring a professional forestry crew to treat NNIS.

For those that enjoy outdoor recreation, insects and plants or plant seeds can stick to your clothes, gear, and firewood. Be sure to clean your gear before entering and leaving recreation sites, use local firewood, and stay on the trail. Seeds and insects can also stick to pets, so don't leave them out of the cleaning process.

### Storm impact

NNIS thrive on disturbance, and Helene was one of the largest disturbance events this region has ever seen. Existing infestations will worsen this spring as invasive plants continue to capitalize on canopy openings and bare soil.

Without proper control, NNIS will overtake these clearings, smothering native species and reducing the value of these areas for wildlife.

# Stash the trash: A fed bear is a dead bear

**Gerald D. Hodge Jr.**  
*Appalachia Georgia Friends of the Bears*

The Appalachia Georgia Friends of the Bears would like to remind the public that March marks the time for the black bears to emerge from den. The warmer weather will bring the adult males, subadults, and moms with yearlings out to start foraging for another year. Moms with cubs of the year will emerge in mid-April-early May.

Attractants like birdseed, hummingbird feeders, pet food, livestock food, greasy barbecues, smokers and fish cookers, and wildlife feeders are easily accessed by black bears. Minimize attractants and the availability of food rewards throughout your yard and neighborhood. Help us save a bear's life and remove the attractants.

The intentional and unintentional feeding of bears teaches them to approach homes and humans for food which is a recipe for human-bear conflict. Two-thirds of human-bear conflict is because of bears having access to garbage. In addition, it destroys their teeth, digestive tracts, and results in a slow and painful death.

Store garbage in a sturdy building or place in an approved bear-resistant trash receptacle and put it out on the morning of pick up goes a long way. The longer garbage is in the heat, the larger olfactory signature it will have. The greater the signature, the greater the distance for it to travel on the wind. To help reduce this signature, rinse off any food, and drink resi-



Photo/Gerald D. Hodge

Top: A black bear accessing garbage, source: National Park Service. Right: Birdfeeders attract wildlife, including bears. (Submitted photo)

due from containers and packaging. Also, clean your garbage cans and dumpsters.

The Appalachia Georgia Friends of the Bears is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose mission is to reduce human-bear conflict through proactive educational outreach programs, increase public awareness about coexisting with Black Bears, the use of humane bear deterrents, and advocacy. Visit BearWise.org and agfriendsofthebears.com for more information on reducing human-bear conflict.



## Calendar

Continued from page 6

### Thursday, March 26

- **JAM** will perform at City Drive-In.
- The Mitchell County Historical Society, after a five-year gap, will again host the **annual History Bee** on Thursday, March 26 at 6 p.m. at Mitchell County Middle School, with cash prizes in two divisions: middle school (grades 6–8) and high school (grades 9–12). Parents, families, and community members are invited to attend. Admission is free. For additional information contact the Mitchell County Historical Society at (828) 688-4371, mitchellnchistory@gmail.com or https://www.facebook.com/mitchellnchistory.org.
- **Showtunes:** Toe River Music presents a themed event featuring local musicians singing songs from Broadway (or other) musicals and prominent songs from movies or television from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. in the side rooms of Burnsville Town Center.

### Friday, March 27

**Michael Cansler** will perform at City Drive-In.

### Saturday, March 28

- **Bob & Dee Carr** will perform at City Drive-In.
- Mitchell County Animal Rescue invites the community to grab a fork and make a difference at **Spay-ghetti 2026**, a family-friendly spaghetti dinner fundraiser supporting critical spay and neuter efforts. The event will be held on Saturday, March 28, from 4:30 p.m. – 7 p.m. at the Mitchell Senior Center. Dinner prices are \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors, and \$8 for children ages 12 and under. Tickets may be purchased at the door or pre-purchased in advance. For more information about Spay-ghetti 2026, to purchase tickets, or to become a sponsor, visit mitchellcountyanimalrescue.org.

*Events to be included in the Community Calendar should be emailed to editor@mitchellnews.com by noon Thursday in order to be included in next Wednesday's paper. Please put "Community Calendar" in the subject line of the email.*

## MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL

# CLASSIFIEDS

### The Mitchell News Journal Classifieds Sell today - gone tomorrow

**Small costs, BIG results**

For a classified advertisement of 10 words or less, the cost of one publication is only \$10. For each word over 10 add 30 cents per word. Classifieds deadline is 11am Monday for the current week's edition.

**To place a classified call (828) 765-7169**

### AUTOS FOR SALE

- CARS FOR SALE**
- 2008 Mazda 3 - \$3500 Cash
  - 2004 Crown Victoria - \$3990 Cash
  - 2001 Crown Victoria - \$5900 Cash
- Call/Text Liz at (828)260-9863

### LEGALS

#### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

State of North Carolina  
County of Mitchell  
Superior Court Division  
File No 26-E-000047-600

Having qualified as Executor of the estate of **BETTY JOYCE BUCHANAN**, deceased, late of Mitchell County, this is to notify all persons, holding claims against said estate to present them, duly verified, to the undersigned on or before the 11th day of June, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate will please make immediate settlement.  
This the 9th day of March, 2026.

Jack Buchanan  
189 Marble Mine Road  
Bakersville, NC 28705  
Executor of the Estate of Betty Joyce Buchanan, Deceased

#903706 3/11/26-4/1/26

IN THE CHANCERY COURT FOR GREENE COUNTY, TENNESSEE  
THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT, SITTING AT GREENEVILLE

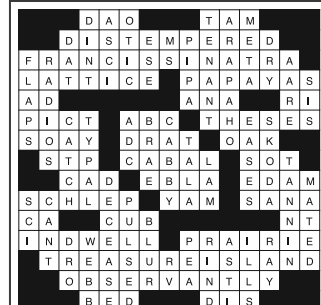
DANIELLE BELCHER DAVIS, Plaintiff/Wife,  
vs.  
JAMES E. DA VIS, Defendant/Husband.

CIVIL ACTION NO.: 26-CV-22

#### ORDER

It appearing from the filings in this cause that personal service of process cannot be had upon the defendant(s) and service of

### PUZZLE SOLUTIONS



4	6	2	1	7	5	3	9	8
9	7	5	6	8	3	2	1	4
8	1	3	9	4	2	5	7	6
5	4	6	7	9	1	8	2	3
1	3	7	2	6	8	4	5	9
2	9	8	5	3	4	1	6	7
3	5	9	4	2	6	7	8	1
6	2	4	8	1	7	9	3	5
7	8	1	3	5	9	6	4	2

#### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MITCHELL COUNTY  
IN REGARDS TO  
THE ESTATE OF  
ALICE COFFEY GLENN  
25E001184-600

I, B. DEAN GRINDSTAFF, having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of **ALICE COFFEY GLENN** late of Mitchell County, North Carolina, hereby give Notice to all CREDITORS having a claim against said Estate to present them to the undersigned on or before May 18, 2026, when this Notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. This, the 11th day of February, 2026.  
B. Dean Grindstaff  
7830-B Hwy 19E No  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777

#899988 2/18/26-3/11/26

#### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MITCHELL COUNTY  
IN REGARDS TO  
THE ESTATE OF  
MARION JACKSON GLENN  
25E001183-600

I, B. DEAN GRINDSTAFF, having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of **MARION JACKSON GLENN** late of Mitchell County, North Carolina, hereby give Notice to all CREDITORS having a claim against said Estate to present them to the undersigned on or before May 18, 2026, when this Notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. This, the 11th day of February, 2026.

B. Dean Grindstaff  
7830-B Hwy 19E No  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777

#900417 2/18/26-3/11/26

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF:  
Rhonda Lynn Gunter, Deceased  
MITCHELL COUNTY FILE NO. :  
26E000042-600

#### EXECUTOR'S NOTICE

#902265 3/4/26-3/25/26 Having qualified on the 25th day

#### LEGALS

#### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

of February, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of **RHONDA LYNN GUNTER**, deceased, late of Mitchell County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the decedent to exhibit the same to the undersigned Executor on or before the 03rd day of June, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the estate should make immediate payment.  
This the 4th day of March, 2026.

Michael Alan Gunter  
Address: 422 Rockledge Road  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777

#902231 3/4/26-3/25/26

#### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

State of North Carolina  
County of Mitchell  
Superior Court Division  
File No 26-E-000037-600

Having qualified as Administrator for the estate of **WESLEY RAY LOVEN**, deceased, late of Mitchell County, this is to notify all persons, holding claims against said estate to present them, duly verified, to the undersigned on or before the 18th day of May, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate will please make immediate settlement.  
This the 13th day of February, 2026.

Timmy Ray Lovén

#### LEGALS

#### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

610 Ted Byrd rd  
Bakersville, NC 28705  
Administrator of the Estate of  
Wesley Ray Lovén, Deceased

#900704 2/28/26-3/11/26

#### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MITCHELL COUNTY  
IN REGARDS TO  
THE ESTATE OF  
KATE GRIFFITH PATE  
25E000017-600

I, Wanda G. Ledford, having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of **KATE GRIFFITH PATE** late of Mitchell County, North Carolina, hereby give Notice to all CREDITORS having a claim against said Estate to present them to the undersigned on or before May 18, 2026, when this Notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. This, the 11th day of February, 2026.

Wanda G. Ledford  
12630 Canyon Oaks Dr  
Frisco, TX 75033

#900407 2/18/26-3/11/26

#### EXECUTORS NOTICE

25E001216-600  
Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of **Glenda Sue Stewart**, late of Mitchell County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against the estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 18th day of

**May, 2026**, or this notice will be pled in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate will please make immediate settlement.

This the 18th day of February, 2026.

Mark Stewart  
2330 Kenmore Ave Unit B  
Charlotte, NC 28204

#898721 2/18/26-3/11/26

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF:  
Doris Duncan Sullins, Deceased  
MITCHELL COUNTY FILE NO. :  
26E000043-600

#### EXECUTOR'S NOTICE

Having qualified on the 25th day of February, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of **DORIS DUNCAN SULLINS**, deceased, late of Mitchell County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the decedent to exhibit the same to the undersigned Executor on or before the 03rd day of June, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the estate should make immediate payment.  
This the 4th day of March, 2026.

Sarah Ann Sullins  
Address:  
178 West Mountain Road  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777

#902379 3/4/26-3/25/26

## NOTICE OF MEETINGS Mitchell County Board of Equalization and Review

**Pursuant to N.C.G.S. 105-322 of the General Statutes of N.C., the Mitchell County Board of Equalization and Review will meet as required by law.**

#### PURPOSE OF MEETING

To hear upon request, any and all taxpayers who own or control taxable property assessed for taxation in Mitchell County, with respect to the valuation of such property, or the property of others, and to fulfill other duties and responsibilities required by law.

#### TIME OF MEETINGS

The Board will convene Monday, April 13, 2026 and adjourn Wednesday, April 16, 2026. Meeting times are posted below. Meetings will be held in the County Administration Building.

- Monday, April 13, 2026- 9 am - 1 pm**
- Tuesday, April 14, 2026- 9 am - 1 pm**
- Thursday, April 16, 2026- 9 am - 1 pm**

Request for a hearing must be received no later than the adjournment time. In the event of any changes, notice to that effect will be published in this newspaper.

The schedule for the hearing of appeals, which were timely filed, will be posted at the office of the Assessor, serving as the Clerk to the Board, and will also be provided to individuals and organizations that have requested notice pursuant to N.C.G.S. 142-318.12.

**All requests for hearing should be made to:**  
Clerk, Mitchell County Board of Equalization and Review  
Mitchell County Administration Building  
26 Crimson Laurel Circle  
Bakersville, NC 28705  
828-537-1405

## NOW HIRING! PROPANE SERVICE TECHNICIAN

#### JOB DUTIES INCLUDE:

- Installing propane tanks
- Installing/servicing propane water heaters and propane heaters
- Running and connecting gas lines
- Leak testing and system checks
- Providing safe, professional service to customers

#### REQUIREMENTS:

- Mechanical or plumbing experience preferred (will train the right person)
- Ability to work outdoors and lift heavy equipment
- Valid driver's license
- Strong work ethic and attention to safety
- Customer-friendly attitude

#### BENEFITS:

- On-the-job training
- Competitive pay based on experience
- Opportunity for advancement
- Steady, year-round work

Apply in person or call (see contact info below)

## YOUNG'S FUEL SERVICE

215 Crimson Laurel Way • Bakersville, NC 28705  
M-F 7am-6pm • Sat 8am-Noon • 828.688.2116

# Quartz

Continued from page 1

they were collecting decertification signatures, then the union would have grounds to file charges against the company, Pittman said.

“After the NLRB has done a thorough investigation, the decert petition could be thrown out, and no vote takes place, or they could set up a date for the bargaining unit employees to vote for the union to stay or go. The majority would then rule,” Pittman explained.

Workers who want to remove the union believe the UMWA is not effective and that non-union facilities would be better than what the union has done for them, Semmens stated.

“They don’t talk to rank-

and-file employees about what’s going on,” Semmens stated. “My understanding is that there’s not any sort of democratic process within the union. There aren’t elections for the officers. They just get appointed. So basically, these workers feel like they have no say in what the union’s doing.”

The UMWA Local 0140 was voted in at The Quartz Corp in March 1998 and has 37 bargaining unit employees.

“The union represents all the bargaining unit employees at this facility,” Pittman wrote. “Over the years, we have negotiated many contracts with the company. ... A contract that is binding ... in terms of wages, vacation, funeral leave, safety, seniority,

call back rights in the event of a layoff, and just cause, which means that the employer has to have a good reason to fire or discipline bargaining unit employees.”

Bargaining units are employees who are represented by a labor union during negotiations with their employer. These units are essential for collective bargaining, where employees negotiate for better wages, benefits, working conditions, and job security.

“We have several bargaining unit employees who don’t belong to the union, but they do like the union being there to represent them,” Pittman added.

If the blocking charge

is overturned, it will allow workers, nationally, to vote to remove their union without interference as long as they have the votes required, Semmens said.

“We handle a good number of decertification cases and unfortunately ... we see these types of tactics where instead of letting the workers vote, union lawyers try and block it or delay it,” Semmens stated. “But we think every day that these workers are stuck under a union that a majority likely opposes, that’s a violation of their rights and certainly a bad thing.”

But Semmens warns that a ruling could take months to years.

“One of the current three

members of the NLRB’s term expires this year. There are five seats on the NLRB and if they fall below three members then they lack a majority to take action,” Semmens said.

Without union representation, companies in North Carolina can fire you for almost anything that is legal, Pittman said.

“It doesn’t matter whether you were a great employee and have worked there for 20 years. If you stayed out of work for two days due to the weather, they could fire you, and you would have no recourse,” he said.

Pittman assures the employees that during the NLRB investigation, “the union and its supporters will

continue to treat everyone fairly, as always. We will document, report, and cooperate with any laws, and will provide the NLRB with anything they might require to efficiently complete any investigations.”

Pittman spoke about the value of having a union contract.

“In my opinion, most companies dislike a union because it’s another party involved in their business,” Pittman said. “I would like to see the union stay at this operation. I believe that having a contract gives you more rights.”

The Quartz Corp had no comment on this dispute, and Blake Davis did not respond to requests for comment.



Left: Ripley the Aussiedoodle (right) greets fundraiser attendees. Right: Artist, and one of the organizers of the fundraiser, Vicki Essig, stands next to her work.

MNJ Photos/Steffen Silvis

# Ashcraft

Continued from page 1

laws threatens 85 percent of publicly owned lands.

“A lot of the mining and quarrying here started right on top of where Native Americans did the same thing,” Ashcraft said.

Mitchell County, a geologically-rich location for minerals of international interest and national security, has attracted private corporations, and mining can be worth millions, even trillions, of dollars.

For example, Hurricane Helene (downgraded to a tropical storm after slowing down over land) and tariffs hit Sibelco, the biggest employer in Mitchell County, in 2025. Their earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization fell 15.9 percent, but still amounted to 233 million Euros (about \$275 million), according to Agg-Net.

The Quartz Corp has an estimated revenue of \$70 million a year, according to CompWorth. The global high purity quartz market is projected to grow from \$1.15 billion to 2025 to \$2.07 billion by 2034, according to Wall Street Watchdogs.

Spruce Pine is the only place in the

world that produces the ultra-high purity quartz used in semiconductor manufacturing.

“The unique geology under Mitchell County has been meaningful for millennia,” Ashcraft said. “The geology here meant as much to people then as it does to us today.”

The federal government owns less than 8 percent of the state’s land. By using an old and disproven formula, Ashcraft said, the U.S. Forest Service has avoided investigation of 87 percent of that land for ancient artifacts, gravesites, and more culturally meaningful materials

Details of Ashcraft’s work can be found at [www.scottashcraft.com](http://www.scottashcraft.com).

“Cultural resources, archaeological sites and sacred areas belong to the public and to tribal ancestors,” he said. “They don’t belong to a particular government agency. Looking around Spruce Pine now, we’re looking at an intensely significant cultural landscape. We have a wild and untapped huge archaeological phenomena here, the opportunity to show the nation and the world what actual history is and was. They want to keep a cap on it.”



Submitted photo

Environmental and historical activist Scott Ashcraft worked for the U.S. Forest Service for many years.

# Art

Continued from page 1

“Typically, the prior fundraisers have each raised about \$6,000,” Bell said. “We’ve enjoyed aiding Mitchell County Animal Rescue.”

Among the opening night attendees were a number of dogs, on hand as a visual reminder

of MCAR’s mission. The evening’s unofficial mascot was a gregarious Aussiedoodle named Ripley, who bounded up to every new arrival at the door to greet them. While Ripley already had a home, he was a nudge toward remembering that not all ani-

mals are so lucky.

Mica Gallery is open on Fridays and Saturdays through April from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., as well as by appointment by calling or texting Speckled Dog Pottery at (828) 434-0353.

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# Sports

## Middle school soccer season starts with a draw

**Loren Baker**  
Mitchell Miners Team  
Photographer

The Mitchell Middle School girls soccer team started its season with a hard-fought draw.

Offensively, Alexa Sixtos, Samy Wences, Jaylen Barnett and Bella Grindstaff applied steady pressure throughout the game, creating multiple chances for scoring through disciplined passing and coordinated movement. Offensive substitute Carlee Spurlin maintained the team's pace when called upon.

Serving as a transitional player, Kenzie Stansberry contributed to both sides defense and offense. Her ability to shift roles effortlessly helped maintain the balance during critical moments during the game.

Defensively, Ana Dellinger, Dayanna Romero and Lily Hurd worked in unison to protect the goal, demonstrating positional awareness. Defensive substitutes Brooklynn Helmer and Ana Garcia reinforced the back line, stepping in when needed and sustaining the team's defensive intensity.

In goal, Alejandra Rincon delivered a composed performance, making several saves to preserve the tie.

Managers Addison Hoilman and Paulina Queriapa kept documents of crucial moments during the game by keeping stats and motivating the players.

Head coach Justin Hollifield praised the collective effort following the game.

"Theres a lot of improvements to be made, but this team grows every time they step on the field," Hollifield said.



### Duncan

Continued from page 5

smells of cotton candy and lilac blossoms, and the sounds of music coming from the carousel had us kids running in all directions.

Then the ballgames that were played on the ole' field — walking home in defeat or victory was sometimes a good walk or slow one on the bridge, but the bridge was always there for us.

When I brought my granddaughter and her friend back to my hometown, the first place I took her was to see and go across the ole' bridge and she did the same thing I did at her age, she enjoyed it.

Sadly, the old bridge that was there for all that time, has done the unthinkable — it floated away in the deep waters during Helene 2024. Something you thought would never happen, along with all those glorious memories.

The bridge lasted a century and more, and all the history with it. I bet you have a tell or two you would like to share? Do you think the walking bridge should be rebuilt and in the same place or is it just a piece of history in a bygone era?

*Diane Duncan reflects on her past in Spruce Pine from her home in Lowell, N.C.*



Submitted photo

This hole near the old Spruce Pine footbridge was left after someone set off dynamite as a New Year's Eve prank in 1959.

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