



Retiring Macon County Sheriff Robert Holland received North Carolina's highest honor, The Order of the Long Leaf Pine Award, at his Nov. 30 retirement tribute. Pictured from left, are State Sen. Kevin Corbin, Holland, his wife, Marci, and N.C. Rep. Karl Gillespie.

Judge Roy Wijewickrama administers the Oath of Office to incoming Sheriff Brent Holbrooks who was accompanied by wife, Sarah, and children.

Holland's term ends but not impact on community

Deena C. Bouknight – Contributing Writer

The name Robert (Robbie) Holland has been synonymous with the word "sheriff" in Macon County for two decades. Although that association officially came to an end at his retirement recognition event when he made his final dispatch call, many people in the audience of hundreds who spoke conveyed that they will always think of him as Sheriff Holland.

At the Nov. 30 packed event, family members and friends, dozens of law enforcement representatives and first responders, local and state politicians, and more reflected on Holland's character and achievements during his five terms of service as sheriff. Replacing him as an elected official, sworn in on Dec. 5 at a special meeting of the Macon County

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New sheriff is following in his father's footsteps

Dan Finnerty – Contributing Writer

With outgoing Sheriff Robert Holland announcing in June 2021 his plans to retire, five candidates filed to become the next sheriff. With a field full of Republicans and no Democrats, the primary election that was held in May put Lt. Brent Holbrooks in the sheriff's office.

With the official Dec. 5 swearing in, Holbrooks became Macon County's new sheriff.

Holbrooks, who was already serving within the Sheriff's Office as a lieutenant overseeing civil process and courthouse security, began his law enforcement career in 1999. After leaving for a period in 2004 to pursue other interests, he returned in 2008 and began working as a road patrol officer, before beginning his role within the county court-

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DECEMBER 16 - 17

HOLLAND

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Commissioners, is Brent Holbrooks.

Common accolades shared by individuals who spoke at Holland's retirement event focused on his commitment to law enforcement that did not stop at the job requirements. Holland dedicated himself to a wide variety of services, legislation, programs, and more – personally in his spare time and sometimes as a representative for the Macon County Sheriff's Department.

"It was very moving and I am incredibly honored to have been recognized in such a fashion," expressed Holland after the event. "The outpouring of love and support shown to my family prior to the reception and since is very humbling."

Holland, with long-time family roots in Macon County, began his career with the Macon County Sheriff's Office in 1991. He worked his way up through the ranks of the department, serving as a detention officer, deputy sheriff, juvenile investigator, K-9 handler, and detective sergeant. County Manager Derek Roland reminded attendees at the event that Holland made sure the Sheriff's Office was "always about more than just arresting criminals; he made sure it was an integral part of our community."

"Throughout my entire 30-year career in law enforcement I've always wanted more than anything to make a difference for the people I proudly served," said Holland.

After Holland became sheriff, a case involving a murdered infant prompted him to focus on child-protection-related issues. As a result, he was the recipient of the N.C. Juvenile Officer of the Year in 1999, and he and his wife, Marci, received the Donna B. Stone Memorial Award by Prevent Child Abuse N.C. for their efforts in working with victims of child abuse and for being instrumental in getting the N.C. Infant Homicide Prevention Act signed into law in July 2000. Plus, he served as chairman of the Center for Safer Schools Task Force (appointed first by former governor, Pat McCrory, and then by current governor, Roy Cooper) and established School Resource Officers (SRO) in Macon County schools.

"We're here today to thank you [Holland] for assuming this great responsibility," said Roland. "We can never fully comprehend

the courage you have had to have to make the decisions you've had to make these last 20 years."

Roland and other individuals acknowledged Holland's attention to and involvement in such programs as Shop with a Cop, N.C. Second Chance Alliance (inmate rehabilitation), Prom Promise, and much more.

"He relentlessly pursued higher pay for his officers," said Roland, "so they would receive the compensation they deserve."

Sheriff's Office captains presented Holland with a shadow box that included items reflecting his long career.

Retiring Macon County Board of Commissioners Chair Jim Tate commented.

"He's been to Macon County what Andy Griffith was to Mayberry [The Andy Griffith Show] in that he has loved this county and its people," said Tate.

Chief Deputy Andy Shields said, "To list all of Robbie's accomplishments is an impossibility. They are many. And Marci has been the anchor behind every storm. Hundreds of families and individuals in Macon County have benefitted from programs that he (and they) started and/or supported. But mostly, he has focused on keeping kids safe. And he has had compassion for the mentally ill and for those who suffer from substance abuse. I have been proud to call Robbie my sheriff and my friend."

Holland's younger brother, Tim Holland, spoke tearfully.



Robert Holland's brother, Tim Holland, presented him with a Henry USA Law Enforcement Tribute Edition rifle.

"You've not only been my brother, but my ally, role model, listening ear, place of comfort ...," and then he presented Holland with a Henry USA Law Enforcement Tribute Edition rifle. Tim Holland was employed with the Sheriff's Office under Sheriff Homer Holbrooks prior to Robbie Holland being elected sheriff. He has served as a detention captain and lieutenant of criminal investigations.

Holland told The Macon County News a few days after the retirement event, "Tim is

an outstanding officer and he's had a difficult career having his older brother as his boss. Any officer will tell you that if they have to go into a bad situation, they want Tim Holland to have their back. My brother always had my back and I'm very proud of him."

Game Warden Edwin Grant reminded the crowd that due to Eric Rudolph, known as an American domestic terrorist, who hid out around Macon County and the Nantahala National Forest in the late 1990s, a canine unit was started in Macon County under the leadership of former sheriff Homer Holbrooks, with Holland becoming the county's first bloodhound handler, a responsibility that was added to his other roles (at that time) as a juvenile officer and detective. Grant saved the dog harness of Holland's beloved K-9-unit dog, Duchess, and presented the harness to him at the retirement event.

K-9-unit supervisor and patrol captain for the Sheriff's Department, Clay Bryson, shared how Holland – as a volunteer for the annual Cadet Program – influenced a young (age 11) Bryson's decision to pursue a career in law enforcement. "He was a mentor to many of us, and while being fairly young himself, he was already focused on youth," said Bryson. "I was fortunate to have the opportunity to spend time with him and other great officers of the Sheriff's Office ... the experience definitely impacted my life, and I'm thankful."

Bryson and Corporal Scott Nelson, an SRO, presented Holland with an American flag, which was flown over the Sheriff's Office in Holland's honor.

An honorary scholarship has been named for Holland, and it will be awarded to future students who not only demonstrate outstanding community service but who also pursue a career in criminal justice and related fields.

"Marci has been the brainchild behind this scholarship," noted Tate. "She is wise beyond her years and I have been overly impressed with her love for [her husband], this county, students ... You [Robbie] are lucky to have her."

So far, donations to the fund total \$4,500.

"It's been a ride," said Marci Holland about her experience as a sheriff's wife. "But law enforcement has been a calling on your [Robbie's] heart and you have made an



Incoming sheriff, Brent Holbrooks (left) speaks with outgoing sheriff, Robert Holland, with Lt. Adam Wishon.

outstanding leader. I'm your number one fan and I'm proud of you."

State Sen. Kevin Corbin and Rep. Karl Gillespie announced that Holland would receive The Order of the Long Leaf Pine Award, which is the highest state honor presented to individuals who have made significant contributions to the state and their communities through their exemplary service and exceptional accomplishments.

"Law enforcement is what I know best," said Holland, after the ceremony. "I've spent 30 years looking forward to going to work every day. I consider myself blessed to be able to say I've never regretted a single moment I had to go to work. While I am retiring as sheriff and from my law enforcement career, my law enforcement family knows I'm only a phone call away and I'd be there for them anytime, day or night."

About his plans for retirement, Holland added, "I have been a committed public servant in my community and it's not just been about my career or making a living but rather it has been my passion. I will always believe God led me to where I am today, and He will lead me where I will be tomorrow. For now, my son and I will be making up some lost time hunting and fishing. I will also enjoy continuing to be a swim dad, cheering my daughter on. I'm looking forward to a renewed focus on my family and trying to keep up with my honey-do list by my biggest supporter and best friend, my wife."

Editor's note: At the Monday night meeting, the School Board approved the contract for Robert Holland as the coordinator of School Safety for Macon County Schools system. Former Sheriff Holland will assume this role on Jan. 3, 2023.



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Social Security Admin launches redesigned website at SSA.gov

Starting Dec. 7, visitors to SSA.gov will experience a fresh homepage and a new design to help them find what they need more easily. Improved self-service capability allows people to skip calling or visiting an office, which helps Social Security staff focus on those visitors who need in-person assistance.

Part of ongoing efforts to improve how the public can do business with the agency, the redesign is intended to provide a clear path to the tasks customers need to accomplish. Many of the most visited sections of SSA.gov are now live with a more user-friendly and task-based approach. New pages and improvements based on public feedback will continue to be unveiled in the coming months.

Visitors to SSA.gov can use interactive tools to:

- **Check eligibility for benefits.** The new benefit eligibility screener is a convenient and simple way for people to learn if they might be eligible for benefits.

- **Save time on Social Security Number (SSN) and card online services.** If a person loses their SSN card, they may not need a replacement. In most cases, simply knowing their SSN is enough. If a person does need a replacement card, they may be able to request it online by visiting www.ssa.gov/ssnumber. Individuals can also start an application for an updated card or request an SSN for the first time. People may never need to visit an office and, if they do need to visit an office to complete the application, they will save a lot of time by starting online.

- **Start an application for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).** People can start the application process online and request an appointment to apply for SSI benefits by answering a few questions at www.ssa.gov/benefits/ssi/.

- **Apply for Social Security benefits and other online services.** For most benefits, people can apply online or start an application online. In many cases, there are no forms to sign. The agency will review the application and reach out with questions or for more information. Visit www.ssa.gov/onlineservices to apply for retirement, disability, or Medicare.

Many Social Security services do not require the public to take time to visit an office. Using a *my* Social Security account, a personalized online service, people can start or change direct deposit, or request a replacement SSA-1099. The agency encourages people without a *my* Social Security account to create one at www.ssa.gov/myaccount/.

Commissioners, sheriff sworn in; Higdon and Young unanimously elected chair, vice chair

Dan Finnerty – Contributing Writer

A new era of Macon County government began Dec. 5 in a packed fourth floor courtroom at the county courthouse in Franklin. Due to the large turnout, county commissioners chose an alternate location instead of the third floor commission boardroom, but attendees still witnessed standing-room-only, with still some people not able to fit inside the room.

North Carolina Special Statute 153A-39 directs that “on the first Monday in December of each even numbered year, counties will select a county board of commissioners’ chairman and vice chairman. The chairman is the presiding officer of the board and unless excused by rule of the board, the presiding officer has the duty to vote on any question before the board but has no right to break a tie vote in which he or she participated.”

As his last official action in the position, outgoing Macon County Commission chairman Jim Tate called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and immediately passed the gavel to County Manager Derek Roland, who introduced the Honorable District Court Judge Roy Wijewickrama. Judge Wijewickrama then administered the oaths of office for newly elected commissioners Danny Antoine and John Shearl, as well as Gary Shields, who was re-elected to his position. Also sworn in was Register of Deeds Todd Raby.

Roland opened the floor for nomination of a new board chairman and vice-chairman. The commissioners unanimously nominated incumbents Paul Higdon and Josh Young to those positions, respectively. Next, formal approval of the sheriff’s bond for Sheriff-elect Brent Holbrooks took place, followed by delivery of the bond to the Clerk of Superior Court for registration. According to North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 162, Article 2, “The sheriff shall furnish a bond payable to the State of North Carolina for the due execution and return of process, the payment of fees and monies collected, and the faithful execution of his office as sheriff.” Further, “The amount of the bond shall be determined by the board of county commissioners, but

shall not exceed twenty-five thousand dollars.”

Next on the agenda was administration of the oath of office for Sheriff-elect Brent Holbrooks by Judge Roy Wijewickrama. Holbrooks was joined by his wife, Sarah, and their children before informing those in attendance that he would be using his great-grandmother’s Bible for the swearing in. Holbrooks then asked his father, former Macon County Sheriff Homer Holbrooks, to pin on his sheriff’s badge.

A resolution regarding official bonds examination for public officials was introduced/discussed, along with consideration of Budget Amendment 99, by Finance Director Lori Carpenter. First, the Finance Director bond was announced as \$250,000 as was the Tax Collector bond. The Register of Deeds bond is \$50,000, with the sheriff’s being \$25,000. The board then approved all bonds as they currently stand. Amendment 99 is appropriation of funds for the Shop With a Cop initiative, to which the community donates money each year. If approved, a special check is then cut to the Sheriff’s Department and gift cards are then generated. The commissioners approved the amendment and also affirmed the 2023 meeting schedule to remain the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m. in the Macon County Courthouse Commission Boardroom.

Lastly, swearing in of sheriff’s deputy officers, detention officers, and administration staff took place with Judge Wijewickrama once again administering the oaths.

“I work with you all on a daily basis and I’ve worked in this county 22 years as a judge,” he said. “We’re living in troubled times; to know that we have these men and women in here to preserve and protect and defend our constitution, and keep this county safe ... I know the vast majority of the folks standing in here today, including the sheriff himself and former sheriff, Robbie Holland. It comforts me to know that we have folks like this putting their lives on the line every single day and night to keep us safe. I want to thank each and every one of you and I’m truly honored to be here to swear you in today.”

The next county commissioners meeting is scheduled for Jan. 12, 2023, at 6 p.m. at the Macon County Courthouse.





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Former sheriff, Homer Holbrooks, pins the official badge on his son, Brent Holbrooks, Macon County's new sheriff.

HOLBROOKS

Continued from page 1

house in 2010. Holbrooks is following in the footsteps of his father, Homer, who served Macon County as sheriff for 16 years, retiring in 2002.

With his grandfather also serving Macon County, Holbrooks is the third consecutive generation of law enforcement within his family. From corporal to sergeant to lieutenant, Holbrooks also served as a SWAT team leader for 15 years.

The new sheriff was clear about his gratitude in being selected to such an important and public position.

"The role I have accepted carries deep responsibilities, not the least of which is the importance of remaining grounded; truly rooted in knowing who and what I am. Winning this elected position has been a lifelong dream, an aspiration to follow in my dad's footsteps. God entrusted me with this position and I plan on being good, honorable, and decent to myself and others. The torch, while it may get hot and heavy, comes with His blessing."

Sheriff Holbrooks also pointed out that he is already working on a smooth transition from the former sheriff's tenure to his new role leading the department.

"My long-term goals are to address issues that are important to our citizens of Macon County and to continue building programs that will allow our citizens and youth a brighter future."

He explained that he intends to make decisions that put the best interests of the Macon County Sheriff Office and the surrounding communities first.

"I respect and admire those men who went through the election process alongside me ... it was an experience that I couldn't have made it through without the support from my family and closest friends."

Regarding having been elected over, in some cases, department employees who were senior to him, Holbrooks affirmed that the two other sheriff candidates still serving with the Sheriff's Office are "great individuals and trusted professionals." He added, "We all want what is best for the department and county ... I envision that we will all move forward in a positive direction."

Lastly, Holbrooks reflected that he will miss people he worked with at the courthouse for the past 12 years. However, he said, "They haven't gotten rid of me altogether; I will be stopping by frequently to visit and give them a hard time."

CFWNC awards grants totaling \$1,218 to Macon County Schools

The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina (CFWNC) recently awarded grants totaling \$1,218 to Macon County schools from the Learning Links grant program. The grants provide local teachers with funding for activities designed to make coursework engaging and relevant for their students.

Two Learning Links grants will support projects at Macon Middle School and Nantahala School. Funds will support a hands-on math project and supplies for STEM-centered activities.

"The Learning Links applications I reviewed this year showed once again how creative WNC teachers are as they work to expose their students to hands-on and experiential learning," said Philip Belcher, vice president, Programs. "Through the dedication of these educators and with support from Learning Links grants, students build things, conduct experiments, visit new places and more – all experiences with the potential to deepen learning, support classroom instruction and stimulate interests."

Learning Links offers grants up to \$800 per classroom to public school teachers in Avery, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Jackson, Macon, Madison, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford and Swain counties to provide experiential learning projects for students. The goal is to increase students' enthusiasm for learning and school. The grants funded through the Cherokee County Schools Foundation Endowment Fund, Fund for Education, Ben W. and Dixie Glenn Farthing Charitable Endowment, Leon C. and Grace E. Luther Charitable Fund, Dr. Robert J. and Kimberly S. Reynolds Fund and one other. This year, 57 grants were awarded totaling \$101,912.

The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina inspires philanthropy and mobilizes resources to enrich lives and communities in 18 WNC counties. Last year, the Foundation facilitated \$23.5 million in charitable giving.

For more information, contact CFWNC at (828)254-4960 or visit www.cfwnc.org.

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Nantahala Bank News

Tim Hubbs Retires as CEO

Tim Hubbs, long-time CEO of Nantahala Bank retired as of October 30, 2022. In 2003, Tim was involved in organizing the bank and has served on the Board of Directors since its inception. After retiring from Angel Medical Hospital in 2012, Tim agreed to serve as CEO of the bank. Under his leadership, the bank has grown in deposits and loans and increased market share in the counties the bank serves. We wish Tim the best in his retirement and are pleased that he will remain on the Board of Directors for the bank.



Nantahala Bank Welcomes Greg Proffitt as New CEO

Greg Proffitt, formerly the President of Newton Federal Bank in Covington, GA, has accepted the position of CEO of Nantahala Bank effective October 31, 2022. Greg has 22 years of banking and bank regulatory experience, and was a member of the Executive Committee of the Community Bankers Association of Georgia, a board member of Newton Mentoring, Inc and the Newton County Christian Learning Center. He served on various other non-profit groups. We welcome Greg and look forward to working together to help our customers and communities meet their financial needs.



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Town officially installs Devin Holland as Franklin's New Police Chief

Deena C. Bouknight
Contributing Writer

On the rainy evening of Dec. 5, at one end of the Town of Franklin – the courthouse – the swearing in of Macon County's new sheriff was taking place, while at the other end – at Town Hall – Devin Holland became Franklin's new police chief.

With his wife, Sara, his children, and some extended family present, Devin Holland was sworn in by Mayor Jack Horton as the new police chief to replace retired police chief Bill Harrell.

Holland, a very distant relation to newly retired Sheriff Robert Holland, began his law enforcement career with the Franklin Police Department as a part-time officer in October 1996. He was later hired full-time in February 1997. Prior to working as a law enforcement officer, he obtained degrees in criminal justice. He earned the rank of patrol sergeant in November 2001 and held that rank until June 2020, at which time he was promoted to lieutenant of patrol and then to captain of patrol.

Chief Holland told Macon County News, "I am very honored to have been appointed Chief of Police. I am eager to serve the community, and I am very passionate about making Franklin a quality place to live, work,

and visit. My first priority is to fill the vacant officer positions so that we can provide the police services the town needs. I also want to add more quality to the workplace and

more efficiency to the services we provide to the citizens."

Also new to the Town of Franklin is Fire Engineer Zach Ledford, introduced at the December council meeting by Fire Chief Ben Ormond. "Zach was a volunteer fire fighter with much experience, and now he is a career fire fighter. And, with his hiring, our fire department is fully staffed."

Public Works Director Bill Deal introduced to the Council the new Wastewater Treatment Operator Ethan Peek and new Equipment Operator Jon Sanders. Deal also recognized that Pedro Ruiz received a Certification for Water Treatment Operator.

In addition, a belated honor was presented to Dwayne Cabe, who retired from the police department in June. He was given The Order of the Long Leaf Pine by newly sworn in Police Chief Holland, who commented, "For anyone to be awarded this highest North Carolina honor, he (or she) must have given 30 years of service to North Carolina and provided considerable contributions."

In addition to the appointments and recognitions, calls for public hearings were approved by Council after Town Planner Justin Setser explained details for each: One to receive



Immediate and extended family attended the new police chief's swearing in. Pictured from left are Aaron Holland holding Madden, Daylon Holland, Deborah Holland, Skyler Holland, Devin Holland, Sara Holland, Hudson Shope, Izzy Shope and Harlyn Holland.

CHRISTMAS SALE
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public input on a rezoning request for 120 Riverview Street from Medical Institutional Cultural Residential to Commercial C1; another to receive public input on a rezoning request for 7 Plantation Drive from Residential R1 to Commercial C2. Both public hearings will be held on Jan. 2, 2023, at 6:05 and 6:10 p.m., respectively.

New business included approval of a partner for the recreation plan for the Town's Whitmire Property. Two firms were permitted bids, according to Town Manager Amie Owens, who added that there were "no qualms" with either of the bids. The bid from McGill and Associates was approved by Council; the bid was for \$55,980. "The company is experienced with recreational plans in other municipalities," she said.

Owens also said that a grant of \$75,000 has been assigned to the project.

"The grant was through the state funding allocation from Senator [Kevin] Corbin's office via the NC SCIF grant that is administered by Region A," stated Owens. The grant will assist with the future Whitmire Property recreation plan project.

The next Town of Franklin Council meeting is Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2023. The Town of Franklin offices will be closed for the observance of Christmas, Dec. 23-27, and for observance of New Year's Day, Jan. 2.



Mayor Jack Horton conducted the swearing in of the new Town of Franklin Police Chief Devin Holland, with his wife, Sara, pinning on his badge immediately afterwards.

Residents encouraged to prepare for winter weather

Winter Weather Preparedness Week is Dec. 4 - 10 and North Carolinians are urged to plan and prepare now, before potentially dangerous winter weather arrives.

Residents are urged to monitor winter weather conditions and forecasts by listening to local media and paying close attention to winter weather watches, warnings and advisories.

- Winter Storm Watch is issued when conditions are favorable for either heavy snow, sleet, or freezing rain within the next 24-48 hours.
- Winter Storm Warning is issued when confidence is high that a winter storm will cause significant impacts within the next 24 hours.
- Winter Weather Advisory is issued when wintry weather is expected and residents should exercise caution as light to moderate amounts of snow, sleet, or freezing rain are expected within the next 24 hours, causing travel difficulties.

To help ensure you are ready for winter weather, North Carolina Emergency Management officials urge you to:

- Always keep at least a three-day supply of nonperishable food and a supply of medication in your home.
- Keep fresh batteries on hand for weather radios and flashlights.
- Dress warmly. Wear multiple layers of thin clothing instead of a single layer of thick clothing.
- Properly vent kerosene heaters and ensure any electric generators are operated outside and away from open windows or doors to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Never burn charcoal indoors.
- Use a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration weather radio or a weather alert app on your phone to monitor changing weather conditions.
- Keep alternative heating sources and fire extinguishers on hand. Be sure your family knows how to use them.
- Store an emergency kit in your vehicle. Include scraper, jumper cables, tow chain, sand/salt, blankets, flashlight, first-aid kit and road map.

If you must travel during bad weather, leave plenty of room between you and other vehicles and, if driving on snow- or ice-covered roadways, slow down. If conditions worsen, pull off the highway and remain in your vehicle. Do not set out on foot unless you can see a place to take shelter.

For more information on how to prepare for winter storms and other hazards that affect North Carolina, visit readync.gov.

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Building Engineers Program starting up in Macon County schools

Diane Peltz – Contributing Writer

The Macon County School Board met at Nantahala School on Monday, Dec. 5. Normally, the school board meets the fourth Monday of the month but due to the Thanksgiving holiday, the meeting was moved to Dec. 5.

On the agenda was a presentation from Jennifer Love, STEM Coordinator, regarding the Building Engineers Program. This program brings Engineering and Design Skills into daily instruction and allows the students to be leaders in the classroom. Through this work students from all backgrounds are able to envision themselves in STEM Careers. Love said that Macon is the only county in Western North Carolina to offer this program.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction explains that if schools are to truly build toward the modern graduate that is able to collaborate with others to flexibly solve problems, they must start in kindergarten. The Building Engineers in K-5 classrooms initiative seeks to do exactly that across the state of North Carolina.

The approach this initiative takes is both deep and wide. The deep part includes working directly with local education agencies in cohorts to assist them in developing two-year plans for spreading this work within the classrooms in their district. The "wide" part

is the establishment of a statewide collaborative of elementary educators interested in these ideas and willing to champion them in their classrooms.

Where it began

In the fall of 2014, a group of Digital Integration Facilitators (DIFs) in Moore County Schools (MCS) delivered Lego EV3 and NXT robotics that were scattered across the district to five elementary schools to start after-school robotics clubs. In the spring of 2015, MCS held its first Elementary Robotics Showcase. This initial spark lit a fire across all grade levels from kindergarten all the way to advanced robotics within high schools.

The momentum generated from this movement led the MCS digital learning team to expand the positive impact beyond after-school clubs and directly into classrooms. This expansion was fueled by the creation of the K-5 Engineering thread in the summer of 2016.

The engineering thread is a set of 12 engineering mini projects, woven directly into MCS's K-5 math and science pacing guides.



Building ENGINEERS

These projects incorporate both robotics and traditional materials (such as popsicle sticks, aluminum foil, and cardboard).

The response to this curricular

sional development to help our teachers plan STEM activities that can be integrated into the K-5 academic classroom. Instead of this being enrichment, it would be directly related to content which is the intent of STEM. Our current K-8 STEM teachers already have the focus on designing activities that will help support classroom teachers with difficult or abstract concepts such as physical science or data collection in

thread was immediate, enthusiastic, and overwhelming: The scramble was on to meet teacher demands for more.

The success of this work led to Moore County being named 1 of 4 Innovation Academies by NCDPI. This allowed MCS to host 800-plus educators from across the state through site visits and the development of the annual conference/robotics showcase—Building Engineers in K-5 classrooms. Now, through a partnership between NCDPI and the SERVE Center, this work can grow and expand to reach even more students.

Macon Schools expectations

Love explains what Macon County expects to gain from the program.

“The gist is that this program will provide the resources and support through profes-

math. In this way, our STEM classes are providing academic support for specifically math and science but they are also incorporating literacy. Lastly, our STEM teachers are beginning to include the new K-12 computer science standards. These standards were intended to be taught through the math and science classes starting in kindergarten but through our STEM classes, we are able to address these skills through hands-on activities like robotics.”

Love sent out an email on Monday morning regarding signing up for the workshop for this program, and five teachers have already expressed interest in learning about it.

A professional development class will be held on Jan. 20, at the central office board room. The goal is to get 6 to 8 elementary teachers to sign up.

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‘Welcome to my Little World’ exhibit at the public library



An exhibit by Andrew Beck, graphic designer, illustrator, painter, printmaker, and animator is being featured in Macon County Public Library Meeting Room for the month of December. “Welcome to My Little World” displays a variety of art mediums and styles to showcase some of the favorite art pieces he has created. Beck is a graduate of Western Carolina University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design. He has worked on many client design requests, freelance commissions and projects throughout his career to create unique, stunning, and eye-catching creations. Call ahead to be sure the Meeting Room will be open during your visit.





Newly elected school board members were sworn in on Monday, Dec. 5, at a special called session of the Macon County School Board. Stephanie Laseter (above) and Diedre Breedon (below) were flanked by their families as they took their oaths of office.



The Macon County School board met on Monday, Dec. 5, to swear in its new members and elect officers for the next term. Jim Breedlove was reelected Chairman and Melissa Evans was named vice chair. Pictured (L-R) are board members Stephanie Laseter, Hilary Wilkes, Breedlove, Evans, Diedre Breedon and Macon County Schools Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin.



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What's new on the plateau

Patrick Taylor
Highlands Mayor



Patrick Taylor

It's a shame that Highlands ... I'm ashamed that Highlands ... I get emails with these kinds of salutations on a routine basis. Just this past week I received an email with the "shame" opening remark. Although I could not disagree more in their thoughts on their choice of words, I give them equal weight with all concerned citizens inquiries; I read them and ascertain if the town can take action to correct the problems expressed in these types of emails. In regards this particular email, I talked with the town manager, and we believe corrective action can be taken to address the issue cited in the email. My hope is the author of the email takes a more positive view on Highlands and our system of serving the community.

And in terms of serving, I was again honored to participate in the Highlands Christmas parade. Ashamed of Highlands? Absolutely not! As I walked down Main Street on Saturday morning I was filled with pride and joy for our community. Highlands as a town has dealt with a fair share of controversy and dissension this year, but I am still optimistic and humbly honored to be your mayor.

As I walked in the parade, I again had a sense of affirmation that this is the great place to live, a town where everyone can experience "a wonderful life" as that classic Christmas movie portrayed.

I was pulling my candy wagon loaded with about 20 pounds of candy. Our grandkids were running on both sides of the streets passing out the candy to children. I saw little children with their parents and grandparents standing on the parade route with their bags open hoping to be given a piece of candy. They all had angelic expressions on their faces. I urged Henry and Eliza, our grandchildren, not to miss or overlook any child. They did their job and at the end of the parade route, we had no candy remaining. We all had a great feeling of satisfaction as parade participants, and hopefully, everyone participating in the parade felt the same.

The parade is a microcosm of what makes Highlands a special place. Over 60 groups including businesses, faith-based groups, nonprofit organizations, and clubs were in the parade. So, let's all be proud of this mountain community here on the plateau. Given all of our commitment, concern and support, Highlands is

Continued on page 11

Letters to the Editor

Outsourced customer service a dangerous prospect

This is pertinent information that all Franklin residents should be aware of.

I ran out of LP gas last night and have been freezing since about 2 a.m. My provider is [a local gas company].

[The company] has transitioned to a "centralized service" which means you cannot speak to anyone at the local office. They don't accept walk-ins or phones. All of your inquiries by telephone go outside the U.S. to a service center that sounds like India.

I requested an emergency delivery at approximately 7 a.m. this morning. By 2 p.m. I checked back with the centralized service because delivery had not been made. The customer service representative verified I would receive the delivery within 24 to 48 hours. That is when the fireworks really began. 48 hours? I assured the customer service rep. I would not wait 48 hours for my emergency delivery and questioned why [the gas company] would have such a policy in place if a customer was out of gas and freezing.

The service representative made changes in the system to expedite the delivery this afternoon. I asked why that had not been done during my initial phone call. She provided a "runaround" but polite answer that made no sense.

I have filed a formal complaint with [the company] and will follow up with their corporate offices regarding their 24 to 48 hours policy for a refill under emergency conditions.

... Local residents and customers of [this company] need to be informed of their lack of customer service that could potentially cause severe injury or even death.

Jim Gagliolo – Franklin, N.C.

Individual's regulatory philosophy can be changed

Re: The letter in the 01 December 2022 issue of your paper.

Your correspondent came here to enjoy the mountains, and, if the culture is in the way of his enjoyment, to change it; there must be no interference with his enjoyment. People and culture be damned. His enjoyment must be complete; no matter that nothing is completely satisfactory. One of my cousins (from South Carolina) lived for two years in Minnesota. Said he, "George, those people up there are nice, not like the ones that we know. People who are not happy where they grew up are not going to be happy anywhere they move."

Unhappy by habit.

Madam Editor, your correspondent has noticed and disapproves of people practicing with firearms. Madam Editor, your correspondent is not the only one who notices people practicing with firearms; would-be thieves notice too. A lot

more peace is produced than disturbed.

Unthinking.

A call for social upheaval and revolution for our entire county so that one person who has moved here from afar, can feel more comfortable. When many versus many, there may be two sides to the story. When one versus many, the one is the problem, not the many.

Self-righteous.

One can always change one's self easier than one can change 40,000 others. But hey! If one is already perfect, there is neither reason nor room for change; the 40,000 must be made to change.

Tyrannical.

And the proposal for more zoning ordinances—if a native resident has an idea for a business, but is faced with long delays and expenses for getting his property rezoned, easier I guess just to sell out to somebody who came here in order to enjoy the beauty, peace, and tranquility of living in the mountains. That is the highest and best use of mountain land. People raising families on mountain land are just in the way. Move them out.

Selfish.

The junk in my neighbor's yard—he brings junk home and rehabilitates it, then resells it for a few dollars. Those few dollars keep him from having to degrade himself in front of the welfare officer. And other residents down the road who appear merely slovenly—they will clean up when the prices paid for scrap metal go up enough to make it worth their while. And that pile of pallets in another yard. The owner has a reason for them that those who grew up pampered may not be able to fathom. But let not ignorance hold one back from encouraging our county commissioners to develop a habit of loading more regulations on everybody's back.

Ignorant.

Madam Editor, can any thinking person read your correspondent's letter, and fail to understand why the Confederate battleflag remains a favorite symbol in the yards and on the houses of many who descend from Confederate soldiers? And, of some who moved here from other places in order to escape those other places.

I lived for five years in a foreign country. For the first year and a half or two years that I was there, I was unhappy. Those people did not do things the way we do them back home. I was the typical "damned Yankee." They were tolerant; not once did anybody slip me a note that said, "Yankee go home." Then I adjusted; I became happy. I found much in their culture to admire. Today, I still miss it. When I did go home, at least one cried.

Madam Editor, will anyone cry for your correspondent when he passes from the scene?

And if this letter makes him feel unwelcome here, well, it is his philosophy that I do not welcome, and he can change philosophy. If he does, he will lose many of the reasons that he does not like Macon County.

George Crockett – Franklin, N.C.

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Please, before taking any medications, especially eye meds, please read your patient drug education monograph from the drug store and make sure all of your meds are compatible.

Bette Carman on behalf of Don Carman – Franklin, N.C.

Macon County has a rich heritage of generosity

The election is now old news, but it was interesting how the narrative was made of incumbents in terms of, "so-and-so did things for the people." First of all, every politician from local to federal level is spending someone else's money. Politicians do not create wealth. It was taken from producers and redistributed by government fingers – most of the time inefficiently. I have been a fire fighter, foster parent, and worked for the federal agency USDA. My wife worked full time in public schools for many years. I have seen first-hand the enormous waste of government spending. Anyone who has been a part of both the private and government sectors probably realizes this basic fact. Government is solely dependent on private enterprise, and there are always unnecessary expenses that can be cut from any and all government budgets.

What gets lost in today's mentality over government's proper job and spending tax money is how thankful society should be for capitalism and free market principles. Why aren't we giving praise to what business owners are doing for society by creating jobs and wealth to begin with? Entrepreneurs and middle-class workers are what drives the economy; not government being a biased referee. Instead of looking to politicians, why don't we hold people working in the farming, tree service, excavating, or retail industries in high esteem as "doing so much for the people?" These everyday heroes as well as the super-rich who reinvest into the economy are the ones who generate the funds for government to tax and then redistribute according to the bureaucracy of so-called public service. Even liberals want to keep their money in their own pocket to distribute according to what is best for their families and companies. From the many people leaving Democrat-run states in favor of lower taxes and less regulation elsewhere, we can plainly see that collectivism is a failing relic of a non-progressing society.

It was evident in the recent sales tax referendum in Macon County that people are not comfortable giving more money to local government when there is no specific plan or prioritized spending. That vote was democracy in action. The people should always have a clear voice in how their money is taxed and spent. If voters rejected a ¼ cent sales tax, they sure as fire don't want their property taxes to increase. In the future, it would be wise for any large expenditures to be democratically voted on before giving large projects the green light. Even the leftist liberals give lip service to democracy, so putting specific big-ticket items (or anything controversial) to a referendum vote should be a no-brainer for county commissioners. Let the people decide!

Concerning the proposed FHS [Franklin High School] project, much has been said recently in Macon County to demonize anyone who desires fiscal responsibility as "they don't care about the kids." Nothing could be further from the truth as nearly everyone desires children have as many benefits as can be afforded. Homeschool families who self-fund all of their kid's education have to stay within their budgets while getting zero benefit from taxpayer funding towards schools. If the left wants so-called equality, why isn't taxpayer money being allocated to homeschool students in the same amount per student as public schools? Does the left not care about kids getting an education at home?

If supporters of a new FHS were disappointed in the referendum outcome, there is absolutely nothing stopping them

from organizing a private campaign towards voluntary seed funding a new FHS. The Sk828 group has taken this approach to self-fund and is proving they are serious in sharing the cost. The Macon County community has a rich heritage of private generosity and would surely rise to the task of a private fundraising campaign towards a new FHS. Citizens in Macon County are very giving as has been shown many times in the past. Back in the 1950s and '60s during the hospital expansion and "Operation Heartbeat," Angel Hospital was funded solely by the community that took pride in not receiving government aid. The generosity of the public was on full display and is probably one of the best examples of local citizens voluntarily giving towards a worthy cause that united the community.

If FHS is such an urgent need, it is surprising that some of the leading advocates haven't organized a seed money campaign already. Once a substantial amount of money was raised, then taxpayers would be more comfortable with a huge price tag of a new facility. No one wants another Parker Meadows money pit with very little ROI [Return On Investment] When there are fewer regulations and lower taxes, people have more disposable income to contribute towards causes they individually choose. That is the type of environment that makes any community thrive and attracts the same kind of people to become part of it. In the meantime, for those who are financially able and want to pay more towards a new FHS in this current environment of inflation and uncertainty, absolutely nothing is preventing them from beginning that endeavor. Instead of focusing on requiring collectivist payment from everyone through taxation, anyone can voluntarily open their pocketbook today.

Jim Gaston – Franklin, N.C.

It would be nice to go back to saying Merry Christmas

Christmas is the time when people have a little more mercy, a little more grace, a little more kindness, goodness, love and faith, a little more patience, a little more peace and are a little more like Jesus. Do you remember many years ago when everyone said Merry Christmas? People would be cheerful, have smiles on their face, the stores would decorate for Christmas and all the employees in the stores would say Merry Christmas. Now stores put Christmas items out in October, people say Happy Holiday. It is not the same and it seem to have lost some of the magic behind Christmas.

Happy has its own holidays like Happy Thanksgiving, Happy Birthday or even Happy Easter and does not need to be included during the Christmas season. Wouldn't it be nice if you walk into a store and the employees would go back to saying Merry Christmas. It seems like we are always trying not to offend someone unless they are a Christian.

Even if you don't believe in the birth of baby Jesus, there is a lot of things you might do that is associated with his birth at Christmas time. The Christmas tree is symbolic of eternal life. The candy cane represents the Shepherd's hook; the color red, his blood; and the color white, his purity. Giving of gifts represent the gifts Jesus received from the wise men. The star on top of the tree represents the star of Bethlehem; mistletoe - love; bells - joy; fruit baskets - fruit of the Holy Spirit. The holly leaf represents the crown of thorns and its red berries - Jesus's blood.

Santa Claus brings joy and gifts to children just like Jesus brings joy and gifts to his children. Yes, there are many meanings behind the decorations that we display for Christmas. We live in the Bible Belt where friends help friends, neighbors help neighbors, and people help people and where we should say Merry Christmas.

Merry Christmas and God Bless!

Mike Townsend – Franklin, N.C.

TAYLOR

Continued from
page 10

special, if you will, an exceptional place.

I want to give a special thanks to the marching bands in the parade, the Franklin and Rosman High School bands and the Pride of the Mountains Western Carolina Band. I am posting on my AskMayorPat.com website the mailing addresses of these bands for those who would like to send a contribution to their music programs.

Thursday, Dec. 8, is the final town board meeting of the year. It will begin at 7 p.m. at the Highlands Community Center next to the ball field. The town board will hear a report concerning the recently completed annual town audit. We have a new auditor this year. The board will hear a proposal by representatives of the Highlands ABC Board. If you cannot come to the meeting it can also be accessed through YouTube on a link at the town website.



Correction

In the Christmas Gift Guide 2022 edition of Macon County News, on page 16, in the Shop With a Cop program article, Sgt. Laurie Beegle of the Franklin Police Department was misidentified as Capt. Dani Burrows. Sgt. Beegle is pictured with Laurel Brown.

What's on your mind?

Email letters to the editor to
maconcountynews@gmail.com

The Macon County News letters page is a public forum open to a wide variety of opinions as a right guaranteed in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Letters are neither accepted nor rejected based on content. Letters must be signed and contact information provided. Views expressed are not necessarily reflective of the opinions of publisher, editor or staff. Writers are asked to refrain from personal attacks against individuals or businesses.

Live Nativity at Cartoogechaye Baptist Church Dec. 9-10

Cartoogechaye Baptist Church on W. Old Murphy Road, is staging its Live Nativity for one more weekend, Friday, Dec. 9 and Saturday, Dec. 10, from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Visitors will have an opportunity to drive up to the church, hear a short introduction, be handed an audio device, and then drive through "Bethlehem" to pause at various authentically-conveyed scenes and learn details of the Christmas story. The church presents the event every other year due to the months of labor put into the production.



Photos by Ellen Randall



Winter Wonderland

The Town of Franklin held its last Winter Wonderland of the season last Saturday night. Carols were sung, pictures were taken and Santa and the Grinch showed up to greet visitors. Photos by Ellen Randall



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Arrest Report

The Macon County Sheriff's Department or the Franklin Police Department made the following arrests Nov. 25 - Dec. 1. All suspects are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



Macon County Sheriff's Department

November 26
 Kaylan Jo Moore, was charged with breaking and entering and simple assault. Matthew D. Long made the arrest.

November 28
 Charles Russell Edwards, was charged with failure to appear. Costin Jigla made the arrest.

Samantha Nichelle Ramsey, was charged with true bill of indictment. Costin Jigla made the arrest.

Jose De Jesus Feriamendoza, was charged with failure to appear. Costin Jigla made the arrest.

Marcus Cody Waldroup, was charged with failure to appear. Costin Jigla made the arrest.

November 29
 Joan Beck Hobbs, was charged with failure to appear. Joel Lynch made the arrest.

November 30
 Hailey Madison McCall, was charged with possession of methamphetamine. Matthew T. Breedlove made the arrest.

Roberto Miguel Perez-Cervantes, was charged with domestic physical. Deputy E. Sands made the arrest.

December 1
 Michael Robert Ensley, was charged with failure to appear. Costin Jigla made the arrest.

Richard Kaleb Bates, was charged with child support enforcement contempt. Costin Jigla made the arrest.

Adrian S. Monares, was charged with probation violation. Timothy B. Carter made the arrest.

Franklin Police Department

November 25
 Monica L. Zontelli, was charged with driving while intoxicated and resisting officers. E.D. Kirkland made the arrest.

November 28
 Nicholas Matthew Hennequin, was charged with driving while license revoked. R.S. Dula made the arrest.

Steven Gerald Knight, was charged with fugitive warrant. R.S. Dula made the arrest.

November 30
 Enrique Cruz Soriano, was charged with driving under the influence. L.C. Beegle made the arrest.

December 1
 Jerimiah Noah Smith, was charged with trafficking in a schedule II methamphetamine, possession of a schedule II controlled substance fentanyl, possession of a schedule IV and possession of a firearm by a felon. E.D. Kirkland made the arrest.

Enrique Cruz Soriano, was charged with driving while impaired. R.S. Dula made the arrest.

Applications open for help with heating costs

Older adults and people with disabilities can now apply for the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' Low Income Energy Assistance Program. The state began accepting applications on Dec. 1.

The federally funded program helps low-income households with a direct, one-time payment directly to their heating vendor to offset the high cost of warming their homes during the cold weather months.

Payments will be distributed automatically to heating vendors beginning in December 2022 if a member of the household meets the following three requirements:

- Is age 60 or older or a person with a disability receiving services through the Division of Aging and Adult Services,
- Currently receiving Food and Nutrition Services; and
- Received a LIEAP payment during the 2021-2022 season.

Households meeting the requirements for the automatic payment were notified of their eligibility in November 2022 and do not need to re-apply for LIEAP.

Any household with a person 60 or older or with a disability receiving DAAS services who did not receive notice of an

automated payment can apply online at www.epass.nc.gov. Applicants can also call their county department of social services to apply by phone or print a paper application from www.epass.nc.gov to mail, fax or drop off at their county department of social services. To be eligible for the LIEAP program, a household must:

- Have at least one U.S. citizen or non-citizen who meets the eligibility requirements,
- Have income equal to or less than 130% of the federal poverty limit, and
- Be responsible for their heating cost.

Beginning on Jan. 3, 2023, all other eligible households who meet the eligibility requirements may begin applying. Applications will be accepted from Jan. 3, 2023, to March 31, 2023, or until funds are exhausted.

Last year, the program provided approximately \$114 million to help more than 168,000 households pay their heating bills from December 2021 through March 2022. For more information, visit www.ncdhhs.gov/assistance/low-income-services/low-income-energy-assistance.

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50%	60%	15%	50%	50%

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Manna Food Bank is now at Bethel United Methodist Church. To reserve a food box, call (828)634-1116 and leave a message with the following information: your first name and last initial; phone number to confirm pick-up time; number of people in your family; if there are allergies in the family; and any specialty items you might need, like diapers, etc. Pick up is at Bethel UMC, 81 Bethel Church Road, off Highlands Road.

The Franklin High School Band will present "Mountain Christmas Medleys" a free Christmas concert Monday, Dec. 12, at 7 p.m. in the Fine Arts Center at Franklin High School. The concert will feature special guests The Whiteside Brass Band in their Macon County debut along with the Macon Middle School Honor Band.

Christmas at the Hallers will be held 6 to 9 p.m. nightly thru New Year's, 607 Rabbit Creek Rd., .06 of a mile from 441 N. The displays include 100,000 Christmas lights, 10 lit trees, animated figures including a ferris wheel, a merry-go-round and a skating pond.

Music and Light Show in sync with music is being shown at Wired any evening in December from 6:30 to 10 p.m. Tune your radio to the station shown on the signs and see a great light show with music. Wired is located at 121 Highlands Road (in the Shops at Riverwalk shopping center).

Franklin Women's Club Christmas Party, will be held on Friday, Dec. 9, 11:30 a.m., at Fat Buddies restaurant in Westgate Plaza. Members are asked to bring a gift for the Chinese Auction. To RSVP, call Brenda Jacobs at (828)421-0411. For more information about the Club, call Linda Ellison at (407)342-9654

Macon County CareNet Drop-off Location through Dec. 9 will be at Edward Jones branch office, 81 West Main St., during regular business hours. Items needed include non perishable canned meats, vegetables, fruits, peanut butter, and more.

Mountain Voices' Christmas Concert will be held on Thursday, Dec. 8, 7 p.m., at First United Methodist Church, 66 Harrison Ave., Franklin. The 50-voice community chorus and ensembles sing sacred and secular songs of the season. Beverly Barnett directs; Mary Pittman accompanies on piano, along with a variety of instrumentalists. Venue is wheelchair accessible. For more information, call (828)524-3644.

Macon County School Free Developmental Screening for children ages 3 to 5 will be held on Friday, Dec. 9, 8 a.m. to 12 noon. The purpose of screening is to ensure children are reaching developmental milestones. Children will be asked to perform a variety of activities in the areas of pre-academic, language and motor skills. Vision and hearing will be screened. To schedule an appointment call (828)524-8938 ext. 2059.

Brasstown Ringers "We Need a Little Christmas" will be held on Saturday, Dec. 10, 7 p.m., at First United Methodist Church. Eighteen advanced ringers from Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee demonstrate various ringing techniques on five octaves of bells and six of chimes. For details or to become a ringer, email lkmsterrett@gmail.com.

Free Musical Entertainment at Frog Quarters Saturday, Dec. 10, Barry Roma will sing show tunes, pop oldies and more, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Frog Quarters is located at 573 E. Main St.

Drive through Hot Lunch, Christmas Food Pantry box, Coat Cabinet and prayer as requested will be held on Saturday, Dec. 10, starting at 11 a.m., at Franklin Covenant Church. 265 Bellevue Park Rd.

Otto Christmas Party will be held on Saturday, Dec. 10, 5:30 to 8 p.m. Otto Community Development, 60 Firehouse Rd. Come join the fun and visit with Santa, face painting, Christmas treats, photo booth and games.

TM Rickman will open for the last time this season on Saturday, Dec. 10, 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. featuring Nikwasi Dulcimer Players in the morning, Christmas carols, and music jam in the afternoon. The store is located at 259 Cowee Creek Road.

Nantahala Hiking Club will hike to William's Pulpit on the NC Bartram Trail on Saturday, Dec. 10. Starting at Wallace Branch ascend to the ridge. Come to the rock outcrop for good views south to Albert Mt and Rabun Bald. For reservations and more information, call leader Robert Barnable (828)369-1565.

Nantahala Hiking Club will hike to Larry's Road out old 64 West on Sunday, Dec. 11. FSRD 7281 is a wide road with good views into West Dills Creek/Cartoogechaye Communities. For reservations and more information, call leader Kathy Ratcliff (828)526-6480.

Death Cafe will be held on Sunday, Dec. 11, 2 to 4 p.m., at Wayfarers Unity Chapel, 182 Wayfarer Lane, Dillard, Ga. Death Cafe is a group-directed discussion with no agenda, objective or themes and no intent to lead participants to any conclusion, product or course of action. Come have tea and cake and talk openly and confidentially about all things death related. The session is facilitated by Jan Brewer, M.A., CMT and Teresa Weiser, Ed.D. For more information, call Jan at (510)684-5555 and/or visit www.deathcafe.com.

Cullasaja Community Association Christmas Dinner will be held on Monday, Dec. 12, 6 p.m. Bring a covered dish to share and invite your neighbor.

American Legion Macon Post 108 and American Legion Auxiliary Unit 108 will meet on Tuesday, Dec. 13, light dinner 6 p.m., regular meeting following meal at 7 p.m., at the Post Home, 614 W. Main St. All members, military veterans and spouses are encouraged to attend.

Share the Journey Support Group for Caregivers whose loved ones are experiencing memory loss will meet on Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2 p.m., at First Presbyterian Church, 26 Church St. Enter the church from the parking lot, come through the double red doors in the courtyard and follow the signs. For more information, call (828)524-3119.

MS Support Group of Macon County will meet at the Dorothy and John Crawford Senior Center in Franklin on Thursday, Dec. 15, from 2 to 4 p.m. The Senior Center is located at 108 Wayah St.

Holly Springs Baptist Church Festival of Trees & Happy Birthday Jesus Party set for Saturday, Dec. 17, has been cancelled. The new flooring project in the fellowship hall will not be completed in time.

Franklin Seventh Day Adventist is discontinuing its Community Service Outreach Program at 93 Church Street, Suite 203.

Macon County Landfill and all Recycling/Convenience Centers will close at noon on Saturday, Dec. 24. All will remain closed on Sunday, Dec. 25. Recycling/convenience centers will also be closed on Sunday, Jan. 1. A normal schedule will be in effect on all other days.

Girl Scout Daisy and Brownie Volunteers needed for Troop 2996 in Franklin. This is a great opportunity to help 5 to 8 year olds learn and grow. For more information, call Diane Peltz at (828)371-2823 or email dianepeltz1953@gmail.com

CHURCH HAPPENINGS

First Alliance Church will be holding Sunday Service on Dec. 11, at 10:30 am. Sunday School for all ages will be held at 9:30 am. Rev. Bradly Bennett will be preaching the sermon. Daughters of Grace will be performing special music. The church is located at 31 Promise Lane (off Womack, next door to Trimont Christian Academy).

Spiritual Light Center on Sunday, Dec. 11, at 11 am., Rev. Dr Katherine Greysen will speak on "In. Through. As everything; Finding Spirit, Claiming Our Power. On Thursdays, a movie is shown at 3 p.m. and then out to eat afterward. The center is located at 80 Heritage Hollow Dr., behind the Gazebo Restaurant. For more information or to stream services go to SpiritualLightCenter.com.

Grace Baptist Church will present a Christmas play "Unto Us a Child is Born, A Night to Remember" Sunday, Dec. 11, with special music at 6:15 p.m., program starts at 6:30 p.m. The church is located at 139 Setser Branch Road.

Cancellation of the Holly Springs Baptist Church Festival of Trees & Happy Birthday Jesus Party that was set for on Saturday, Dec. 17. The new flooring project in the fellowship hall will not be completed in time.

Watch Party with Free Chapel Church and Pastor Jentzen Franklin on Sunday, 11 a.m., 22 W. Palmer St. For more information, call (828)421-6712.

Son Rise International Ministries Christian Fellowship Services are held on Friday evenings at 7 p.m.; Wednesday ladies prayer and Bible Study from 1 to 3 p.m. Mens Bible Study Thursday at 7 p.m. The church is located at 462 Depot St. For more information, call (828)369-2465.

Mountain Synagogue in Franklin conducts services the first Friday and third Saturday of each month. For information, visit the website at mountainsynagoguewnc.com, email us at mountainsynagogue@gmail.com, or call (828)634-1312.

Memorial United Methodist Church Worship Services in person and on Facebook at 11 a.m. every Sunday. They have communion the first Sunday of each month. The church is located at 4668 Old Murphy Rd. (across from Loafers Glory). The pastor is Evan W. Hill. For more information, call (828)369-5834.

Franklin First United Methodist Church Sunday In-person Worship is held at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. or on Facebook at Franklin First United Methodist Church, either live or later on recorded video. The church is located at 66 Harrison Avenue in downtown Franklin; senior pastor is Rev. David Beam. For more information, call (828)524-3010 or visit us at http://www.firstumcfranklin.org

Email your church events to maconcountynews@gmail.com

SUDOKU ANSWERS FOR PG. 22

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CROSSWORD PUZZLE ANSWERS FOR PG. 22

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Goats, quilts, crafts, and more define Cowee Christmas

Deena C. Bouknight
Contributing Writer

Whimsically costumed goats representing Macon Mountain Goats, vintage automobiles, and local law enforcement and first responders welcomed the hundreds of people attending this year's Cowee Christmas and Balsam Bee, Dec. 3, at Cowee School Arts and Heritage Center. Once inside, attendees were treated to multiple craft-making and purchasing opportunities, Fraser fir swags for sale, live music, Appalachian heritage demonstrations, and home-made foods.

The annual event is the largest fundraiser for the historic Cowee School, which year-round offers lectures, performance events, gallery exhibitions, nature opportunities, a toy museum, a pottery studio, and more.

Quilts crafted by Smoky Mountain Quilters Guild (SMQG) were sold and auctioned off, and hand-sewn pillows were stuffed with fragrant Fraser fir needles. In addition, Quilts of Valor were presented to selected veterans. Committee Chairman Carlie Nichols, representing the SMQG initiative that has given away at least 1,000 quilts to veterans, conducted a short ceremony with each recipient.

She expressed appreciation "for your service to our country" while wrapping the quilt around veterans receiving a quilt. Each handmade quilt includes the name of the recipient, date of when it was received, and the quilt's designated title. A letter addressed, "Dear American Hero," was also given to each veteran. The letter conveys, "May it provide you comfort in time of need and pleasure for years to come."

Nichols told veterans as she picked out a quilt for each one,



Left: Andi Setser, daughter of Town of Franklin Planner Justin Setser, shows off "Cooper" the red-nosed goat at Cowee Christmas. Right: Noah Swope entertained attendees at Cowee Christmas with handmade wooden puppets.

"Not all of the quilts feature red, white, and blue or American flags, but all are patriotic in theme."

Present at Cowee Christmas was the new Cowee School Arts and Heritage Center executive director, Laura Brooks.

"This event started so small nine years ago, but the attendance grows every year," said Brooks. "The fundraiser raises at least a few thousand dollars for the school annually. I'd like to continue to grow it ... add to the vendors and kids' crafts. It's my favorite event and it is for many people in the community as well."



Douglas Keyworth, a Korean War Veteran, was one of several veterans presented with an honor quilt by Carlie Nichols, committee chairman of Quilts of Valor.

Cookies with Santa

The Macon County Public Library hosted a Cookies with Santa event Tuesday, Dec. 6. Library staff read a story to the children and then led the group in song to welcome Santa to the library. Children were able to have their pictures taken with Santa with cookies and drinks provided by the Friends of the Library. Crafts were also provided for the children as well as family activity packets to take home, provided by Read2Me.

Photos by Vickie Carpenter



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Driver shortage causing Macon County School buses to sit idle

Diane Peltz – Contributing Writer

School buses are an integral part of the Macon County School (MCS) System. There are 52 bus routes in Macon County, which cover all nine schools, seven of which are considered full-time routes.

“These [seven] routes total 30 hours or more each week,” relayed Todd Gibbs, Macon County Transportation and Ground Facilities director. “Full-time employees are eligible for retirement benefits, health care benefits, supplemental insurance benefits, and more. All other routes are 4-5.5 hours per day. That means anywhere from 2 to 2.75 hours per morning and afternoon route, minimum pay for bus drivers is \$15/hour. We have drivers who have topped out of the pay scale and only receive pay increases when the General Assembly votes percentage increases for all school employees.”

The county’s yellow buses run more than 2,500 miles per day at a cost of \$1,276.315 per year. The buses get about eight miles per gallon per bus. The dollar amount may seem like a large number but buses run from Tellico, to Walnut Creek, to Mulberry, to Standing Indian. This amount pays for diesel, tires, oil, filters, seat covers, drivers’ pay and benefits, mechanics pay and benefits, and that is just for the yellow buses.

Why drive a school bus

Carolyn Fouts is one of the many school bus drivers in Macon County.

“I got my bus license in January 1991 after driving for two years in Georgia, before coming back home,” said Fouts. “So this January will be 32 years for Macon County Schools. I’ve had a bus license for 34 years total. I am one of five EC (Exceptional Children) bus drivers that serve Macon County/Franklin area schools. EC buses have safety assistants that ride also. Josh, one on my bus students then, works on my school bus now.”

Fouts drives all over the county on her route – Clarks Chapel, Patton Area, Sylva Road, Lake Emory Road and in-town streets, and the Iotla area.

She drops off and picks up children at Franklin High, Macon Middle, Mountain View, South Macon, East Franklin and Iotla Valley.

Her work day consists of three routes – the first is three hours, second is one hour, and the third is four hours, totaling eight hours, including pre-checks and bus cleaning.

“I enjoy driving the bus and you get attached to the children and parents,” said Fouts. “I have one to graduate this year that I’ve had since he was seven. When they graduate, you miss them. It’s always a good feeling to see former students come up and speak to you and give you a hug. Although driving a school bus and being out in public



Keeping school buses on the road is an integral part of ensuring Macon County students receive an education. Too many times over the recent months have buses been sitting idle because of a lack of bus drivers. Benefits available to full time bus drivers include above average pay, health care, insurance, reimbursable training expenses and more. Contact Macon County Schools Transportation Director Todd Gibbs at (828)524-3314, ex. 1029.

can have a twist. I had one student that didn’t know me because I wasn’t on the bus. That was funny.”

Fouts indicated that very often, traffic is bad, especially on these smaller back roads. She encounters more cars and trucks crossing into her lane than people running the bus stop sign. She said people don’t want to follow a school bus so they will pull out in front of you.

“You have to watch for that,” she said.

Linda Williams is also a school bus driver. She speaks about her experiences driving a bus for 40 years.

“I drive both morning and afternoon. I drive bus #41 for South Macon Elementary in the Otto area. I travel to four schools. The traffic/road construction to/from South Macon and Franklin High can be very challenging. As far as student discipline, we discuss safety and the rules for riding the bus. We have an understanding of what is expected of each other. I have a really good group of riders. They are well behaved. I’m very proud of them. We have support from our principals and assistant principals as well. I like driving because I love kids. Also, it’s a way of giving back to my community. I’m close to driving three generations. I have driven the same route throughout my career. A special thank you is needed for the parents for being understanding when issues arise that cause me to be early/late. They are a very important part in things going smooth. I have been truly blessed during my years as a driver. I’ve developed lots of friendships with the kids and parents that continue to this day. I consider them my extended family.”

School bus crisis

Gibbs explained the serious nature of the bus driver shortage.

“Since COVID especially, but somewhat before that, we have been short route drivers, and especially substitute bus drivers. It is now the norm to have at least one bus in the county not running because there is no driver for it. Five years ago, it was extremely rare for a bus to sit because there was no driver for it. Ideally, we would have 10 substitute drivers in a pool to use for fill-in. But since we don’t have enough drivers for regular routes, I don’t see us having any sort of pool of substitute drivers in the near future. Many local business are currently short employees; we are in the same situation with drivers. Bus driving is a very rewarding job. Kids in Macon County Schools are great kids. Understandably, bus driving is also somewhat stressful. The amount of traffic a driver has to navigate a bus through requires attentiveness and caution.”

Kim Smith is the parent of two Macon County school children who have been adversely affected by the bus shortage. Smith, who works at Wal-Mart, explains.

“When I get a phone call early in the morning that my child’s bus will not be running today, I have to scramble to make alternate plans to get them both to school. The morning is not so bad because I can drive them to school before work, but in the afternoon I don’t get off until 5 p.m., so I need to find someone who can pick them up from school. I can’t leave work early, as we are assigned points at my job, and leaving early would deduct points and would adversely affect my job performance. In my particular case our

bus has been without a driver too many times this year already.”

April Keefer is the mother of four Macon County school children. Each child is in a different school this year. One is in elementary, one in MVI, one at MMS and one at FHS.

“It is difficult to get each child to school on time with so many drop-offs and long car rider lines,” said Keefer. “Often at least one child goes in late if not two. In the afternoon I pick up my elementary school child first and the two at MVI and MMS have to wait at school until I can get there. My child in high school also has to wait later to get home. The bus has been non-operative several times this year sometimes for a few days in a row or only in the morning and not in the afternoon. It is very inconvenient to have to drive all over town dropping off and picking up my children. There have been several substitute drivers this year but not all days were covered.”

How to become a school bus driver

Training is dictated by the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration, and the state Department of Transportation, not Macon County Schools.

Three days of classroom training covers everything from air brakes on a bus to passenger stops, to mechanical pre-trip inspections, and more. During this classroom training, a drug screen is administered.

Trainees, if they are not school system employees, must fill out an application for MCS. This is the only MCS requirement, besides them being approved for employment by the board of education.

After the three days of classroom training, the trainee must go to the NCDMV-Drivers License office to obtain a CDL-Permit. This permit must be in their possession a minimum of 14 days before they can do behind-the-wheel training.

During this 14-day minimum wait, potential bus drivers must also get a CDL physical from one of the five certified health care providers in Franklin that do CDL/DOT physicals.

After obtaining CDL permit, the drug screen, the CDL/DOT physical, and the 14-day minimum wait, they are then eligible for three days of behind-the-wheel training.

In this three days, the trainee practices handling a bus, passenger stops, pre-trip inspections, and more.

After completing the behind-the-wheel training, the trainee must go back to the NCDMV-Drivers License office to get their permanent CDL license.

All of the expenses, CDL Permit, DOT Physical, drug screen, and permanent CDL license are all reimbursable expenses by the school system with the MCS reimbursement form and receipts.

If you are interested in driving a school bus for Macon County, contact Todd Gibbs at (828)524-3314, ext 1029.



Deaths & Funerals

Arnold Buchanan

Arnold Buchanan, 79, of Cullowhee, N.C., went home to be with Jesus on Saturday, Dec. 3, 2022.

Born in Jackson County, he was the son of the late Perry and Myrtle Leopard Buchanan. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his wife, Brenda Louise Haskett Buchanan; bonus grandson, Jason Mathes; and siblings, Linda Jane Woodard, Wayne Buchanan, and Randall "Willie" Buchanan.

He was a member of Lovedale Baptist Church in Sylva, N.C.; and former member of the Masonic Lodge in Glenville and East LaPorte. He served on the Jackson County School Board for eight years; loved to fox hunt and go to the dirt tracks and watch racing. He was an avid Alabama football fan.

He is survived by two sons, Brent Buchanan (Debi) of Cullowhee and Kellen Buchanan of Cullowhee; grandson, Cayden Q. Buchanan; bonus grandson, Johnny Mathes; and nine bonus great grandchildren; a brother, Kenneth Buchanan (Shannon) of Harrisburg, Pa.; two sisters, Rachael Capps (Tommy) of Hendersonville and Joyce Todd of Hendersonville; and numerous nieces and nephews.

A celebration of life was held Wednesday, Dec. 7, at Macon Funeral Home with Rev. Eddie Stillwell and Rev. Dennis Burrell officiating. Military honors were provided by VFW Post 7339 and American Legion Post 108.

In lieu of flowers, memorials can be made to Shriners Hospitals for Children, Office of Development 2900 Rocky Point Drive, Tampa, FL 33607, or the Glenville Cashiers Rescue, 79 N. Norton Rd., Glenville, NC 28736.

Online condolences can be left at www.maconfuneralhome.com.

Macon Funeral Home is handling the arrangements.

Gary William Cates

Gary William Cates, 85, of Franklin, N.C., passed Oct. 27, 2022. He was born Dec. 2, 1936, to the late Lois Larson and Ralph W. Cates.

Before moving to Franklin 19 years ago, he spent time living in Tallahassee and St. George Island, Fla. He attended college on a boxing scholarship, and earned his MBA from the University of Nevada in 1969. He worked with youth clubs in Utah, Nevada and Florida. He was on the Chamber of Commerce in Salt Lake City, Utah, and was a member of the Elks Club in Florida. He was retired from his work in human resources and labor law.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his first wife, Ane Chipman Cates (2003).

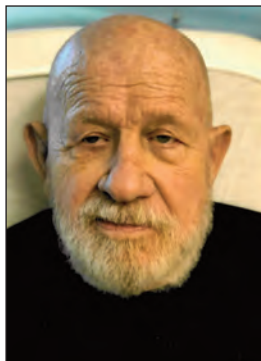
He is survived by Cherie M. Cates, to whom he was married 17 years; his children, Melinda C. Onderick (Joseph), Tina C. Putnal (Scott) and Michael G. Cates (Carla); brother, Ralph W. Cates Jr.; seven grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Macon County Humane Society in Franklin.

Condolences may be shared at AshevilleMortuaryServices.com.



Arnold Buchanan



Gary William Cates

Bart Edward Kimmey

Bart Edward Kimmey, 77, passed from this life on Nov. 26, 2022.

Born on Sept. 14, 1945, he was a wonderful family man and a great provider who will long be remembered by those who loved him dearly: his wife of 53 years, Linda Rhoden Kimmey; his daughter, Tara Jean Kimmey; his grandchildren, Samantha, Savannah, and Robert Washington Jr.; his great-granddaughter, Nevaeh Snead; his brother, Alan Kimmey; his nephews, Richard Hopson, Daniel Hopson (Lolita), and Gregory Abair; his niece, Cynthia Abair; his great-nephews, Christopher Abair and Jedidiah, Jeshua, and Jessie Hopson; and his great-niece, Karlea Abair. He was predeceased by his daughter, Dawn Marie Kimmey; his mother and stepfather, Mary Elizabeth Murphy Rosenberger and Fred Rosenberger; and his sister, Gail Abair.



Bart Edward Kimmey

He was very patriotic and loved being a citizen of what he considered the world's greatest nation. He was proud to be a military veteran, having been a member of the United States Air Force from 1966-1970. He considered it not only a duty and a privilege but also an honor to be able to serve his country.

He enjoyed life. His very real claim to fame was being a professional bowler on the PBA tour. He actually bowled a game with a perfect score of 300 and a set with a score of 807. He was a jokester with a laid back attitude who was always looking for an opportunity to give advice about life in general. He was artistic and used his ability and talent in his career as a sign painter. All of his work was done by hand including some hand painted gold leaf.

He loved listening to music from the '60s and '70s. The songs of Elvis, Neil Diamond, The Beach Boys and others of that era were always being played. He enjoyed watching all kinds of sports on television, but his favorite teams were the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Syracuse Orange. His special little pal was a cat named Bree.

Memorial contributions may be made to any local animal shelter, or any local veteran's organization.

No services are planned at this time.

Moffitt Family Funeral Care is honored to serve the family. Online condolences may be made at www.moffittfunerals.com.

Dennis Barkley Bell

Dennis Barkley Bell of Leesburg, Ala., passed due to a chronic medical condition complicated by Covid on Dec. 2, 2022. He was born in Los Angeles, Calif., and spent his childhood in a wonderful place called Eagle Rock. He had many friends, some who remained lifelong buddies even with a 3000-mile distance. David Puopolo, Art Bradley, and Ray Blanco called to check on him often and always lit up his day with their calls.



Dennis Barkley Bell

He loved drawing and painting and studied at UCLA art school for a while before finding his vocation with computers. He often told the story of working the night shift at Forest Lawn Cemetery where there was a huge data center. It started him on a career that took him across country and then finally to Atlanta, Ga., where he spent most of his adult life.

His passions included bird watching, model airplanes, radio control airplanes, gem hunting, and bad jokes. Quiet at first but once he knew you he was a constant jokester and had a ridiculous sense of humor.

He was a kind and loving husband to his wife, Debra, and an amazing father to his son, Tony. His favorite memories were coaching Tony in basketball and watching him play any sport. He lived his life with kindness and was not afraid to speak his mind.

He is survived by his wife Debra; son, Tony; daughter-in-law Lorena; sister, Margo Marshall; and many many nephews, nieces, and in-laws. He is preceded in death by his father, Charlie, mother Dolly, and his beloved sister Gail.

A service will be held at Mountain Grove Baptist Church Franklin, Saturday, Dec. 10, at 2 p.m.

Dennis is now running strong and pain free with his beautiful Sunny and Libby. He will forever be in our hearts.

"But the most important thing is, even if we're apart, I will always be with you." - A. A. Milne

Online condolences at www.bryantgrantfuneralhome.com. Bryant-Grant Funeral Home & Crematory is serving the family.

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NASCAR fetes its champions in Nashville awards ceremony

Reid Spencer – NASCAR Wire Service

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — It wouldn't be a stretch to say that deuces were wild on Thursday night at the Music City Center, where NASCAR honored the champions of its top three national series at the annual NASCAR Awards.

Headlining the event was NASCAR Cup Series champion Joey Logano, who drives the No. 22 Ford for Team Penske. The title was Logano's second, following the championship he won for team owner Roger Penske in 2018.

Logano also made a two-time winner of crew chief Paul Wolfe, who earned his first title a decade earlier while on the pit box for Brad Keselowski.

Logano won two of the 10 Playoff races—the first Round of 8 race at Las Vegas to guarantee a spot in the Championship 4 as well as the race that decided the title, the NASCAR Cup Series Championship Race at Phoenix.

The 2022 champion ended the season with four wins—in addition, his victory on the exhibition Clash at the Coliseum, the competitive debut of NASCAR's new Next Gen Cup race car. "22 in '22," Logano said, repeating the motto that had driven his race team throughout the season.

Introduced by friend and IndyCar legend Mario Andretti, Logano paid homage to his team owner and his parents.

"Mom, Dad... Letting me chase my dreams means so much," said Logano, 32.

He congratulated Penske for winning both the Cup Series and IndyCar championships in the same season.

"That's never happened before, guys," said Logano, who ended his speech with advice for young drivers. "Coming from a guy that has made plenty mistakes in front of a lot of people... plenty of them still remind me of my mistakes," said Logano, the youngest driver to win a Cup race at 19 years, 35 days. "No regrets. I challenge you to take risks, make the big moves, stand up for what's right. Because it's not about winning or losing, it's about winning and growing. I hope everyone has a Merry Christmas."

Penske described Logano as "the leader on the track and off the track. Obviously, we've signed him up for five more years."

Wolfe was just as effusive in his praise.

"Joey—he's the guy that motivates us all," said Wolfe, who contrasted his first championship with Keselowski with the current title. Ten years ago... that first one was so early in my career I didn't know any better," Wolfe said.

In addition to recognizing the accomplishments of each of the 16 Playoff drivers, the NASCAR Awards also honored



2022 NASCAR Cup Series Champion Joey Logano Poses for a photo at the Ryman Auditorium on Nov. 30, 2022 in Nashville, Tenn. Photo by Chris Graythen/Getty Images

NASCAR Xfinity Series champion Ty Gibbs and NASCAR Camping World Truck Series champion Zane Smith.

Gibbs won the Xfinity Series title at Phoenix, picking up his seventh victory of the season in the process. But hours later, Gibbs' father, Coy Gibbs died in his sleep at age 49.

When Ty Gibbs took the stage at the Music City Center, he was greeted with a standing ovation.

"Wow! Thank you. It means a lot," Gibbs said. "Thank you for all the support. I really appreciate it."

Team owner Joe Gibbs, Ty's grandfather, echoed the sentiment.

"Thanks so much for the way you've reached out in these last few weeks for our family," Joe Gibbs said.

Ben Kennedy, NASCAR senior vice president of racing development and strategy, introduced Zane Smith with high praise.

"At such a young age (23), one can't help but feel like we're watching a future NASCAR superstar writing the beginning of his story," Kennedy said.

Smith's parents were in Phoenix to watch the driver of the No. 38 Front Row Motorsports Ford win his fourth race of the season and the accompanying title.

"I'm still not sure if my mom was more excited to see me win or get a picture with Jeff Gordon after the race, since she's always told me that was her dream," Smith quipped. "So, I'm happy we were both able to accomplish our dreams that



2022 NASCAR Camping World Truck Series champion Zane Smith poses for a photo on the Shelby Street pedestrian bridge on Dec. 1, 2022 in Nashville, Tenn. Photo by Sean Gardner/Getty Images



2022 NASCAR Xfinity Series champion Ty Gibbs poses for a photo on the Shelby Street pedestrian bridge on Dec. 1, 2022 in Nashville, Tenn.

Photo by Sean Gardner/Getty Images

night."

Ralph Maccarone was honored as the winner of the prestigious Betty Jane France Humanitarian Award. In 2012, Maccarone founded Who We Play For to inspire and empower schools, sports clubs and communities to provide heart screenings for all student athletes and students.

Team owner Justin Marks, who fields cars for Playoff drivers Ross Chastain and Daniel Suarez, was honored with the Myers Brothers Award for outstanding contributions to stock car racing. Marks' Trackhouse Racing enjoyed a breakout season, with Chastain winning twice and Suarez once—and Chastain leaving an indelible mark on the sport with his eye-popping

high-speed trip around the Martinsville wall to earn a spot in the Championship 4.

For the fifth straight year, Chase Elliott won the NMPA Most Popular Driver Award, the only significant honor in the sport determined solely by vote of the fans. Elliott's father, Bill Elliott, won the award a record 16 times. Dale Earnhardt Jr. was voted Most Popular Driver for 15 seasons.

Noah Gragson was the NASCAR Xfinity Series' Most Popular Driver, and Hailie Deegan earned the honor in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series.

Jes Ferreira from CSM Production was honored as the winner of the Comcast Community Champion of the Year award for her commitment as the single parent of two adopted children.

Kyle Busch wants to be NASCAR Tom Brady

After a year that can be described conservatively as tumultuous, two-time NASCAR Cup Series champion Kyle Busch is ready to take the next step in his career.

Busch is leaving Joe Gibbs Racing, where he spent 15 full seasons, to drive a Chevrolet for Richard Childress Racing.

"It's obviously been a challenging... not just this year, but the last little while... so it's kind of maybe a blessing in disguise," said Busch, who explored various options for 2023 after his sponsor, M&M's, declined to return to the No. 18 JGR Toyota after this year. "Honestly, it just might be time for a fresh start—something new and something different.

"I'm kind of looking at it as the Tom Brady/Peyton Manning aspect, where they left great teams, great organizations where they won championships, and they went on to win championships somewhere else."

Busch arrived at his Champion's Week question-and-answer session at the Music City Center wearing the championship rings he won in 2015 and 2019, one on each hand.



Chase Elliott attends the NASCAR Awards and Champion Celebration at the Music City Center on Dec. 1, 2022 in Nashville, where he was once again named most popular driver.

"If you've got it, you might as well wear it," Busch said. "You're not going to wear it getting into a race car, so you might as well wear it at the functions where you can show people what they're going after... Again, I'm going to go back to the Brady/Manning theory where, yes, I've done it before at one place. I want to do it again somewhere else."

Ryan Blaney is making a list and checking it twice – with his crew chief

After two enjoyable weeks in the off-season, Ryan Blaney was eager to return to racing. Because he's not scheduled for any off-season testing, however, the driver of the No. 12 Team Penske Ford won't be back in his car until February.



Noah Gragson, driver of the #9 Bass Pro Shops/TrueTimber/BRCC Chevrolet, (L) and Brandon Jones, driver of the #19 Menards/Pelonis Toyota, talk on the grid during qualifying for the NASCAR Xfinity Series Championship at Phoenix Raceway on Nov. 5, 2022 in Avondale, Ariz. Gragson was named Xfinity Series' Most Popular Driver at the NASCAR Awards and Champion Celebration at the Music City Center on Dec. 1, 2022 in Nashville, Tenn.

Photo by Meg Oliphant/Getty Images

That doesn't mean Blaney can't work on ways to improve from a season where he qualified for the NASCAR Cup Series Playoffs on points and finished eighth in the final standings.

"I make a list at the end of the year," Blaney said. "OK, what did we do well? What did we struggle with? And like what are your goals to get better? What do you really want to improve?"

"Me and (crew chief) Jonathan (Hassler) sat down last week and went through our list of notes, and like where do we want to get better and improve at, and what did we do well and can still build off of? You look back on the year, and you're like, 'Well, we screwed up in this situation. Let's jot that down and let's try to figure out a different way. If that comes up again, let's change it.'"

One race Blaney would like to change is the season-opening Daytona 500, where he had a chance to win on the last lap but finished fourth as rookie teammate Austin Cindric took the checkered flag.

"The one that stings the most is the 500, because we've been so close to that that thing for years," Blaney said. "That one stings the most, but I try to get over that stuff really quick."

Ty Gibbs emotional Championship Week

Wearing his new, sparkling NASCAR Xfinity Series champion's ring and sporting a pair of stylish sneakers, 20-year-old Ty Gibbs offered smiles and cherished recollections of his 2022 championship season.

He calmly asked reporters to focus on the racing topic, saying he did not feel comfortable responding to questions about the tragic loss of his father, Joe Gibbs Racing Vice Chairman Coy Gibbs, 49, who passed away in his sleep in Phoenix after Ty's impressive championship trophy hoist just hours earlier.

"I've been doing good, thank you for asking, definitely appreciate you guys," Gibbs said addressing the subject immediately. "Right now I'm not going to touch on that subject at all, just going to stick with the racing questions."

Gibbs said he had been absolutely committed to coming to Nashville to celebrate his and the team's achievement. Only two weeks ago, the JGR team – owner by his grandfather, NASCAR Hall of Famer Joe Gibbs – formally announced that Gibbs will drive the

No. 54 Toyota in the NASCAR Cup Series fulltime in 2023.

He said he's devoted a lot of time to learning the NASCAR Cup Series car on the SIM and feels the 15 races he got to compete in during 2022 filling in for the injured Kurt Busch in the 23XI Racing Toyota will be a substantial boost to his rookie season next year.

"Definitely a huge benefit for sure," Gibbs said. "I'm very thankful to be put in that opportunity. Again, thank you to (team co-owners) Denny (Hamlin) and Michael (Jordan) for the opportunity. It was really cool."

Of the unexpected chance to get some seat time in the Cup car in advance of its move up to the series, Gibbs said, "Going back and forth and double-duty and racing for the championship in one series, it was a lot... I'm thankful to have had the experience."

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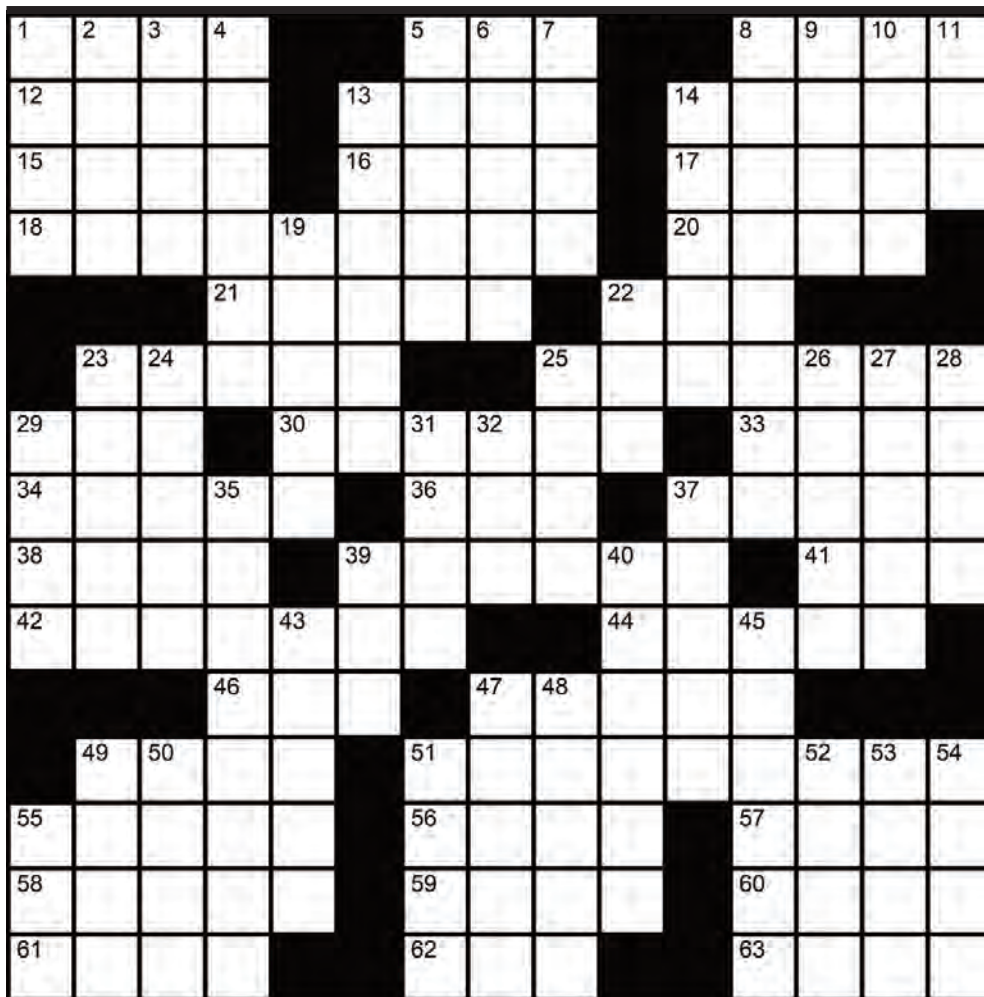
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THEME:
YEAR-IN-REVIEW

ACROSS

1. Use a bayonet
5. *Late Saget
8. Greek salad staple
12. Meal in a shell
13. Lowest brass
14. Like daytime energy
15. *2022
16. Van Gogh's famous flower
17. Poodle minus d
18. *Late Queen
20. Volcano off Sicily coast
21. Leaves out
22. Elf's distinctive body part
23. *Olympic host
25. *Russia's target
29. Black sheep sound
30. Treat badly
33. Reason for Thanksgiving
34. Carl Jung's inner self
36. "But I heard him exclaim '___ he drove out of sight, 'Merry Christmas...'"
37. Pick on
38. Pro ___
39. Bank, usually
41. Driver's aid
42. Jalopy
44. Back of the neck, pl.
46. Finish line
47. Fur of the marten
49. Paul Bunyan story, e.g.
51. *Economic woe
55. Faultfinder
56. Tropical edible root
57. Soreness
58. Irretrievable loss



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PAWSITIVE SHELTER Volunteers (PSV) Indoor Yard Sale Saturday, December 10, 10am-2pm, Robert C Carpenter Community Center, 1288 Georgia Road, across from Ingles Market. Hundreds of like-new, and gently used items. Enjoy hot cocoa and homemade cookies. PSV is an all-volunteer, NC nonprofit whose mission is to promote the health, wellness and adoption of shelter animals in Macon County. Information call (910)478- 5491.

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YEAR	MAKE	MODEL	MILES
2021	Chevrolet	Corvette	5,792
2021	Chevrolet	Spark	82
2021	Kia	Optima EX	20,010
2020	Chevrolet	Camaro	25,641
2019	Camaro		40,428
2019	Dodge	Grand Caravan SXT	55,584
2019	Equinox		52,902
2019	Nissan	Sentra SV	15,009
2019	Volkswagen	Beetle	42,676
2018	Chevrolet	Equinox	53,520
2018	Chevrolet	Cruze	34,692
2018	Traverse	LT AWD	95,105
2017	Dodge	Journey	110,982
2017	Honda	Fit	59,209
2016	Ford	Focus	68,653
2015	Ford	Flex	99,016
2014	Mazda	3	86,680
2013	Hyundia	Genesis 6 SPD	69,381
2013	VW	Beetle Convertible	67,099
2009	Lexus	ES350	113,060

SUVS

YEAR	MAKE	MODEL	MILES
2023	Chevrolet	Tahoe	257
2022	Jeep	Wrangler Sahara Unlimited	10,539
2021	Chevrolet	Express 2500 Van	39,022
2021	Chevrolet	Tahoe	33,592
2021	Ford	Bronco Badlands AWD	1,237
2021	GMC	Yukon XL	53,356
2021	Grand Cherokee	L	13,279
2021	Jeep	Wrangler Sport	8,094
2021	Tahoe	High Country	28,303

2020	Acura	MDX AWD	46,606
2020	Buick	Encore	34,808
2020	Chevrolet	Trax	7,250
2020	Chevrolet	Trax Premier	28,030
2020	Grand Cherokee	Trailhawk	26,226
2020	Jeep	Wrangler Rubicon Unlimited	24,249
2019	Chevrolet	Blazer RS	45,231
2019	Chevrolet	Tahoe LT	46,162
2019	Chevrolet	Trax AWD	16,288
2019	Honda	Pilot EX	40,801
2019	Jeep	Cherokee 4x4	65,409
2018	Chevrolet	Equinox LT	23,569
2018	Ford	Explorer Sport	57,475
2018	Forerunner	TRD Sport	65,055
2018	Mitsubishi	Outlander	44,985
2018	Nissan	Murano	53,903
2017	Rogue	SV	58,866
2016	Chevrolet	Traverse LS AWD	62,942
2016	Dodge	Grand Caravan	76,458
2016	Lexus	RX 350	72,919
2016	Sorento	LX	112,933
2016	Toyota	Sequoia	96,869
2016	Trax	LT	20,021
2015	Suburban	LT	92,352

TRUCKS

YEAR	MAKE	MODEL	MILES
2022	Chevrolet	2500 LTZ	4,635
2021	2500	LT 4x4	16,442
2021	Chevrolet	1500 4x4	10,243
2021	Chevrolet	1500 RST	34,026
2021	Chevrolet	Colorado	8,980
2021	Chevrolet	Colorado ZR-2	10,842
2021	Chevrolet	LT Trailboss	34,069

2021	Chevrolet	Silverado 1500	5,822
2021	Chevrolet	Silverado 1500	8,432
2021	Chevrolet	Trailboss Crew	22,256
2021	F-150	Crew 4x4	32,251
2021	Ford	F-150 SuperCrew Cab	32,251
2021	GMC	Canyon Elevation	50,934
2021	Ram	2500 Black Widow	13,542
2021	Ram	2500 Tradesman	3,647
2021	Toyota	Tacoma TRD Sport	10,557
2020	Chevrolet	2500 Diesel	8,241
2020	Chevrolet	Colorado ZR-2	36,463
2020	Chevrolet	Silverado	52,944
2020	Chevrolet	Silverado 1500 High Country	22,601
2020	Chevrolet	Silverado 1500 RST	90,498
2020	Colorado	Ext Cab ZR2	26,842
2020	Toyota	Tacoma SR	12,448
2019	Chevrolet	1500 Trailboss	36,741
2019	Chevrolet	2500 LTZ Crew	38,248
2019	Chevrolet	Silverado 3500 HC Dually	45,535
2019	Chevrolet	Silverado 1500 High Country	44,359
2019	Colorado	WT 4x4	6,261
2019	Ford	F-150 Punisher	53,682
2019	GMC	Sierra 1500	18,811
2019	Ram	3500 Flatbed	58,192
2018	Chevrolet	1500 LT Crew	28,131
2018	Chevrolet	1500 LT Crew	50,934
2018	Chevrolet	2500 LTZ Crew	56,558
2018	Chevrolet	Colorado Z-71	23,542
2018	Colorado	ZR2	36,012
2018	Ram	2500	101,661
2017	Chevrolet	1500 Z-71	73,529
2013	Ford	F-250 DSL	85,920
2011	Ford	F-150	182,492



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