

# OPINION

## BBQ festival deserves second chance

The Rotary Club of Spruce Pine briefly considered the idea of doing away with its annual BBQ & Bluegrass Festival after some negative feedback about admission price and overall declining attendance.

We can all be thankful club officials ultimately chose otherwise.

The club instead decided to revamp the festival and have it anyway, mainly because it is the club's biggest annual fundraiser and for the multiple agencies, organizations and individuals that receive money from Rotary each year.

For instance, the club pledged \$20,000 to the Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Foundation for the construction of the emergency waiting room when the hospital was remodeled. Rotary paid off that pledge in annual \$4,000 pledges for five years. Rotary continues to contribute to other BRRH Foundation projects as well.

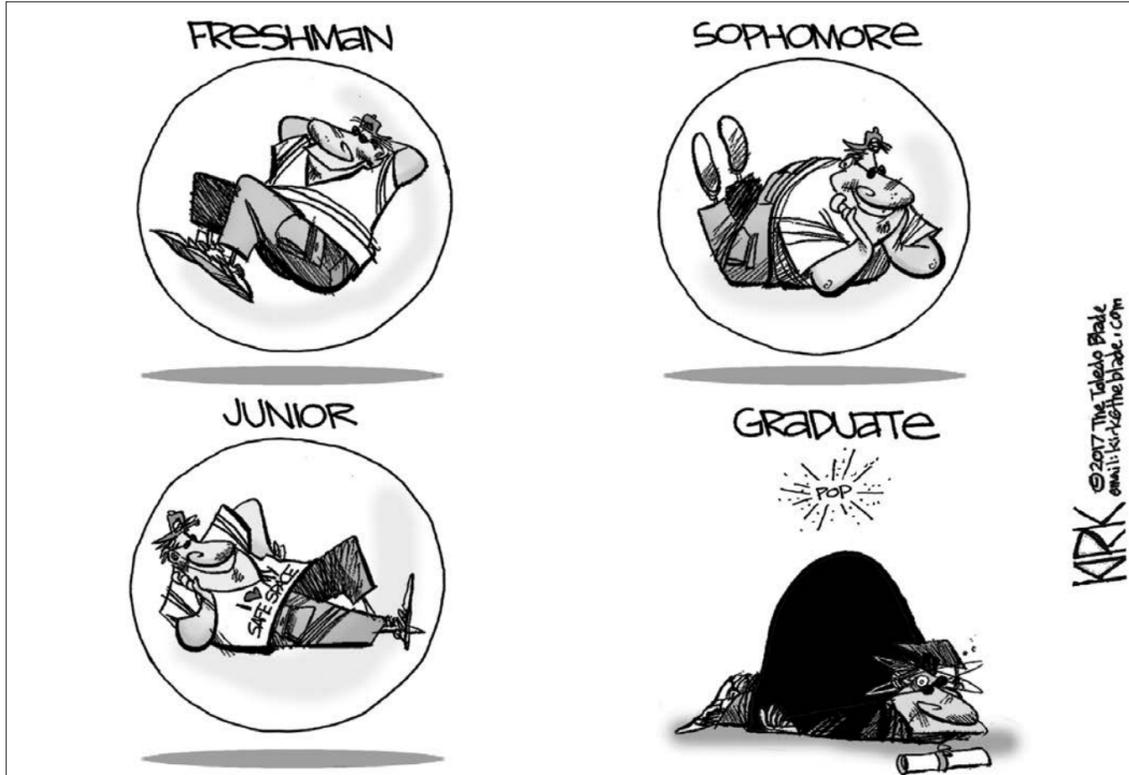
Rotary also pledged \$10,000 to buy property for Central Park in downtown Spruce Pine and paid for and installed a Rotary bench in Overlook Park on Oak Avenue.

Tens of thousands of dollars have been contributed to the Rotary Wheelchair Foundation, which has delivered more than 895,000 wheelchairs worldwide as well as for scholarships for area students.

Nearly \$100,000 in labor and materials has been given for Kiddie's Play Park at Riverside Park and the club was recognized by the local district for its contributions toward overseas disaster-area shelter boxes.

People who attend the BBQ Festival allow Rotary to donate to these and many more worthwhile projects such as the kennels at SafePlace, the building of several homes under the auspices of Habitat for Humanity and special recognition of students, teachers and firefighters.

With this year's new, low admission price of \$5, we should all want this year's BBQ & Bluegrass Festival to raise enough money to sustain these projects into the future.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Decision determined by Medicaid funds

#### To the editor:

According to the North Carolina Rural Health Research Program at the University of North Carolina, 16 rural hospitals in the state closed this past year. Three quarters of all closures nationwide were in states that chose not to expand Medicaid to low-income adults.

Several commentators in the Yancey County paper and the Mitchell News-Journal have recently pointed out the loss of birthing services is the first step toward losing broader surgical services on the way to marginalization and, ultimately, closure.

"Trumpcare" in the U.S. House of Representatives now proposes to reduce Medicaid by as much as \$560 billion over the next 10 years.

Even though Mission has invested heavily in Blue Ridge Regional Hospital in recent years, the loss of all those Medicaid dollars and its impact on the long-term prospects for the hospital had to be the deciding factor in withdrawing birthing services.

The overwhelming irony in all this is both counties voted to enable this drastic policy, which will negatively impact the economic viability and certainly our neediest.

Russ Mundy  
Spruce Pine

### Mission CEO ignoring the 'powerless'

#### To the editor:

I would assume Mission CEO Dr. Ron Paulus is congratulating himself for shutting down labor and delivery departments in two rural hospitals to make Mission Health services more "efficient."

Those two departments were staffed by dedicated doctors and nurses with long and exemplary records of safe and compassionate care, delivered by providers who know their patients and their families well. Paulus effectively shut down any dissent from his "plan" by moving up the vote by our board three months and had armed security preventing any demonstrations on hospital grounds by unhappy citizens, which were mostly young families with firsthand stories of how having local labor and delivery services had saved their babies' lives: What was he afraid of?

Paulus presented our local board with no middle ground between shutting down obstetric services or withdrawing all support for our local hospital and leaving us to dangle in the wind.

There is middle ground in this negotiation, as thoughtfully outlined by Dr. Bryan Murphy in a presentation to our board this past month. I don't have access to the financial figures, but he offered several good solutions to narrow the gap.

The real question is one of the Mission system bearing some responsibility in ensuring reasonable access to care for the rural patients in WNC, many who live more than one hour from Memorial Mission Hospital or its two "hubs" in Marion and Sylva.

I'm sure centralizing everything to Asheville makes sense on organizational charts to Paulus and the Mission board, but it is totally unfair to our rural citizens and will probably result in some bad outcomes.

Mission doesn't mind the large volume of lucrative referrals that come from rural WNC counties and I believe, in turn, they should be willing to subsidize some critical-access services for rural patients. If Paulus' philosophy continues, there will soon be five places a pregnant woman can deliver a baby in all of WNC.

When Spruce Pine Hospital formalized a relationship with Mission, it was understood it would benefit from closer ties to an excellent referral hospital, while being able to shape local medical services to fit our community's needs. In recent years, however, starting with laying off many long-term local employees and now, without any attempt to seek a compromise to sustain continuing vital obstetric services, Mission has continued a heavy-handed, top-down management style that doesn't recognize any local input.

It has been difficult to recruit new physicians to our area with its lower reimbursement for medical care, more frequent hospital calls (usually uncompensated) and less amenities. After attracting a stellar core of dedicated physicians and nurses, Paulus' decision is forcing at least three of them to leave our area.

If Mission Health is going to be almost the exclusive source of medical care in WNC, it needs to address the needs and concerns of rural citizens, not just people who live in or near Asheville. So far, Paulus is blatantly

ignoring us, the powerless. Shame on him.

Dr. Arch Woodard  
Spruce Pine

### BRRH board not to blame

#### To the editor:

It was Mission who chose to close labor and delivery at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, our board is not to blame. The choice had already been made.

Do not use euphemisms such as "consolidating with" or "moving to" McDowell. Mission administration needs to have the courage to state the truth: They elected to close labor and delivery at Blue Ridge, sending us back to a level of care we have not experienced since the 1960s or '70s.

The community does need to be aware of one issue that brought us to this point. We elected officials to the state legislature who voted to send federal taxpayer dollars to citizens of other states. If they had accepted them here, they would have benefited our own citizens. This decision caused our hospitals to lose millions of dollars, forcing consolidation and loss of services.

Quality of care was not the issue. There are at least nine real lives, just in the past two years, which would have been lost or suffered without labor and delivery at BRRH. Right now, without further spending, we have modern rooms with all the latest equipment and new operating rooms, thanks, in large part, to generous community donors. For at least the past 20 years we have had 24/7 C-section ability with surgical backup and 24-hours-a-day newborn call without interruption.

Mission administration placed a gag rule on the officers, such that they could not speak about the subject. By the time the administration came to us, they already made their decision. We who work seeing patients and do not have separate media and research departments were left with a few weeks to respond. During those few weeks, we acted in a civilized fashion, speaking diplomatically to board members, trying, unsuccessfully, to engage Mission administration in negotiations. It was not until Paulus decided to present misleading information to the media before any board decision had even been made we put very respectful letters to the editor in the paper.

It may be if we had engaged in truly equal negotiations with the common goal of providing the best care for women and newborns in rural Western North Carolina, we may have come to the same place we are now anyway or we might have come up with a better solution. At least we would know we were working as part of a team. The way it happened, however, made us truly understand, from Mission's standpoint, the medical staff, board and community members of Blue Ridge have no role in decisions of how to best provide care for our community.

Elizabeth M. Peverall, M.D.  
Burnsville

### President of Hospice board offers 'thanks'

#### To the editor:

As Hospice and Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge celebrates its 25th anniversary, we also celebrate our "Lucky 13th" annual golf tournament.

This very generous community came together once again to make this one of our best fundraisers. Quite frankly, a newspaper is not big enough to handle all the "thank you's" owed – so, if I miss someone, forgive me.

Our sponsors are many and varied. There were 11 golf courses that helped us with prizes for golfers and more than 40 businesses donated money, prizes and gift certificates. Very special thanks go to Buchanan & Young for sponsoring the hole-in-one. We had corporate and business sponsors, hole sponsors, "In Memory Of" sponsors, individual donors and so many more.

The helpful and patient staff at Grassy Creek Golf and Country Club and the Twisted Laurel restaurant outdid themselves on our behalf. The Hospice board, staff and volunteers are always there behind the scenes making it all happen.

But, the biggest "thank you" has to go to the golfers – 97 of them this year – many of whom show up year after year to turn this fundraiser into a "fun-raiser." Again, my most sincere thanks to everyone who participated.

Althea Foley, President, Board of Directors  
Hospice and Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Mitchell News-Journal welcomes letters to the editor on issues of local importance. Deadline to submit a letter for publication in the coming week's edition is 5 p.m. Friday. All writers are expected to follow the our letters policy:

- Letters must be exclusive to the News-Journal;
- Letters must include the writer's full name, street address and daytime telephone number for verification. The writer's name and city of residence will be published – names cannot be withheld;
- Letters must be original – no photocopies;
- Letters should be 500 words or fewer;
- We do not publish poems, excerpts from other publication or lengthy submissions of scripture; or letters signed by groups or multiple individuals;
- Letters endorsing or criticizing a business will not be published;
- We reserve the right to edit letters for brevity, style and libel. Publication of any letter is the sole discretion of the Mitchell News-Journal.

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