

# OPINION

## Mitchell County commissioners

**Chair**  
**Matthew “Vern” Grindstaff**  
325 Belvedere Drive  
Bakersville, NC 28705  
828-467-3369

**Keith Holtsclaw**  
468 Apple Lane  
Spruce Pine  
828-765-1637

**Ken Hollifield**  
124 Ray Wiseman Road  
Spruce Pine  
828-765-4557

**Jacob Willis**  
108 Louis Drive  
Spruce Pine  
828-520-1061

**Danny Burleson**  
218 Hickory Hill Circle  
Spruce Pine  
828-766-0599

## Spruce Pine town officials

**Mayor**  
**Darla Harding**  
251 Rogers Street,  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
(828) 765-2068

**James Acuff**  
239 Balsam Avenue,  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
(828) 385-0219

**Rocky Buchanan**  
50 Balsam Avenue,  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
(828) 765-6298

**Larry McKinney**  
255 Summit Avenue,  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
(828) 765-9398

## Mitchell County’s U.S. and state elected officials

**U.S. SENATE**  
**Sen. Thom Tillis**  
G55 Dirksen Senate  
Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
202-224-6342

**GOVERNOR**  
**Roy Cooper**  
Office of the Governor  
20301 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-0301  
919-814-2000

**Sen. Richard Burr**  
217 Russell Senate  
Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
202-224-3154

**N.C. SENATE**  
**Ralph Hise**  
16 W. Jones St.  
Room 1026  
Raleigh, NC 27601-2808  
919-733-3460  
828-766-8329 in Mitchell

**U.S. CONGRESS**  
**Rep. Mark Meadows**  
1516 Longworth HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
202-225-6401  
or  
11 Crystal St.  
Spruce Pine  
828-765-0573

**NC HOUSE**  
**Josh Dobson**  
16 W. Jones St.  
Room 1006  
Raleigh, NC 27601-1096  
919-733-5862  
828-442-4370 in McDowell



## Reflections from my first month in Mitchell

I’ve been working for the Mitchell News-Journal for more than a month and the time has flown by.

I got settled into my role as a reporter with a story on a woman from Red Hill who had just turned 100 years old and a board of education meeting. The two experiences were very different, but important for getting into a groove.

Over the past month, I’ve met a lot of great local officials, business owners and citizens. I’ve been to the Rhododendron Festival on assignment and spent the last night of the festival square dancing in the street in Bakersville with my wife and brother-in-law.

The News-Journal is a lot different from the previous two papers for which I worked. Here, I feel as if I’m a part of a team and I love the feeling of connectivity I already feel with the readers.

When I clock out the for the day, the area still feels like home. It feels like a great place to call home.



Cory SPIERS

I want to thank everyone for their warm welcomes and kind words. I already feel like I fit in.

It gives me great satisfaction to hear people talking about our articles and issues. I love seeing people sharing our material on social media.

We have become a true community newspaper and I have a blast being a part of telling your stories.

I have covered a lot of sports in my young journalism career, so I’m very excited to help bring Mitchell High athletics to life through reporting.

Football season is close and I’m very excited to bundle up and get out to Ledger under the Friday night lights.

Speaking of bundling up, this weather here is great. I grew up just outside of Charlotte where it was usually very hot.

When I started my freshman year at Appalachian State in 2011, I was blown away by the cool weather. What a novel concept it was to be able to stroll to class in September without a heavy jacket.

Mitchell County has that same gorgeous weather and even prettier sights.

Every day on my drive to the office, I take in the breathtaking mountains that seem close enough to touch. It’s truly a sight to behold and a fantastic way to start the day.

I love living here despite how different it is from the big city.

It has been a pleasure to tell you all stories so far and I can’t wait to see what the future holds for us.

**Cory Spiers is a reporter for the Mitchell News-Journal. He can be reached by email at reporter1@mitchellnews.com or by calling 828-765-7169.**

### GUEST COLUMN

## Getting overlooked: In defense of rural America

It’s difficult to pinpoint the exact moment it happened.

Perhaps it was driving through the perfectly manicured downtown of “Stepford” where the buildings gleamed so shiny and new they practically had price tags on them. Or, it could have been sandwiched between the Teslas in the Starbucks drive-thru cashing in on Frappuccino happy hour. Where ever it happened and in whatever manner it occurred, I knew one thing: by mid-2014, I was done.

I was finished with the affluent suburbs of Nashville and craving something real. I craved rural America. Goodbye traffic jams and strip malls. Give me country roads, small towns and the mountains of North Carolina. I needed to come home to Mitchell County. It is not only the most beautiful place in the world, but it had everything my family needed: tight-knit community, small schools with caring teachers and a rural, yet expertly staffed, hospital.

And so, I traded my Starbucks for a million stars. I gave up the city lights ... but the lightning bugs put on quite a display. I left a life of convenience for the life I felt convicted to live. Each sacrifice has been sweetened by the simple things I have gained. And every day I remind myself how grateful I am to be home.

Yet, while I feel fortunate to call these mountains home, one thing has been gnawing at me as of late. Our home is under attack. Read any newspaper or tune in to the TV and there is one pervasive fact that cannot be ignored – small towns across our country are dying. Rural areas are paying the price of every poor legislative and money-minded decision that has unfolded in recent years.

Look for no further proof than Mission Healthcare.

With willful dismissiveness, they opted to put profit before the people of this area and close our labor and



Chelsea THAYER

delivery unit. They claim a concern for quality and hide behind corporate speech while their actions speak louder than their words. On Sept. 30 – the final day of the fiscal year for Mission, mind you – women in our area will no longer be able to give birth locally. Forced to drive, in many cases over an hour, they will undertake unnecessary risk to travel farther to deliver.

Despite every research study and significant data that equates distance traveled with adverse and potentially fatal results, Mission has ignored our community.

And, make no mistake, we will not be “sharing” services with McDowell. They have been taken from us. As a soon-to-be mother of four, I take great offense to their use of the word “share.” If a bully steals a toy from my child on the playground and runs away, I do not say, “Don’t worry, sugar, they’re sharing.” They are taking something valuable and necessary and it will come at a great cost to the community I love.

We are faced with the reality the closure of labor and delivery will likely be the first of many services we will be forced to “share.” And so, it happens with many rural hospitals and small towns across America.

Necessary services cut from rural areas and hardworking people time and time again. Are we so easy to overlook? Do our lives matter less than those in metropolitan areas? Those in power say “yes,” but we know better.

We are a community birthed from the inexhaustible spirit of the mountaineers that settled in these valleys nearly 300 years ago. My ancestors were among them.

Scotsmen who found this land rugged and beautiful like the Scottish Highlands from which they hailed. I believe rugged determination lies in many of us. Though it may lie dormant, it is there. Rural America has been fed the lie that we are underserving of purpose-filled, quality lives. With every job or industry that has been taken (or to use Mission’s term, “shared”) elsewhere, a toll has been taken on the spirit of this community.

With a sigh of resignation many have shrugged as if to say, “Well, there’s nothing to be done. It’s just another service we lose because of where we live.”

Nothing could be further from the truth.

We may live in a rural, isolated area, but we are just as deserving of quality, local, affordable health-care and services as anyone else in America.

Mission has failed us. Many have overlooked us. Industries have ignored us. Government officials have slighted us. But we have the capacity to defy the odds.

Now is the time to make a difference in the small towns we love, because not to is to accept defeat. We must care for our own. We must join with a common goal to replace the services Mission is bent on eliminating.

Our community can pull together in such a way that it has not done since, perhaps, the building of our local hospital in the 1950s – the door-to-door effort that made the dream of having a local hospital a reality.

The force behind that effort still exists in these mountains. Though many say small towns are dying, I will persist.

They have just been sleeping. Let us wake up and get to work. A vibrant community that cares for its own is waiting to be rebuilt. Together.

**Chelsea Wilson Thayer is a native and resident of Bakersville.**

## MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL

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### Our Mission

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

We believe strong newspapers build strong communities – “Newspapers get things done!” Our primary goal is to publish distinguished and profitable community-oriented newspapers.

This mission will be accomplished through the teamwork of professionals dedicated to truth, integrity, loyalty, quality and hard work.

**Tom Wood, Chairman**     **Dink NeSmith, President**  
**Rachel Hoskins, Regional Publisher**

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