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BCBS contract expires with Mission Health

The break between Mission Health and Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina became reality last week, when the current agreement expired on Oct. 5.

Mission Health asked to renegotiate its contract with Blue Cross, but those discussions broke down over compensation levels earlier this year. According to statements, both sides have provided to Carolina Public Press.

Blue Cross Blue Shield spokesman Austin Vevurka told CPP last week that even if the two sides reached an agreement, customers would be affected.

Blue Cross Blue Shield is the largest health insurance provider in North Carolina. In addition to many individual customers and policies offered through corporate and nonprofit employers, Blue Cross is the health insurance provider for state and local government employees, including those working in education.

Mission Health, based in Asheville, is the largest hospital company in the western portion of the state, with hospitals in Buncombe, Transylvania, Macon, McDowell, and Mitchell counties, as well as many smaller facilities throughout the region.

Both sides have pointed fingers at each other over the failure to reach an agreement.

Blue Cross has blamed Mission for being unwilling to negotiate, pointing out that no other major hospital operators have broken with the insurance company.

Asked why Mission was alone in not renewing its contract with Blue Cross, Rowena Buffett Timms, Mission's senior vice president of government and community relations, pushed back against that narrative in a statement to CPP last week.

"The premise of this question is simply not true," she said. "That's based on BCBSNC speaking points and not reality."

She described negotiations between health providers and insurers are more common than Blue Cross has implied in its statements, with more than 25 similar negotiations across the nation over the last year.

Mission's situation was different from that faced by many other providers because of its unique service area, Timms said.

"It's simply a fact that other providers across North Carolina are or will be negotiating with BCBSNC," Timms said. "However, very few face Mission Health's starkly challenging demographics." Timms also accused the insurance provider of playing hardball with health providers. "BCBSNC has used a strategy of intimidation and fear to keep most health systems 'in line,'" she said, noting that the insurance company's contracts are designed to renew automatically with no increase in compensation for hospitals, despite inflationary pressures. Hospitals can and do seek to negotiate changes, but Timms said the insurance company doesn't play fairly.

"We knew that BCBSNC had no incentive to negotiate in good faith - because of the auto-renewal with no (compensation) rate increase - and we could not accept their offer of a net payment reduction over three years

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Vigil held for closing of labor and delivery at Blue Ridge Hospital

By Mike Lamm

On September 30 the Labor and Delivery department at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital was officially closed. Despite concern expressed by local residents about the increased risk in childbirth that would result from pregnant mothers having to travel much further to Marion or Asheville while in labor, Mission Health refused to reconsider their decision. Consequently, over a hundred people gathered on the night of September 30 for a candlelight vigil for healthcare in Yancey and Mitchell counties.

Pastor Tommy James (First Baptist, Burnsville) began the service by praying, "We gather here at this place and at this time to grieve together as a community. We grieve because of the injustices of corrupt systems that place profit above people. We gather to grieve because of even greater hardships that will be placed on poor families who are already struggling. We pray for little babies and mothers who lives might be in danger. We pray for healthcare workers who will lose their jobs and whose families have been disrupted by the closing of labor and delivery at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital. We turn to you because so many politicians don't care - we turn to you because of the pain inflicted by corrupt systems that exploit the vulnerable among us."

Pastor Bill Whiteside (Vian's Valley Presbyterian) gave a moving reading from Psalm 38 including "My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior."

Pastor Jeremy Troxler (Spruce Pine Methodist) recalled the story of children



On September 30 the Labor and Delivery department at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital was officially closed. Over a hundred people gathered on the night of September 30 for a candlelight vigil for healthcare in Yancey and Mitchell counties. Photo by Britt Kaufmann

being brought to Jesus (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). He said, "We stand here tonight keeping vigil to mark the end of Labor and Delivery services at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital. As a Christian pastor, I am here because I take Jesus at his word: that the degree to which a person or a community is willing to welcome children is the degree to which it is willing to welcome God. I am here because of my concern that the closing of local Labor and Delivery hurts the well-being of vulnerable children in our community: and because I want to be part of a community that does everything it can to provide blessing and healing for every child born into this world. We give thanks for holy moments in which parents and grandparents laid eyes on the face of their infant for the first time. We express our gratitude for all of those doctors, and nurses, and staff who have served in the history of Labor and Delivery. We have gathered to lament. We grieve that our mothers will not be able to give

care close to home. But as we light candles tonight, we do so in part to express a hope: the hope that this vigil is not merely a wake - but that . . . we might one day be a community again that does everything in its power to take Jesus at his word, and to welcome the little children."

Pastor Whiteside read about Jesus healing a leper (Mark 1:40-44), a woman who had been unable to straighten her back for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-13), and Jesus healing crowds of sick people (Matthew 9:35-36).

Pastor Mike Lamm (retired Presbyterian minister) spoke about the miracles of Jesus, noting that three-fourths of the individual miracles cured illness or disability. In addition, there are sixteen passages that tell of crowds of people coming to Jesus to be healed. When those are taken into account, we realize that all but a tiny fraction of the miracles of Jesus were healthcare miracles. None of his miracles were enormous spectacular events like the

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Drug Take Back Day gets great results

By Jeff Spargo
Program Coordinator

The Drug Take-Back Day on Saturday, September 23rd, sponsored by the Mitchell-Yancey Drug Abuse Task Force, was a success! Between the drugs collected at the take-back and those collected at the permanent drug drop boxes in Burnsville, a total of 71 pounds was brought in. This is 71 pounds that won't end up in the hands of children and youth; 71 pounds that will not be diverted and sold on the streets; 71 pounds which won't tempt people to experiment. Thank you to all who volunteered time at the Take-Back, who helped advertise and who brought in prescriptions! BIG thank you to the Prescription Pad of Burnsville, Yancey Sheriff's Department and Burnsville PD for partnering to make this event a reality. We are also especially thankful for Project Lazarus who provided funding for advertising materials for this event!

It was also reported that Mitchell County Sheriff's office has recently collected an additional 74 pounds of prescription drugs in their permanent drop boxes as well.

Recently, the Task Force Leadership Team was invited to take part in a World News radio interview with BBC News. Detective Brian Shuford of the Yancey Sheriff's Office, PATH Director Schell McCall and myself met in Celso with two gentlemen who were here from London doing a BBC series on masculinity and substance use. Several communities throughout North Carolina were chosen for this piece - somehow, Yancey County ended up on their radar. However they found us, we are thrilled to have had the opportunity to represent our community in the world news and to get the word out about the importance of communities working together to prevent substance use disorders. The interview will be aired sometime in November - we will keep you posted!

Thank you to law enforcement in both Mitchell and Yancey Counties for all of your work in preventing substance misuse behaviors in the community!

Register to vote by Friday

This Friday, October 13th is the deadline for registering if you plan on voting in the upcoming town election on November 7th. All residents of the Town of Burnsville who are currently registered to vote with the Yancey County Board of Elections may vote in this election. Voters will choose a Mayor and two council seats, all for four-year terms.

Polls will open from 6:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m. at the Burnsville Town Center. Any town resident who wishes to vote in this election but is not currently registered to vote must register on or before 5:00 p.m. on Friday the 13th.

Voters, who have moved outside their precinct but still remain within the town of Burnsville, need to notify the Yancey County Board of Elections in writing by 5 p.m. on October 13th. Absentee ballots will not be allowed.

For more information contact the Yancey County Board of Elections at 682-3950, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. or by email at yancey.boe@gmail.com.

Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Regional Library System receives grant

Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Regional Library System has embarked on an exciting new project which will impact all public library locations, Pre-K, and Kindergarten programs in 3 counties, thanks to a People in Need Grant from The Yancey Fund and The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina. The program 'One World, Many Stories' is a research-based collection development project and storytime program that features quality, diverse literature and mindfulness/movement activities for Pre-K and Kindergarten children. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends libraries house literature that has "representations of different aspects of daily life within a culture, with particular attention given to aspects of setting and racial relevance." Research tells us that by the time children are preschool age, "they make choices based on race, about with whom to play and how" (NAEYC). When libraries have culturally rich and racially diverse literature, communities have a better opportunity to foster attitudes of respect and tolerance.

All AMY Library locations will undergo significant children's collection updates, which means brand new, beautiful books for children to check out. As AMY Director Amber Westall Briggs shares, "With this grant, our libraries have an opportunity to be intentional with developing a multicultural collection we know will give

our children a more accurate representation of the world." AMY Regional Children's Librarian Karen Dobrogosz, who has recently been certified as a Childlight Yoga Instructor, has developed a 'Many Stories' storytime program using new books, new yoga mats, and yoga/movement resources to infuse her storytime into a dynamic, physical and brain nurturing experience, perfect for active children.

Scientific research shows that yoga for children "increases strength and flexibility, increases respect for self and others, improves attitudes, aids sleep and digestion, and promotes an overall sense of well-being." So far, children are loving the experience and loving how they feel. Ms. Karen is taking her children's storytimes into Pre-K and Kindergarten programs, so that all children, who cannot attend storytime programming at our library locations, have an opportunity to experience these sessions.

The outreach pilot program has initially begun in Yancey County but will be in Mitchell and Avery Counties as well. In addition, storytime packets with books and thematic resources will be given to each school so that these yoga/movement multicultural storytimes can continue, even without Ms. Karen.

The AMY Library System expresses the sincerest thanks to The Yancey Fund for funding this collection development process and the 'One World, Many Stories' program.



The Yancey Fund and The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina recently presented the Regional Library System with a grant. Pictured above at the presentation are Ron Powell, Bill Cullom, and Amber Westall-Briggs.



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Shane Wesley Watson plays at St. Thomas Episcopal

By Carol Thomas
Shane Wesley Watson, a two-time-fiddling-winner at the Charleston Highland Games competition, has just signed on to lead the music program at St. Thomas Episcopal Church.

One might think that as the great nephew of Doc Watson, a seven-time Grammy winner for his songwriting and guitar playing, young Shane might have specialized in guitar.

"Matter of fact, the guitar was the first instrument I ever had," said Watson, now 28. But it wasn't my favorite. When I was a kid, dad took me to see Doc once, hoping he would help me, but it didn't work out."

What Shane Watson did know was that he loved music.

"I guess the first thing I remember is my mom singing in the car," Watson said. "She

would sing 'Doe, a Deer' from 'The Sound of Music'. She said I tore up a VCR rewinding 'Lion King' so I could listen to the music."

It took him a while to find his favorite instrument, and he learned to master others along the way: Violin in the fifth-grade orchestra at Parkway Elementary in Boone and trumpet in the sixth grade, organ in high school, then piano at Appalachian State, where he will graduate with a major in organ and sacred music this fall.

But then, there's the fiddle.

"I didn't play the fiddle much until a school trip to Ireland to study music. I went twice. That's about the time I found out my family wasn't Irish. We were Scots and came to this country even before the

Scotch-Irish.

"When I returned from Ireland I went to the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games for the first time. I fell in love with it."



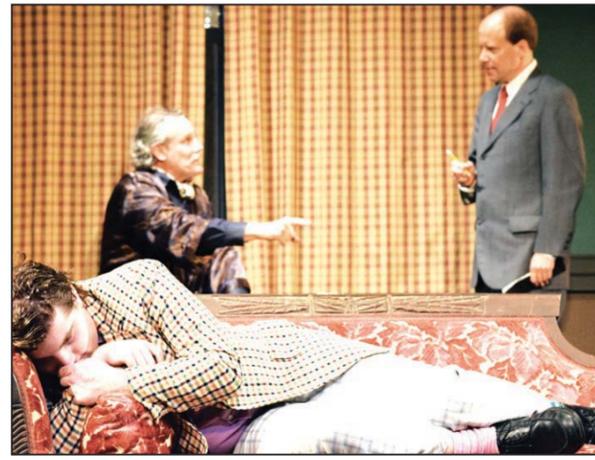
Shane Wesley Watson

On a recent Sunday, With the early fall breeze coming in through the windows at St. Thomas, the congregation sat transfixed as the young red-bearded musician picked up his fiddle and played the medley of march, strathspey, and reel that helped him win his most recent Highlands competition. Some described the moment as "magical."

Watson will go on to East Tennessee State and focus on Scottish-Irish studies, with an ultimate goal of teaching at the university level. But for now, he is enjoying playing piano and fiddle for the sacred music at St. Thomas. "This is a special place," he said. "I like the feeling of community at St. Thomas. I like being a part of it."

St. Thomas Episcopal Church is at 372 Reservoir Rd. in Burnsville, up the hill behind CVS. Sunday service is at 10:30 a.m. The church and Shane Watson welcome all.

Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap" at Playhouse



Don't spend the weekend on your couch! Come see how Christopher Wren (played by Dakota Mann) deals with the murder and mystery swirling around him in *The Mousetrap*. Pictured in the background are Rob Storrs as Mr. Paravicini and Steve Elderbrock as Detective Trotter. Parkway Playhouse presents Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* is running through October 14. Tickets are available at www.parkwayplayhouse.com or by calling 828-682-4285.

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Toe River Arts host weekend of recognition

The Toe River Arts Council's current exhibit featuring the works submitted by local and regional artists in several mediums will set the backdrop for a reception on Friday, October 13, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Spruce Pine Gallery, 269 Oak Avenue. Artists and guests will mingle, enjoy a glass of wine as they view the range, quality, and beauty of the exhibited work. They can also vote for their favorite piece.

Upstairs, the Art/Estate Sale continues (through Saturday at 5 p.m.) with over 500 art and estate items spread out on tables and priced to sell during this last fundraising event of 2017.

Amidst all the artworks downstairs and the sale items upstairs, TRAC will hold a naming ceremony for a philanthropist, Dottie Owen, whose generous donation paid off the mortgage at the Spruce Pine

facility. At 5:30 pm on Friday, we will gather to name the great room on the second floor.

The main gallery show will continue through November 4. Special people's choice awards voted on by visitors during the exhibit, will be presented after the show closes.

For over 40 years, the arts council has worked to connect the arts and the community with programs and experiences that set this Blue Ridge region apart from other areas of the country and make this region a destination for the arts. Come support the Arts Council in a weekend of fun meandering around the tables and maybe picking up a

great deal or two, viewing art from around the region in the main gallery, and recognizing the generosity of donors who help to make it all possible.

The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Art/Estate Sale starts with a special \$5 admission preview and sale on Thursday (October 12) from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. then continues with free viewing and buying Friday (October 13) from 10:30 a.m. until 7 p.m. and Saturday (October 14) from 10:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. For more information on Toe River Arts, please visit the website, toeriverarts.org, or call 828-682-7215.

Vigil held for closing of hospital services *continued from page 1*

nation-wide plagues that Moses delivered to Egypt.

In fact, we are told of times when Jesus purposely healed in private and when he told those he cured to not tell anybody. We only know of two times that Jesus knew the person he healed and there are many times when there is no mention that anyone had faith. Jesus was indiscriminate in who he healed: young and old, rich and poor, male and female, Israelite and foreigner. People weren't required to prove that they were worthy.

While people were impressed by the ability of Jesus to heal, Jesus was less motivated by wanting to impress people than he was by compassion for their suffering (Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13; Matthew 9:35-36 and others). He recognized that all people are precious in God's sight (Matthew 6:26). And Jesus taught that we are to treat other people in the way that we hope they will treat us (the "golden rule," Luke 6:31). "If we claim to have faith then there are moral issues that must be addressed if we are to be found faithful.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31, Jesus made it clear that the extent to which we overlook the

illness of others is a moral issue. Healthcare is a moral issue. And if you consider yourself to be a person of faith, it is a faith issue."

As everyone's candles were being lit, Pastor Travis Wynkoop (Griffith Chapel) read the words to the song, "Light One Candle" followed by Galatians 5:14; Matthew 25:34-40; James 2:15-17 and Matthew 7:12. Then he spoke eloquently about having been born at the hospital in Spruce Pine and closed the service with a powerful prayer. The crowd sat in candlelit prayerful silence for several minutes.

The Vigil for Healthcare was co-sponsored by SEARCH (www.searchwnc.org) and by the Yancey-Mitchell branch of the NAACP. SEARCH (Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare) is a recently formed organization of concerned citizens that seeks to "empower greater involvement in decisions affecting the healthcare of our residents" and "to preserve, strengthen and expand access to essential medical services in our area."

The Yancey-Mitchell NAACP mission "is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of rights of all persons."

BCBS/ Mission Health contract expires *Continued from page 1*

or an auto-renewal at the same rates," Timms said.

"Mission simply cannot absorb large inflationary increases or our input costs - drugs, supplies and so forth - without very modest rate increases in our contract to keep up with the rising costs of healthcare," she said.

"One wonders why BCBSNC is pushing through double-digit and mid-single-digit increases to its customers while demanding Mission Health take less than currently. That is nonsensical and we are simply asking BCBSNC to pay its fair share."

Not surprisingly, Vevurka at Blue Cross characterized the situation differently. He noted that it was Mission Health, and only Mission Health among other hospital providers across North Carolina, who had walked away from continued talks.

"We offered Mission the same quality-based contract

terms more than 40 other hospitals and health systems agreed to," Vevurka said.

"We're committed to finding ways to slow down rising costs and improve quality of care.

BRRH outpatient services update

Both infusions and injections are and will continue to be offered at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital in the same area as the Labor & Delivery unit.

According to a recent press release from Mission Health, all outpatient services will be offered Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. The announcement was made October 2. After obtaining a physician order, for scheduling an appointment, call the scheduling department at (828) 766-1760. For questions about services offered, call (828) 766-3716.



Making Each Moment Count

In keeping with our promise to provide the highest quality of care, we utilize an independent surveyor who contacts families to ask about their satisfaction with our service.

The following areas were assessed:

100% Would recommend this hospice

100% Hospice team listened carefully to patient/caregiver

100% Patient and family is treated with dignity and respect

100% Hospice team genuinely cared about patients welfare

100% Patient and family was provided with emotional support

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