

**LESSON ABOUT HISTORY**



NEWS-JOURNAL PHOTO/CORY SPIERS

Third-grade students from Gouge Elementary wait for their turn to tour the historic Little Poplar Schoolhouse at Mitchell High School.



NEWS-JOURNAL PHOTO/CORY SPIERS

Third-grade students from Gouge Elementary during their visit to the historic Little Poplar Schoolhouse at Mitchell High School.

# Our quality of life, not just our healthcare, is at stake

I've reheated my coffee four times today and haven't had a sip. Though messy buns may be the hairstyle du jour among Hollywood's in-crowd, mine is out of necessity and is not in any way, shape or form fashionable.



**Chelsea THAYER**

I'm not exactly sure which day this week I showered, but I swear I took one at some point. If this sounds familiar or describes you then we are a part of the same club — moms of little children. As a mom of four kiddos myself, I depend on a steady supply of coffee and Jesus to get through the day.

On this day, I set out with the goal of writing an op-ed on rural healthcare but sitting down at my computer I have concluded I can't. I just can't. I can't write about the state of healthcare in our region when more businesses are closing.

I can't write about the state of healthcare in these beloved mountains when more families are moving away. I can't write about the state of healthcare while my friends are deliberating where they should give birth and whether a drive down the mountain is too risky in the wintertime. These

are real people and my words about these very real and grim situations don't do them justice. I can't write about the state of healthcare because it is intertwined with so much more.

It is not just healthcare at stake here. It is quality of life. I chose to plant my family in Mitchell County for many reasons, the least of which being that my roots are here. Truly, it was longing for a small town and the quality of life that comes with it that made me long for the mountains. And that quality of life is in serious jeopardy.

Small-town living is not for everyone. But I am quite certain every person can agree it is in small towns we find so much of what we love about our country.

"Mom-and-pop" stores, the local pizza shop, small-town Christmas parades and the Friday night ballgames at the high school. All those places

and people give quality to our lives. But, today, I find myself bemoaning the fact yet another business I love is closing its doors. Businesses closing, families leaving, vital services (like healthcare) slipping away. How? Why?

Like many of you, I find myself groping for answers and coming up with few things I know for certain. Like, dang, I'm going to be missing some good cheesy bread come January. Or the knowledge families I have come to know and admire have been forced to leave since the closure of labor and delivery at our local hospital.

It was brought to my attention recently with the new year, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital may no longer have doctors on staff at night. Sure, there will be physicians in the emergency room, but not in the hospital itself. It may not matter to you until you, or someone you love, is staying overnight. Then it will matter a great deal. Another service lost.

Another card dealt against our small town. Like watching dominoes, I shudder to think what will fall next.

This is where you come in. This is why SEARCH

began. SEARCH, Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare, began in response to the closure of labor and delivery at BRRH but has expanded to so much more. SEARCH is comprised of local citizens, clergy members and healthcare professionals that care about the quality of life here in the mountains. SEARCH knows every decision made by those at Mission affects more than just those people receiving the services eliminated.

Every decision that overlooks the people of this area in favor of fattening wallets trickles down to each of us.

No one is excluded. Jobs are lost. Families leave. Small businesses lose necessary patrons. Another business closes its doors.

How can we combat this? The first step is to get involved. Attend a SEARCH meeting. Talk to your neighbors.

Relay your concerns to your pastor, your county commissioner or your physician.

You deserve to be heard. You deserve a purpose-filled life and access to quality, accessible, and affordable healthcare. The next SEARCH

meeting will be 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 5, at First Baptist Church of Burnsville.

I hope to be there, messy bun and all, doing what I can to improve the quality of life for my family and

the lives of all that call the mountains home. Now please excuse me while I reheat my coffee.

**Chelsea Wilson Thayer is a Bakersville resident and SEARCH member.**

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## Meeting set about Overmountain Victory Trail

SPRUCE PINE – The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, or OVNHT, runs through Avery and Mitchell counties from Yellow Mountain Gap on Roan Mountain down through Spruce Pine to Gillespie Gap on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Phase one of the trail at Grassy Creek is complete and consists of a trail and boardwalk along the creek with picnic areas, a kiosk

with trail history and a disk golf course. Grassy Creek, between Spruce Pine and the Parkway, was once known as Cathy's Plantation and was the Sept. 28, 1780, encampment of the Overmountain men on their march to defeat the British at the famous Battle of Kings Mountain.

Phase two of the project will build the OVNHT from Grassy Creek to downtown

Spruce Pine's Riverside Park, linking two commercial districts and parks by trail.

Phase two is partially funded by an EPA 319 grant, the NC Department of Transportation, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Samuel L. Phillips Family Foundation and the NC Division of Water Resources.

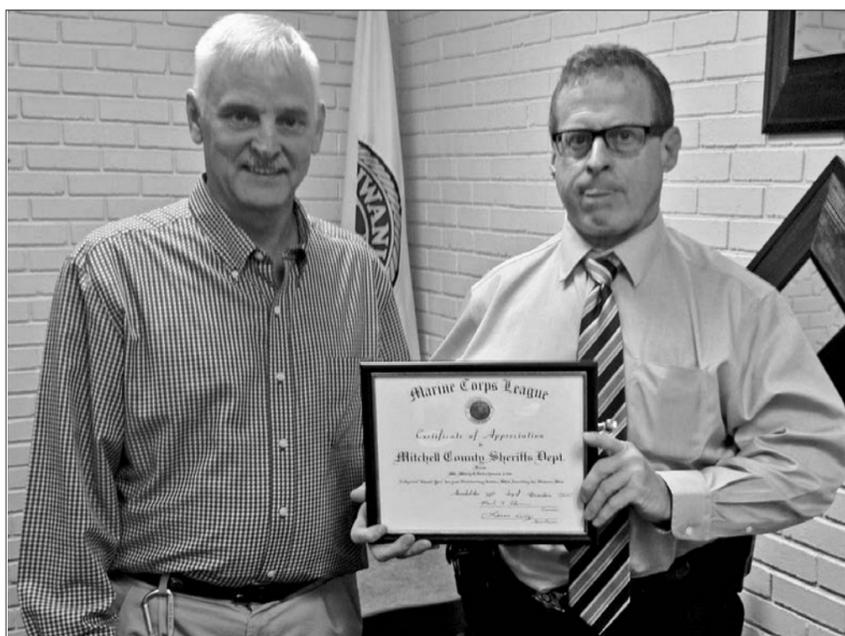
Many local organizations, businesses and land-

owners have been crucial to the project's success. Another critical partner is the National Park Service.

A public informational meeting about the trail is scheduled from 4-5 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 14, at the Cross Street Commerce Center in Spruce Pine.

Call Toe River Partnership Executive Director Starli McDowell at 828-385-2688 for more information.

## MARINE CORPS LEAGUE



NEWS-JOURNAL PHOTO/BRANDON ROBERTS

Marine Corps League 1266 Commandant Mark Thomas, left, presents a Certificate of Appreciation to Mitchell County Sheriff Donald Street in recognition of the sheriff's office assistance escorting the traveling Vietnam Memorial wall.



**Registration is open for the Spring Semester**

**Classes begin January 4**

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Questions? Call 828.766.1234

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