



Your Community-Minded Newspaper

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Attention personal property owners in Yancey

All owners of taxable personal property situated in Yancey County must submit a listing form to the Yancey County Tax Office during the month of January.

Taxable personal property includes but not limited to vehicles not currently registered with the division of motor vehicles (cars, trucks, buses, motorcycles, towable campers, mobile homes) apportioned (IRP) trucks and buses, permanently tagged trailers, boats, watercraft, aircraft and business personal property assets.

Anyone who owns any of these items situated in Yancey County as of January 1, 2017, must list them with the tax office before five p.m. Wednesday, January 31, 2017.

If you do not receive a listing form in the mail you may come by the tax office during regular hours Monday through Friday except holidays 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. to request a form. A ten percent late listing penalty will apply to properties not listed during the listing period.



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the Yancey Times Journal

Santa was in Burnsville at the Town Center recently and hundreds of area children got to tell Ole Saint Nick just what they had on their wish list for Christmas. Christmas is a time for giving, and we here at the Times Journal hope our readers reach out to family and friends at this special time of the year. We also hope you will open your hearts to those who are lonely and in need, citizens less fortunate than ourselves and our brave soldiers working to preserve peace in our great nation. Merry Christmas! Photo by Jamie McMahan

Mission standoff with Blue Cross heavily affected public employees

Now that Mission Health and Blue Cross Blue Shield have resolved a long contract dispute, public employees will soon be able to use their taxpayer-funded insurance plans at the region's largest health care provider, according to the Carolina Public Press.

All state employees receive their health insurance benefits through Blue Cross Blue Shield, meaning that thousands of taxpayer-funded plans were effectively useless since October 5 in parts of Western North Carolina where Mission Health is the dominant provider.

Mission and Blue Cross announced a new contract agreement on Dec. 5 in a joint statement, saying "both parties are pleased to reach agreement on the mutual goal of ensuring that the people of Western North Carolina receive the affordable, quality health care that they need."

The new agreement took effect on Friday, Dec. 15. Hundreds of thousands of Blue Cross customers were unable to use their insurance plans at Mission Health facilities when a contract between the hospital and the

insurer expired in October, leading to several rounds of negotiations and both sides publicly trading barbs about which organizations were holding up a new agreement. Mission claimed that Blue Cross reimbursement rates were too low when coupled with rising health care costs as a whole.

Blue Cross pointed to service agreements it has with dozens of other hospitals across the state in an attempt to show that its policies weren't out of line.

The termination of the contract meant that the insurer's customers could still use Mission facilities, but their health care would be considered "out-of-network" and would cost much more than when the agreement was in place.

Despite the new contract, those Blue Cross customers who chose to continue visiting Mission facilities in the months when an agreement wasn't in place will likely have to foot the bill for those services at the out-of-network rate.

"Services and care received between Oct. 5 and Dec. 15 will generally be

processed as out-of-network unless it is an emergency or approved through the Continuity of Care program," Blue Cross spokesman Austin Vevurka said, in an email to CPP.

"In an emergency, Blue Cross NC customers should always go to the nearest hospital. Emergency care is always covered as an in-network benefit. Prior authorization is never required for emergency care.

If an admission to the hospital is medically necessary after an emergency room visit at a Mission Health facility, we will process these benefits as in-network."

The terms of the new contract, including the amount of time covered by the agreement, have not been disclosed by representatives of either party. Blue Cross said on its website that it can't guarantee that a similar situation won't arise in the future.

"While we cannot promise that a situation like this will not happen again, we can promise that we will continue to fight to make health care more affordable for our customers," Vevurka said.

Community Committee Election results

The Mitchell-Yancey Farm Service Agency (FSA) Office would like to announce the results of the 2017 County Committee elections. Elections were held in LAA-3 (Red Hill, Bradshaw, Poplar and Harrell townships) and LAA-5 (Prices Creek, Cane River, Egypt and Ramseytown townships) this year.

Mitchell County farmers in LAA-3 elected Donald Miller to be their representative on the County Committee. Barbara Smith will serve as the 1st alternate. Yancey County farmers

in LAA-5 selected Harold Davis to represent them. Michael E Edwards will serve as the 1st alternate and William Randolph will serve as the 2nd alternate.

FSA County Committee members provide an important link between the local agricultural community and USDA. Farmers and ranchers elected to county committees help deliver FSA programs at the local level, applying their knowledge and judgment to make decisions on commodity support programs; conservation programs; indemnity and disaster programs;

emergency programs and eligibility. County Committees operate within official regulations designed to carry out federal programs.

For more information about County Committee elections, please contact the Mitchell-Yancey FSA office at 11943 S 226 Hwy, Spruce Pine, NC 28777, or by calling (828) 765-5049 or 682-0774. Producers may also visit the FSA website at www.fsa.usda.gov. For information about USDA's Farm Bill implementation plan, visit www.usda.gov/farmbill.

Commissioners hold final meeting for 2017

The December Yancey County Commissioners meeting had a long agenda. Here are the highlights.

The Commissioners unanimously re-elected Commissioner Johnny Riddle as chairman and Commissioner Jill Austin as vice-chairman of the Board for this coming year.

Commissioner Riddle was also reappointed to the High Country Rural Planning Organization's Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC). This is the regional organization that makes recommendations to the NCDOT for statewide and regional transportation projects in all modes of transportation. County Manager Nathan Bennett currently serves as chairman of the RPO's Technical Coordinating Committee (RTCC) which is made up of staff from the 7-county region to make recommendations to the RTAC.

EDC Director Jamie McMahan gave the Commissioners an update on a building reuse grant on a project in the White Oak Community. The Board authorized the state grant application to be prepared and submitted to the Building Reuse Program.

The company is responsible for putting the application together and provide all the documents for the required commitments. This is a state grant in the amount of \$60,000. The company owner is committed to matching the state award dollar for dollar. The State requires the County (or if appropriate a municipality) to sponsor the application and provide a small local match of 5% - in this case, the County is committing up to \$3,000 if the grant is awarded. If the Company gets all the information together and submits the application timely, notification of award will be in February. McMahan also updated the Board on a sewer extension contract for the new Blue Ridge Elementary School, now under construction in Cane River. The contract to employ Civil Design Concepts (CDC)

was unanimously approved by the Commissioners. This contract specifically provides for the design and permitting a portion of the project to extend municipal sewer service from the area near Altec along Cane River School Road to the under-construction Blue Ridge Elementary site and to Cane River Middle School. The proposed contract included in the agenda packet was modified to correct the required elements in the portion of the project reducing the contract price to \$110,000. This contract is for design and permitting only. The proposed contract had included construction elements that are not part of this scope of work.

Nathan Bennett told Commissioners about the renewal of the county's contract to operate the license plate agency in Burnsville. The commissioners unanimously approved the renewal of the contract between Yancey County and the NC Division of Motor Vehicles to continue operation of the license plate agency for an 8-year term. The county has been the contract operator the LPA serving Yancey County and the surrounding area since September 2012. This contract runs through September 2025.

Other items in Bennett's report included a request from the NC Department of Health and Human Services for comments from the County in regards to an application from Mission Hospital to renew the hospital's designation as a Level II trauma center. Recognizing that Mission serves Yancey County, the state is asking if the county has specific concerns regarding any aspect of the Mission's trauma program or related delivery of care. The Commissioners, nor county staff, are aware of any concerns with Mission's delivery of trauma care, and does not oppose the state's renewal of the Level II designation. Comments are being accepted until January 5, 2018.

The Yancey County Detention Center had its normal semiannual inspection by the

NC Department of Health and Human Services on November 14th. There were no deficiencies or issues of concern found by the state inspectors. State law requires that jails and other places of confinement be inspected two times per year to ensure compliance with state and federal rules and regulations. Bennett commends the sheriff's detention center leadership and staff and county maintenance staff for the ensuring the safe and secure operation of the county jail.

A resolution supporting beautification enhancement efforts along Hwy. 19 corridor through Yancey County was on the agenda. The resolution stated in part, "The Town of Burnsville and Yancey County desire beautification to the completed improvements along Highway 19E as it passes through Yancey County and the Town of Burnsville, particularly at gateways to the Town at Hwy. 19E intersection with West Main Street, South Main, and East Main. Commissioners wish to work in concert with the NCDOT to develop a vision of beautification to those areas. There was no action taken on the NCDOT Landscaping resolution. The Town of Burnsville is the lead on this and they did not address the resolution at their December meeting, so the commissioners tabled any discussion until the Town decides how it is going to move forward with NCDOT.

Commissioners considered four changes to the County personnel policy which included: deleting the County's contribution to the Health Savings Accounts following the transition to the State Health Plan, defining the maximum contribution to retirees health insurance, adding "step parent" to the definition of immediate family as listed in the policy and providing bereavement and court leave to permanent part-time employees working less than thirty hours per week under specific circumstances. The next Commissioners meeting is scheduled for January. 8.