

**Online POLL**

Were you affected by Florence-related weather? Visit [www.mitchellnews.com](http://www.mitchellnews.com) to answer and our Facebook page to leave a response.

**OPINION**

**LAST WEEK'S POLL RESULTS**

Will you no longer purchase Nike merchandise?  
**YES: 55% NO: 45%**

**NEWS-JOURNAL EDITORIAL**

**Consider yourself lucky if you're reading this**

An article posted recently on Bloomberg.com is titled, "Local News Is Dying, and It's Taking Small Town America With It." Less than one-fifth of news stories have anything to do with your community, carrying serious consequences for social cohesion, voting and even bonds, according to the article.

It has created an abundance of what the article deemed "news deserts," cities and towns where local coverage is lacking or absent. As newspaper circulation continues to decline along with ad revenue and newsroom employment, a common casualty is the expen-

sive, time-consuming practice of original reporting.

Without journalists digging through property records or attending city council meetings, looking for official wrongdoing and revealing secret deals, local politicians could operate unchecked – with predictable consequences. But the fallout is much more significant than just keeping government honest.

Studies have shown communities without quality local news coverage see lower rates of voter turnout. Communities where newspapers have shut down have even seen their municipal bond costs rise,

suggesting an increase in government expense due to a lack of transparency. More broadly, communities without serious local news coverage demonstrate less social cohesion, corroding any actual sense of community.

A study published in August by Duke University's DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy found the quantity and quality of local news stories lacks across the country with just 17 percent of stories produced by local outlets based on events that occurred nearby. And more than half of their news reports originated somewhere else, such as some

type of wire service.

The study used U.S. Census data to identify almost 500 communities with 20,000 to 300,000 residents and randomly selected 100 of them. The analysis surveyed 16,000 stories produced by print, radio, television and digital media from both English and non-English outlets, found through media databases and manual searches.

To keep pace with a changing and consolidating media ecosystem, many local news outlets have dedicated their limited resources to covering and aggregating national stories reported by the national

news organizations.

As a result, only 11 percent of the surveyed news stories were local, original and addressed hard news, the report shows. And some outlets stopped producing stories about their local communities altogether.

Only about 1-in-10 news stories produced by outlets that serve smaller communities were original, local and addressed a critical information need.

As a result, it seems as though News-Journal readers are lucky to have a community newspaper, and we are happy to be still providing this unique product.

**There's a story there somewhere**

Any annual event gets more difficult to cover as the years go on. Some stories about these events are nearly the same as a result, but they are important to our readers and our community so we will continue covering them.

Sometimes we find a unique or interesting story hidden inside these repeated assignments. I am always intrigued and amazed by the art and artists

of this area. At the 2016 Spruce Pine Potters Market, I noticed a type of art that was unlike any I had ever seen. That intrigue turned into the story about Jeannine Marchand and her clay folds (Aug. 9, 2017). This routine assignment was the catalyst for a unique story about an artist and her art form. It's the type of story for which we are always searching.

Another story we published recently spawned a phone call from an avid

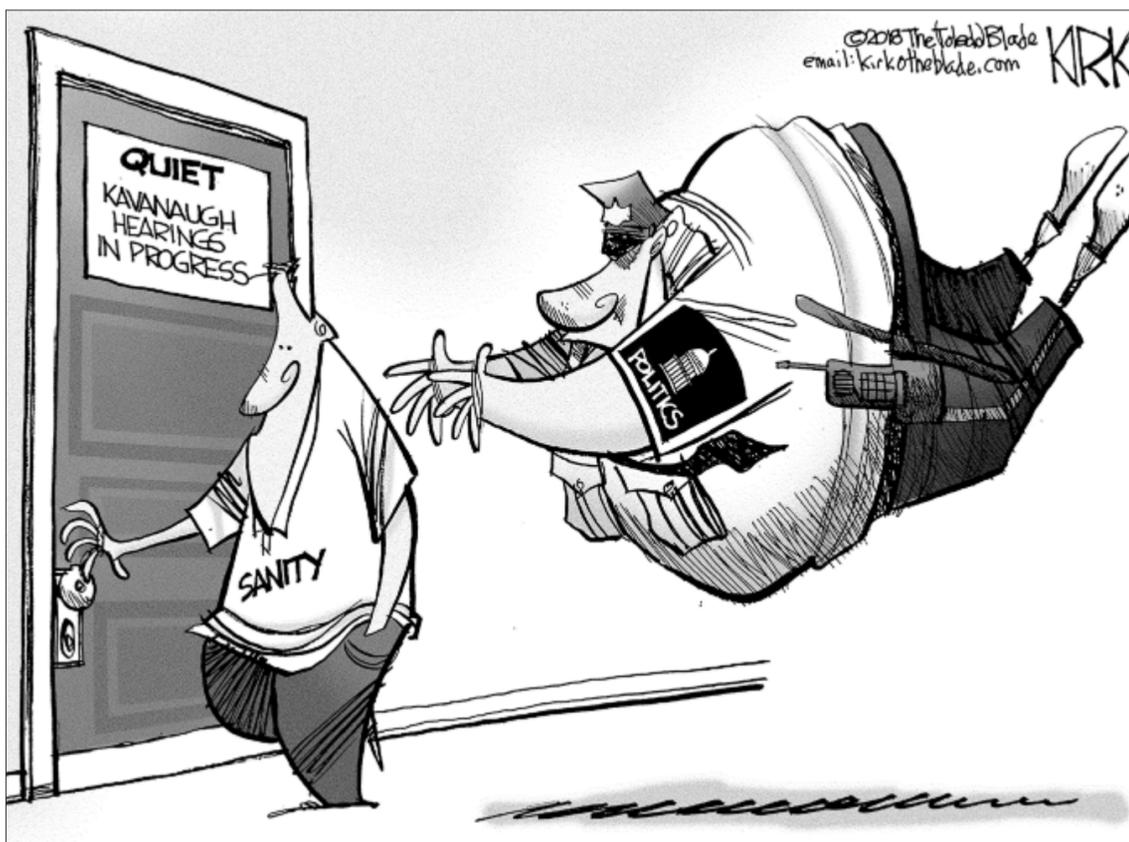
kayaker in Bakersville. He was asking about the story, but as the conversation went on, he tells me he had just returned from kayaking the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. "I have to put something about that in the paper," I told him as he disclosed more of the details about the trip. So, look for that one in an upcoming edition.

There are no stories too big or small for a community newspaper. It would be impossible to produce a quality product each week if we thought all our stories have to be hard-hitting, scandal-busting New York Times-type investigation pieces or if we just reprinted the emails we get about events. There are remarkable stories all over the place in Mitchell County just as there is anywhere else. Printing as many of those stories as we can not only provides our readers with a better sense of community but also makes us a better community newspaper.

**Brandon Roberts is publisher and editor of the News-Journal. He can be reached by email at [editor@mitchellnews.com](mailto:editor@mitchellnews.com) or by calling 828-765-7169.**



**Brandon ROBERTS**



**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**Voice your opinion about Mission sale**

**Dear editor:**  
 There is much to like in the deal struck between Mission Health System and HCA Healthcare – at least in the broad outlines released so far.

HCA has agreed not to close or sell acute care hospitals such as Blue Ridge Regional for at least five years. Emergency rooms would be maintained for at least 10 years. Given the precarious state of the nation's medical system and the pressures on rural hospitals, in particular, those protections are quite attractive.

If the full-text agreement backs up the public pronouncements – with no hidden loopholes or escape clauses – Mission will have lived up to its pledge to protect its rural hospitals. If the guarantees are solid, and if HCA faces real, severe penalties for breaking its word, rural residents can breathe at least a momentary sigh of relief.

That "if," however, is huge. The people of Western North Carolina have too much at stake to accept the proposed sale from a few broad-brush promises. The basic text of the sales agreement has now been made public (though without many important appendices) so now people may read, digest and comment on it before the deal is finalized. SEARCH has posted it on its website, [searchwnc.org](http://searchwnc.org).

Making the sales agreement public was one of three conditions outlined in a resolution adopted by the membership of SEARCH (Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare). Unless all the conditions are met, SEARCH will urge North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein to reject the sale. SEARCH invites other groups and individuals throughout the region to do the same.

The other two conditions are:  
 • HCA must agree, if it chooses to stop operating Blue Ridge as an acute care hospital after the five-year period, it will return the hospital to the community at no cost; and  
 • The board of the Dogwood Health Trust, which will receive the money

from the sale, must be truly independent of both Mission and HCA. That means eight of the nine people named so far, all of whom have deep ties to Mission, must be disqualified. The attorney general should engage a search firm, at Mission's expense, to build a community-centered board.

The deal is now under review by the Attorney General. His office has invited people affected by the sale, which includes everyone in Mission's 18-county service area, to send him their opinions.

The best way to do that is via the public comment form on [ncdoj.gov](http://ncdoj.gov). Look for the "contact us" tab in the top right corner.

Visit [searchwnc.org](http://searchwnc.org) for the full text of SEARCH's resolution and many other documents exploring the pros and cons of the proposed sale.

**Susan Larson**  
 SEARCH executive team

**Thanks to those who helped with festival**

**Dear editor:**  
 On behalf of the 13th annual Carolina Mountains Literary Festival, I would like to thank everyone who helped make the Festival possible.

This year 35 authors presented to a crowd of around 400 people over the three-day event.

This would not have been possible without the 50-plus volunteers who with grace, competence and enthusiasm made the Festival run smoothly. I wish there were space to thank everyone individually.

We appreciate First Baptist Church, Nu Wray Inn, Snap Dragon, Toe River Arts, Town Center, Yummi Yarns and the Yancey Library for the use of their venues. We are grateful to Higgins United Methodist Church for the loan of chairs.

On behalf of the authors, we thank Kelly Rothe and Mountain Medical Arts for setting up the Author Lounge.

We thank Mitchell County Schools, Mountain Heritage High School and Spruce Pine Montessori for bringing students to the Festival. We thank Burnsville Elementary for inviting

authors to the school. We are grateful to the Yancey and Mitchell County senior centers and Avery High for participating in our Outreach Program.

The altered book centerpiece makers helped the banquet be unique and also raised funds for the Festival. We appreciate all who entered our art contest, the winner, Rhea Ormond, and Britt Kaufmann, our graphic designer.

Our gratitude goes to all our sponsors: AMY Regional Library, Arthur Morgan School, Anonymous, Larisse and Warren Bare, Cass and Jay Bevis, Biblio Inc., Kay Broughton, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, Marilyn Cade, David Cort, Bubba and Susan Crutchfield, Cruz Life Center, Lucy Doll, Donna Jean Dreyer, Everywhere Chair, Garden Deli and Snap Dragon, Becky and Charles Gillespie, Jane Goldthwait, Linda Goodwin and George Pfeffer, Jim and Margie Haaga, Homeplace Brewery, Paul Hoover, Jill's Hairport, Joyce Johnson, Britt Kaufmann and Chad Smoker, David and Susan Larson, Rob and Wanda Levin, Little Switzerland Books & Beans, Dotty Morgan and Paul Lundquist, George and Katherine Nero, Liz Peverall, Penny and Stephen Powell, Catherine Reid, Karin Rolett, Dr. and Mars Sansbury, Walter Savage, Jan Schilling, Something Special Gift Shop, David and Fran Strawn, Carol Thomas, Kat Turczyn, Kenneth Weda, Armin and Renee Wessel, Amber Westall Briggs, Yancey County Commissioners, Yancey Times-Journal, Yancey Graphics, and Young and McQueen Grading.

We are grateful for grants from the NC Arts Council, NC Humanities Council and the Yancey Fund.

I give myriads of thanks to my cohorts who worked year-round to make the festival happen: Deana Blanchard, Carol Clark, Caroline Christopolous, Lucy Doll, Chris Holobek, Jamie McMahan, Eliza Millard, Dawn Reid, Lisa Schultz, Amber Westall Briggs and Jill Winger.

We hope to see you at the 14th annual Carolina Mountains Literary Festival Sept. 5-7, 2019.

**Kathy Weisfeld**  
 Festival chair

**LETTERS POLICY**

The Mitchell News-Journal welcomes letters to the editor about 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 abide by the following 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;  
 • Letters must be original – no photocopies;  
 • Letters should be 500 words or fewer;  
 • We do not publish poems, excerpts from other publications, 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 at the discretion of the News-Journal.

**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.

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**Rachel Hoskins, Regional Publisher**  
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