

## EDITORIAL

# Asheville's next police chief must meet a high bar

There will be no soft landing for Debra Campbell when she becomes Asheville city manager next month. One of her first tasks will be to select the city's fourth police chief in the last eight years.

Three weeks to the day after Campbell's appointment was announced, Tammy Hooper resigned effective Jan. 2. Given that Campbell will have been on the job only a month, that means there probably will be an acting interim chief. That is just as well; it is vital that Campbell has time to make the right choice.

It's not easy being a police chief in today's world. In the storied past officers had little to worry about aside from cats up a tree and children with scraped knees from a fall. The real past was not that way, especially in neighborhoods of poverty, but legends die hard.

Today, officers must deal with a diverse population and widespread distrust of their efforts. They are being diverted away from the idea that public safety is measured by the number of arrests. Buncombe Sheriff-elect Quentin

Miller speaks of "changing the mindset from being warriors to guardians."

Each of the recent Asheville chiefs had problems. William Hogan retired in 1911 following strong criticism from then-District Attorney Ron Moore over missing guns and drugs from the police evidence room. William Anderson who retired in 2014, destroyed his credibility when he interfered in the investigation of a traffic accident involving his son.

Hooper almost quit in 2016 amid outcry over the fatal shooting of Jai "Jerry" Williams, an African-American man, by a white police officer. That shooting was eventually ruled justified but not until after considerable community unrest. Hooper would come under criticism anew when it was learned she had opened intelligence operations on two civil-rights groups.

The beating of Johnnie Rush, also African-American by a white officer in August of 2017 was in no way justified. The handling of that incident - the public was in the dark until someone leaked a police body-camera footage to the Citizen Times six months later - cost City

Manager Gary Jackson his job and probably figured significantly in Hooper's decision.

At the top of any new chief's agenda will be hacking away at the wall of mistrust between the police and the African-American community. Past chiefs have made various moves, including the community policing begun by Will Annarino, Hogan's predecessor, and the public-housing unit set up by Anderson. For every gain, however, there seems to be a setback.

The issue of traffic stops and searches illustrates the pressure police face from all sides. Asheville officers have kept on searching cars driven by African-Americans at a disproportionate rate even though contraband is found more often in cars driven by whites. Finally, the City Council ordered changes in procedures.

This led in turn to claims politicians were meddling in police affairs and pursuing an anti-law-enforcement agenda. We agree that elected officials in general should leave police alone to do their jobs. But in this case, they had no choice

**Today, officers must deal with a diverse population and widespread distrust of their efforts. They are being diverted away from the idea that public safety is measured by the number of arrests.**

but to mandate reforms.

One of Hooper's best moves was to institute de-escalating training to keep encounters from deteriorating into tragedies. The new chief should continue that program, and also look into the sort of pre-trial intervention program advocated by Sheriff-elect Miller, himself a long-time Asheville officer, to keep those accused of minor offenses out of the criminal-justice system.

Programs to fight crime without jailing people save money. More importantly, they help race relations in that African-Americans should benefit. We must remember that the goal of policing is to keep a community safe, and arrests are only one tool.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Under assumptions, find the real Asheville

Yesterday, outside of B&B Pharmacy in West Asheville, I was waiting for my bus downtown so that I could meet my mom for her birthday. An African American man with scruffy clothes approached me suddenly, and to my complete surprise asked if I had anything to contribute to his happy box. He told me how it worked. This was a special place for him, and people liked to add things to his happy box. This was his happy box. Did I have anything to add?

I looked down and saw a cigarette package (empty?), an old pair of socks, a mini-Bible and some other things. I reached into my bag and gave him something I had received from a client that I had never used - a special bag within a bag in the style of the artist Steve McQueen. Random, but he put me on the spot! I wished him good luck. He thanked me and walked away talking about how his happy box makes him happy.

I met an enlightened being yesterday, and if we are to judge Asheville's city government by its recent attacks on Kairos West and its continued zoning assault on Firestorm (claiming that the life-saving syringe exchange it hosts constitutes a shelter), it is folks who appear homeless like this man whom the city believes have no place in West Asheville.

*Matilda Bliss, Asheville*

## Dogwood Trust Board should embrace the future

Twenty years ago, a diverse group of us called Community Friends for Corporate Responsibility challenged Mission Hospital to be more intentional on diversity and to hire more Black employees. Initially, it was confrontational with one VP pointing his finger at Rev. O. T. Tomes, saying, "We have a healthy system here and it's going to stay that way."

Upset, we requested a meeting with Mission's full Board. The CEO then asked if we'd meet with him first. We did, and he presented a diversity plan that incorporated our recommendations and added one of his own, an annual minority scholarship program. He saw it was in Mission's interest to embrace the future rather than hold tight to the past. And, despite bumps along the way, there's a strong diversity program at Mission today.

## TRADITIONALIST

It's a CHRISTMAS PARADE!!  
Always has been,  
always should be.



## POST-MODERNIST

"HOLIDAY" parade  
includes everybody  
and their belief systems.



## HUMBUGIST

Isn't traffic around  
here bad enough  
ALREADY?!  
I gotta get to work!



CHEN 12/18

nual minority scholarship program. He saw it was in Mission's interest to embrace the future rather than hold tight to the past. And, despite bumps along the way, there's a strong diversity program at Mission today.

Reading Sunday's commentary "Dogwood Trust will serve community well" by four Mission Health Board Trust Planning Committee members, I regret Mission appears to be circling the wagons around the mainly white, male current make-up of the future Dogwood Health Trust Board. I urge Mission not to go the route of that VP-of-old but to embrace the future and create a Trust Board reflecting the diversity of our community.

*Monroe Gilmour, Asheville*

## Let's do better for area homeless

I just read an article in Tuesday's Citizen Times on accepting Camping Gear at Homeward Bound, November 12-19, for our area's homeless veterans. Per article statistics, 1240 Homeless Vets live in the Asheville area. Not being familiar with the Homeward Bound program, what I read tells me they are a very important and valuable program. But how about this - I also read an article, days ago, stating how on any given night, the new County jail has over 200 empty beds.

There has to be some way to offer these warm accommodations to our vets, on some kind of rotating basis! Donated monies be given to the jail's kitchen to prepare warm hearty meals. Vets held over the next morning (on a wages paid basis) can clean the cells to get ready for the next night's occupants.

This seems so much more compassionate than directions to the nearest underpass - sleeping bag in hand! The new Sheriff also campaigned for less incarcerated people - this would open up more beds! County commissioners - city

council - civic leaders any thoughts? Let's do better for these individuals - It's already getting cold!

*Russ Robertson, Weaverville*

## Our 'smart growth' isn't so bright

Hallelujah! Finally a citizen has put everything in perspective about our city, to my dismay, but approval. Thanks to Charles Fink of Weaverville for his recent letter to the editor "Who represents those who live here?" It's about time the City Council start thinking of its residents as stakeholders. But what is it going to take for this to happen? As an eight year resident, I too am contemplating moving. When my husband and I travel on Sardis Road, off Brevard and Sand Hill Roads, a 10 minutes-drive is now 30 minutes. Now with two new schools, grocery store, new hotels, an outlet mall and multiple apartments, it is a much dreaded drive.

City Council members, do you need a tutorial on the definition of "smart growth?" Most of my neighbors have quit going to downtown summer events due to huge crowds, traffic and no parking spaces available for residents (or city workers). A recent visitor told me, "Thank goodness you don't live on Merimion. It's like a mini-Los Angeles." "So long paradise," hello LA.

*Suzanne Sweeton, Asheville*

## A role model - for dishonoring veterans

I see that this week our Commander-in-chief could not quite manage a visit on Veteran's Day to the National Cemetery for war veterans in Arlington, Virginia, just outside of Washington - something that I believe most recent past Presidents have done. And he also could not bring himself to attend a brief ceremony this past weekend at the French cemetery for our fallen US sol-

diers that died in World War One. It was attended, however, by many dignitaries and leaders of our European allies - at least those that are left.

But lest I be too critical of the President, I will point out that it was raining both days, and as such, was not safe for helicopter or vehicle travel according to White House sources; but it did not stop the Europeans from showing up to honor our dead.

Oh, but wait! In all fairness, it just occurred to me that since perhaps many thousands of the buried soldiers in France and Virginia had also been prisoners of war, the President possibly didn't feel they were worthy of his respect and admiration, seeing as how he likes his heroes to be those that don't get captured. And I'm also quite sure that if it wasn't for the four deferments he received due to a bone spur on his foot, he would have gladly gone to Vietnam to do his part, being the role model that he is!

*George Bant, Asheville*

## We shouldn't have homeless children anywhere

This is what I don't get. 100 homeless children in Haywood County, NC! Those people there have to scarp and beg for the money to help those children. And we have 2.5 million homeless children in our country. Yet we spend and waste billions, yes billions, of dollars on illegal immigrants - retention and housing facilities, law enforcement, judicial and court costs, health care, education, state and city administration costs and municipal funds, drivers' licenses, and jail and prison costs - and that money could take care of all homeless children everywhere and homeless vets for that matter. Imagine that! We don't have our priorities straight. We should not have homeless children anywhere. But we do. Stop wasting money.

*Pat Goodrich, Mills River*

## EDITORIAL BOARD



Dedicated to the upbuilding of Western North Carolina since 1870.

### Letters Policy

We invite Letters to the Editor of 200 words or less written by the submitter for the Citizen-Times. Please include your name, mailing address, daytime telephone number and email address.

**Mail to:** Letters, Asheville Citizen-Times, P.O. Box 2090, Asheville, NC 28802-2090.

**E-mail:** letters@citizen-times.com

**For information:** Call Casey Blake at 828-232-5841 or email cblake@citizen-times.com.

**Casey Blake**      **John Boyle**  
Opinions Editor      Senior Writer  
**Katie Wadington**      **Bill McGoun**  
News Director      Contributing Editor