



Your Community-Minded Newspaper

# YANCEY COMMON TIMES JOURNAL

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Burnsville, North Carolina 50¢



Citizens from across WNC came to hear the N.C. Attorney General's announcement about the sale of Mission Health to HCA and the changes that have been negotiated in the Asset Purchase Agreement. N.C. AG Josh Stein is pictured at the center, N.C. Sen. Terry VanDuyn is at the right, and Patrick Taylor, Mayor of Highlands, is fourth from left.

## Attorney General approves sale but places stipulations on Mission-HCA hospital deal

The sun was shining but the people gathered outside the south Asheville community center were tense as they waited for N.C. Attorney General Josh Stein to arrive.

Citizen groups from Highlands to Asheville to Burnsville and Spruce Pine were about to hear a much-anticipated announcement from Stein about the sale of non-profit Mission Health to for-profit ownership by HCA.

Since Mission Health announced in March its intention to be bought by HCA, the groups have been diligently questioning how the final deal might affect the member hospitals, individuals and groups throughout the 18-county region. They have also cast a skeptical light on the make-up of the Dogwood Health Trust.

Standing behind a simple

wooden podium set up at one end of a bright blue multi-purpose room, Stein assured the audience of citizens and the press that he and his staff understood that "access to healthcare is truly a life or death issue." He emphasized the importance of continued access to health care for residents of the areas currently served by Mission.

"We kept that fact in mind as we conducted our review of this transaction. After extensive negotiations, I am satisfied that this new agreement protects health care in Western North Carolina, ensures that the full value of Mission's assets will continue to be used for public purposes and requires that the Dogwood Health Trust will be independent and representative."

Stein prefaced his remarks by giving a special word of

appreciation to the people who had written or called about their concerns and said it was "public forums which his staff attended, delegations of your folks coming to meet with me in Raleigh, hundreds of letters and dozens of phone calls," input that "shaped a fair deal for the people of Western North Carolina."

Indeed, anxiety in the room lessened visibly as AG Stein outlined the major changes which have been negotiated in the revised asset purchase agreement.

There is now a 10-year commitment to keep hospitals, including the five rural hospitals, open, including Blue Ridge Regional Hospital in Spruce Pine.

The services each hospital must have are spelled out, along with provisions for charity care.

Provision for an independent monitor has been added, and that person's role will be central to assuring that the terms of the amended Asset Purchase Agreement are met. That monitor provides a safeguard should the local advisory boards wish to make changes at their facility.

This gives the Yancey and Mitchell activist group SEARCH (Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare, confidence that Blue Ridge Regional will continue serving the area for at least a decade.

The revised agreement also spells out a way for the hospital to be acquired by the community if that becomes necessary or desirable.

While "Save Our Hospital" asked for a different outcome,

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## School board seeks input from district meetings before interviewing superintendent candidates

The Yancey County Board of Education had received eight applications from individuals interested in heading up the school system when the deadline ended on Jan. 12.

Current Superintendent Tony Tipton announced his retirement effective March 1, 2019.

As the school board narrows that field down to select a new school superintendent, one of the first tasks is to determine the qualities desired by the school board, school staff, and the community, says board chair Angie Weatherman.

Finding the right person - someone who will lead the school system to increased successes as well as honor and embrace the community - is critical, according to Weatherman.

ing input from school staff and our community as part of this process. The board's goal is to select a strong, knowledgeable leader who is committed to our entire community - students, families, staff, and our county, she said.

The board plans to hold public input meetings in each school district as well as a business/at-large community meeting for anyone unable to attend a meeting within a school district location.

These meetings will provide opportunity for parents/guardians and members of the community to share input regarding the superintendent search being conducted by the Yancey County Board of Education.

District meetings are planned for the following dates:

Monday, Jan. 28, for the Bald Creek, Clearmont, and

Cane River communities from 5:30-6:30 p.m. in the Cane River Middle School Media Center.

Tuesday, Jan. 29, for the Burnsville and East Yancey communities from 5:30-6:30 p.m. in the East Yancey Middle School Media Center.

Thursday, Jan. 31, for the Mountain Heritage community from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. in the Mountain Heritage High School Media Center.

Monday, Feb. 4, for the business and at-large community from 5 - 6 p.m. in the YCS Central Office Board Room.

Thursday, February 7, 2019 for the Micaville/South Toe communities from 5:30-6:30 p.m. in the Micaville Elementary School Media Center.

For questions or more information, contact the Central Office at 682-6101, ext. 102.

## County audit report on 2017-18 finances

By Jody Higgins

Commissioners received an excellent report from the county's independent auditor last Monday at the board's regular meeting. Due to careful management over the past years, the county's finances have improved dramatically and the fund balance, or reserve for unforeseen expenses, has grown from minus 8% to a positive 22.23% since 2008.

County government is continuing its ongoing effort to control expense and increase the fund balance with a goal of around 30%. The fund balance of similar size counties averages 32%. The county has set aside \$100,000 in the 2018-19 budget to continue rebuilding the fund balance.

Travis Keever with Gould Killian CPA Group summarized the audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2018 saying there were no material weaknesses in internal controls over the county's financial reporting. He commended Finance Officer Brandi Bureson and the finance department staff as well as Rick Tipton and the DSS staff for their hard work and cooperation in completing the audit.

### Financial highlights

The assets and deferred outflows of resources of the county exceeded its liabilities and deferred inflows of resources at the close of the fiscal year by \$16,852,423. Governmental activities accounted for \$10,049,952 and business-type activities accounted for \$6,802,471.

The county's total net position decreased by \$1,951,298. Governmental activities had a decrease of \$2,053,298 due to ongoing construction of Blue Ridge Elementary School and business-type activities accounted for an increase of \$102,000. The increase in business-type activities is primarily due to continued construction of the East Yancey Water and Sewer Project.

Capital assets for the county decreased overall by \$248,430 after depreciation. This net decrease was mostly due to

current depreciation expense outpacing current year acquisitions. Capital assets for governmental activities decreased by \$349,987, which relates primarily to asset purchases of approximately \$430,000 netted against depreciation expense of approximately \$780,000. Key asset additions include upgrades to the County's E-911 software and several vehicles.

Yancey's total debt increased by \$11,200,882. New installment obligations were issued to fund the construction of Blue Ridge Elementary Schools.

At the close of the fiscal year, the county's governmental funds reported combined ending fund balances of \$15,832,715, an increase of \$9,836,230. The majority of this increase (\$8,785,222) represents installment obligation proceeds remaining at year-end in the School Capital Project Fund for purposes of financing the construction of the new elementary school.

At the end of the current fiscal year, fund balance available for appropriation in the General Fund was \$4,689,542, or 22.23 percent of total General Fund expenditures for the fiscal year.

The county's primary source of operating revenue for the

General Fund at 61% is from property tax collections, which brought in \$13,684,927 at the 60 cents per \$100 tax rate. The collection rate was 98.2% for the fiscal year. The Local Option Sales Tax added \$3,755,013 (17%) and Sales and Services added \$1,006,952.

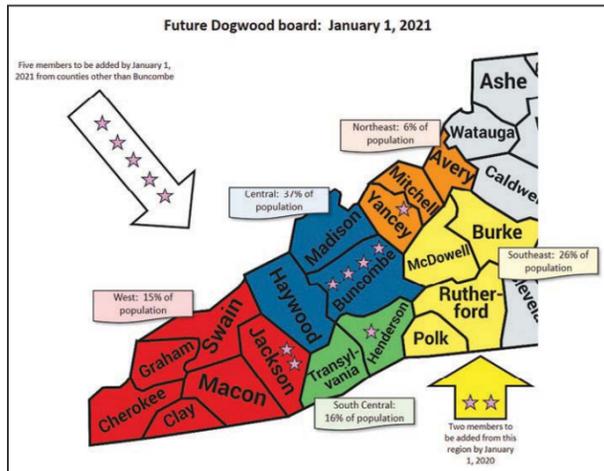
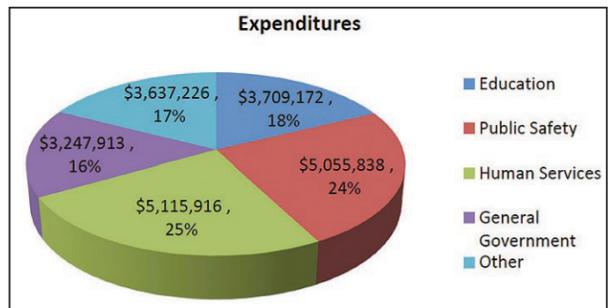
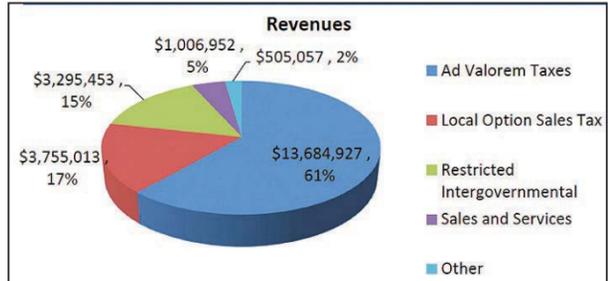
### Local school calendar

School board chair Angie Weatherman made a presentation asking commissioners to approve a resolution giving school boards more control over local school calendars. The board unanimously supported a motion to approve the resolution.

Weatherman said this is an initiative by school systems for the 2019-20 Legislative session. Legislative approval would give boards more local control so they can better plan for weather-related closings and increase student achievement by scheduling first semester exams before winter break and aligning calendars with community colleges and universities.

She said Yancey Schools was asking commissioners to approve the resolution regarding flexibility of the school calendar at the recommendation of NC School Board Association. "I do not think a school calendar

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N.C. Attorney General Josh Stein released this map last Wednesday to reflect the negotiated requirements for the eventual makeup of the Dogwood Health Trust board that will be independent of Mission and reflective of the demographics of the entire region. Courtesy of the N.C. Department of Justice

## Yancey native named Navy Medicine's Physical Therapist of the Year for 2018

Lt. Commander Marissa Greene, associate director of Clinical Support Services, Naval Hospital Pensacola (NHP) in Pensacola, Florida, was recently named the U.S. Navy Medicine's Physical Therapy Senior Officer of the Year for 2018.

Out of more than 100 physical therapists, the Yancey County native was selected for her leadership, innovative strategies and dedication to duty that ensured 100 percent access to care for all active duty and post-operative patients.

"In my 30-year career, I have not run into an officer with this level of quality," said Capt. Michael Allanson, director of Clinical Support Services, NHP. "Her ability to multitask is noteworthy, her attention to detail is exceptional and she anticipates to ensure our directorate is successful. She makes my job as a director easier, and she does all of this while maintaining the priority of providing the highest level of patient care."

Allanson informed Greene of her selection for the award while she was on leave and traveling through the mountains of North Carolina with her family. "I was speechless at first," said Greene. "I didn't know what to say. It is truly an honor and surprising."

"This recognition is a good reminder of all the hard work that has taken place [here] over the course of the last year," continued Greene. "Even though my name is on the citation, it was a team effort that earned this recognition and I'm happy to be a part of this team."

Originally from Green Mountain, NC, she is the daughter of Sarah and Johnny Harris.

Greene was an outstanding student athlete at Mountain Heritage High School in cross country, volleyball, basketball,



Marissa Harris Greene, a graduate of Mountain Heritage High School, was a star athlete and excelled academically, according to coach Susie Shelton.

softball and track. She played basketball all four years for coach Susie Shelton, who recalls that Marissa's goal was to letter in as many sports as possible and she also excelled academically.

"She had excellent leadership skills when she played sports," said Shelton. "She was organized and paid attention to details. She was driven and wanted to accomplish things."

During her time as an athlete, she encountered injuries that required visits with local physical therapist John Medina, who worked with the school's sports program.

"In high school, I was an athlete and I had personal interactions with physical therapists during my own injuries," said Greene. "I developed a strong understanding about the physical therapists capabilities and impact on others."

The positive experiences with her high school physical therapist helped mold and narrowed Greene's decision on what career path would be best for her to pursue.

"As a senior in high school, I had narrowed my decision between being a physical therapist and a mortician," said Greene. "I decided to go with physical

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## Yancey Sheriff's Office felony arrests report

The Yancey County Sheriff's Office felony arrests for the period of Jan. 2 through January 16, 2019:

Timothy Laine Holloway, 53, of Travelers Rest, SC was arrested on Jan. 11 and charged with felony probation violation,



**Holloway**



**Cox**

misdemeanor injury to personal property, and felony attempting to escape from the local jail.

William Jason Cox, 33, of Burnsville was arrested on Jan. 12 and charged with felony breaking/entering, felony larceny after breaking/entering, and felony possession of stolen goods.

Shannon Emily Robinson, 39, of Burnsville was arrested on Jan. 3 and charged with Driving While Impaired, possession of Schedule II (methamphetamine) Controlled Substance, possession of controlled substance on jail premises, possessing drug paraphernalia, 2 counts proba-

tion violation.

Brandon Wayne Bailey, 53, of Green Mountain was arrested on Jan. 4 and charged with taking indecent liberties with a child and first-degree sexual offense.

Elizabeth Lee Kennedy, 20, of Burnsville, NC was arrested on Jan. 8 and charged with possession of Schedule II (methamphetamine) Controlled Substance, identity theft, larceny of a motor vehicle, possession of stolen goods, possession of drug paraphernalia.

Morris Lynn Silvers, 56, of Burnsville was arrested and charged on Jan. 8 with assault on a female, communicating threats, and probation violation.

David Alan Bruce, 56, of Burnsville was arrested on Jan. 9 and charged with probation violation, possession Schedule II (methamphetamine) Controlled Substance, maintaining a place to keep controlled substances, possession of drug paraphernalia, misdemeanor possess of Schedule VI Controlled Substance, and possession of paraphernalia.

### Riddle's Used Appliances

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## Library signing up groups for StarLab Jan. 25-28

The State Library purchased four StarLabs® to be shared amongst libraries in North Carolina in concurrence with the Dept. of Natural and Cultural Resources' statewide celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of the Moon Landing this July.

The program is also helping library's promote the 2019 space-themed teen/tween summer reading program "A Universe of Stories."

StarLab is a portable planetarium system that gives an intergalactic interactive experience to students and all who view it. It brings earth sciences, astronomy, history, and mythology lessons to life. It is perfect for school field trips, Boy Scout groups, and adults!

"We are one of the first public library systems to receive this amazing opportunity for enriching the young minds of our communities," said Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Regional Library director Amber Westall Briggs. "The Spruce Pine Public Library was the first to have the StarLab, the Avery Morrison Public Library second, and the Yancey County Public Library the third."

From inside the portable,



The solar system comes to life through an interactive experience Jan. 25-28 at Yancey Library.

inflatable dome, participants travel along constellations and other cosmic occurrences. Each date includes multiple shows that run between 30 to 40 minutes on various topics.

Russ Fox, the director of the county's Parks and Recreation Department is working with Yancey Library to use the Old Burnsville Gym to house the StarLab during the program that will be presented in Burnsville for three days beginning this Friday.

Some dates and times are still open for groups. Star Lab dates and times are:

\*Friday, Jan. 25, from 10 to 5 p.m.

\*Saturday, Jan. 26, from 10 to 1 p.m.

\*Monday, Jan. 28, from 10 to 3 p.m.

Call or email the library for times slots available and sign up your group at 682-2600 or amyregionallibrary.org/yancey. The library is located at 321 School Circle in Burnsville.

## Attorney General places stipulations on Mission-HCA deal

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their efforts were successful in showing the concern of 4,000 local citizens who signed petitions.

The other major point that SEARCH has promoted was that the Dogwood Health Trust, the \$1.5 billion foundation to be created out of the proceeds of the sale of the non-profit Mission system, needed to become truly representative of the people of WNC. Though the initial board members are Mission-centric and the majority of members are from Buncombe County, the revised Asset Purchase Agreement charts a route to a board composition that is independent of Mission and

reflective of the demographics of the entire region.

The summary of changes to the original Asset Purchase Agreement including how the price being paid for Mission Health System was determined to be fair, and how the agreement will be monitored can be found on the SEARCH website, searchwnc.com..

Speaking on behalf of the leadership of SEARCH, Susan Larson expressed gratitude to Attorney General Stein and his staff for the diligence and openness they displayed during the exceedingly complicated review process.

Larson said Stein addressed the points even-handedly and negotiated an agreement that appears to give the protections sought for rural hospitals and moves the Dogwood Health Trust towards a truly regional body that functions with transparency.

"Elected officials in Mitchell and Yancey counties acted to make this agreement as favorable as it could be for our rural area," she said, "passing resolutions that stated clearly what needed to be strengthened in the agreement." The Towns of Burnsville, Bakersville, Highlands and Spruce Pine and Mitchell County Board of Commissioners and Yancey County EDC all discussed and adopted resolutions which went to the Attorney General.

"Those elected officials should feel gratified that their concerns were heard and acted upon in the final agreement," said Larson. Of particular concern locally is what will happen to EMS, and in the amended agreement HCA will provide full financial support of EMS services for one year in Mitchell, Madison, and Yancey counties while an alternate solution is found.

The Mayors of Highlands and Franklin and other individuals from Macon County also made sure that questions about

the hospitals in their towns were fairly addressed.

Asheville groups have played different roles in evaluating the sale. COAH (Communities for Older Adult Health) organized, with the help of SEARCH and Elder Law, the August forum about the Dogwood Health Trust.

The Health Equity Coalition, a group of a dozen organizations looking at disparities in access to health care in western North Carolina, took shape to ensure that the Dogwood Health Trust board represented the diversity of the WNC population.

SEARCH worked with former Missouri Attorney General and Governor Jay Nixon, who under the sponsorship of individual and community groups, came to Asheville to lead a Listening Session and then traveled to Raleigh to meet with Attorney General Stein. Nixon has maintained his interest in the outcome and lauded the

groups' work as "democracy in action."

Members say the work of SEARCH is much broader than the issue of maintaining the hospital. The public is invited to attend the next SEARCH meeting, tentatively scheduled for February 12 in Spruce Pine, to celebrate and to continue the work of Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare in Mitchell and Yancey counties and to plan how to welcome HCA to the community.

HCA owns more than 150 hospitals in the United States and some in the United Kingdom. If the purchase is successful, Mission Health's facilities would be the company's only hospitals in North Carolina.

Mission Health currently operates hospitals in Asheville, Marion, Spruce Pine, Brevard and Franklin in addition to numerous smaller health care provider facilities across Western North Carolina.

### Stipulations regarding hospital sale

In his letter approving the transaction, Stein listed a series of stipulations to which the parties have consented. Some of these address concerns that residents of Western North Carolina have voiced since negotiations between HCA and Mission Health became public.

These included:

\*HCA extends its promise to acquire and maintain several smaller Mission Health properties in Franklin, Spruce Pine, Highlands, Marion and Brevard from five years to 10 years, with greater specificity for continued services at these hospitals.

\*An independent monitor will review compliance and, along with an advisory board, must sign off on any exceptions to these continued services at the local hospitals.

\*HCA will be limited in its ability to cite economic conditions as a pretext for seeking exceptions to compliance.

\*Both the new Dogwood Health Trust and the Regional Foundation will have the right to bid on the assets of any local hospitals that are sold or closed.

\*HCA will build a new facility in Franklin to replace the existing Angel Hospital. Mission Health has already received a certificate of need for this project.

\*HCA will build a new 120-bed behavioral health hospital in Asheville.

\*HCA will continue most of Mission Health's community service programs, with at least a \$14.28 million expenditure.

\*HCA will continue Mission Health's financial support of emergency medical services in Madison, Mitchell and Yancey counties.

\*Stein's letter also made specific provisions for the Dogwood Health Trust's board, limiting terms of representatives from Buncombe County and ensuring that by 2021 the number of members from any one county will be no more than four. The letter additionally required efforts to have a level of diversity on the board reflecting the diversity of WNC's population. Stein's letter observed that the initial board had no persons of color but has now been changed to have 27 percent membership by persons of color. The attorney general also called for Dogwood's meetings to be public.

### Local government meeting schedule

The Yancey County Board of Education meets the first

Monday of each month at the Central Office located on School Circle. Closed session is at 6 p.m. and open session begins at 6:30 p.m.

### Library Book Annex

Friends of the Yancey Library invite you to visit the Book Annex on the Burnsville Town Square beside the tag office.

You will find a surprising number of books of all kinds for adults and children.

Proceeds benefit the Yancey County Public Library. The shop is open 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. Monday thru Saturday.

Burnsville Town Council meets the first Thursday of each month at 6 p.m., second floor of Town Hall.

The Yancey County Board of Commissioners meets the second Monday of each month at 6 p.m. in the courtroom.

Special and emergency meetings will be scheduled and announced as required by law.

## GAME CHANGER.



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### Planning board meeting schedule

The town of Burnsville's Planning Board's regular meetings will be held on the first Tuesday of the third month of each quarter at 6:15 p.m. in the upstairs boardroom in Burnsville Town Hall.

The first meeting on the schedule will be held on March 5. For more information, call 682-2420.

### Income tax help for SECU members

Tax season is quickly approaching and State Employees' Credit Union (SECU) is ready to help members.

Starting January 23, SECU tax preparers in all 265 offices statewide will be able to complete and electronically file federal and North Carolina income tax returns for members who are eligible to participate in the Credit Union's Low-Cost Tax Preparation program.