



Your Community-Minded Newspaper

YANCEY COMMON TIMES JOURNAL

Volume 27, Number 13

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

Burnsville, North Carolina 50¢

Yancey woman falsely accused, charges dropped

Kimberly Michelle Ray, 49, a Yancey County resident, has been exonerated after being charged on March 8 in Unicoi County, Tennessee with attempted first-degree murder and felony aggravated arson.

In a turn of events, all charges have been dismissed against Ray and her accuser has been jailed after pleading guilty to making a false report.



Kimberly Ray

Ray was arrested by deputies with the Yancey County Sheriff's Office on March 8 based on a warrant issued by the Unicoi County Sheriff's Department.

She was charged with extradition of a fugitive from the State to Tennessee, felony attempted first-degree murder out of state, and felony aggravated arson out of state.

All charges against Ray were dismissed on March 21, according to documents from the Unicoi sheriff's office.

Ray, accompanied by an advocate with October Road, brought the dismissal documents by the Yancey Sheriff's Office and the Yancey Times Journal. The arrest report appeared in last week's newspaper.

"I went for a job interview and was turned down because my picture and arrest was in the newspaper," Ray said. "I just want to clear my name."

"She wasn't even at that location," said Melanie Hollifield with October Road. "The sheriff's office in Unicoi didn't even go out and investigate. They just took the man's word for it."

Hollifield had photographs of the alleged arson, which showed a small dark area on a concrete walkway leading up to the steps of the man's home. She said the man had set the fire himself.

The advocate played a recording of the district attorney's office reading a statement about the exoneration of charges issued by the Unicoi law enforcement agency, however, she said the agency would not provide Ray with a hard copy of that particular statement.

The statement from public defender Jim Lonan of Unicoi County: All charges against Kimberly Ray arising out of the alleged incident of March 18, 2019 have been dismissed. Complaints asserted against Miss Ray on that date have been investigated and determined to be completely false.

Hollifield said she is working with Ray, who may possibly pursue a lawsuit against the Unicoi Sheriff's Department for damage to her reputation for the false arrest and time she spent in custody.



Retired Burnsville physician David Cort, center, with Gail Pace and Jennie Boyd Bull on the Crest of the Black Mountains after climbing the challenging Woody Ridge Trail during a nine-mile hike. Photo by Dennis Smith

Retired physician David Cort conquers Black Mountains' toughest Trail at age 75

Retired physician David Cort didn't even know where the monthly High Peaks Trail Association's hike was planned when at church he asked long-time hike leader Dennis Smith if he could join the group's March 16 outing.

To his surprise, the hike was one of the club's longest and hardest of the year – a climb of nearly 4,000 feet up the Woody Ridge Trail to the crest of the Black Mountains, and then down the Bolens Creek Trail for a distance of nearly nine miles.

"I had forgotten how hard Woody Ridge is," said Cort, who had hiked the trail a couple of times previously but several decades ago.

"I was out of breath and pushing as hard as I could, but once we reached the top it was worth every bit of it," he said.

Cort's stamina and determination impressed Smith.

"David is 75 and to be able to climb the Woody Ridge Trail and complete a nine-mile hike is an inspiration," Smith said.

"We have much younger hikers who struggle on that trail and that kind of distance. What David did was pretty amazing – especially since he had a total knee replacement a couple of years ago," Smith added.

Joining Smith and Cort on the hike were Jenny Boyd Bull and Gail Pace.

"They were in great shape and just scampered up the trail," Cort said. "I slowed them down, but they waited for me."

The Woody Ridge track includes a couple of scrambles on sheer rock faces, one so steep it requires a rope attached to a tree for assistance.

The outing was made even tougher by the weather – temperatures in the 20s and howling winds of 30 to 40 miles per

hour – along with patches of ice in the trail.

"Thank goodness Dennis brought extra hats and mittens," Cort said. "We needed them."

Cort has lived in Burnsville for decades and practiced as an internal medicine specialist and also as an emergency room physician in Spruce Pine. His wife, Carolyn – who passed away three years ago – was a pediatrician known and loved by many Yancey and Mitchell families.

The family took occasional hikes and camped a few times in the Great Smoky Mountains, but were not avid hikers. Cort said he cuts firewood and walks his dog to stay in shape now, but might need more conditioning in advance if he attacks the

Woody Ridge Trail again.

"When I got home I was going down some steps and almost fell because my muscles had turned to mush," he laughed. "But by the next morning I was okay."

Smith said most High Peaks hikes are not so challenging, and he hopes more people might join the club on some of its outings.

"We actually do two hikes a month now, one strenuous but the other a stroll that is designed to be an easier walk," he said.

"We are blessed with gorgeous scenery and hiking is excellent exercise, so we hope folks will join us," Smith added. He has been involved with the club since its inception. To learn more, see nhighpeaks.org

MHHS teacher awarded \$175,000 by Burroughs Wellcome Fund

Mountain Heritage High School biology teacher Sallie Senseney is the recipient of the 2019 Career Award for Science and Mathematics Teachers from the Burroughs Wellcome Fund.

The presentation was made at the high school on March 18

by Aldred Mays with the Burroughs Wellcome Fund.

This \$175,000 grant will impact students throughout the Yancey County school system.

Senseney, a 2005 graduate of Mountain Heritage, has been teaching biology at the high school for the past nine years.

The grant funds are to enliven and enhance science-learning at all levels of the school district's curriculum.

Senseney wrote the grant proposal to provide STEM components for students and professional STEM development for teachers.

The Burroughs Wellcome Fund and the State Board of Education recognizes that improving science and mathematics education in North Carolina will require systemic reform of K-12 instruction.

The Career Award for Science and Mathematics Teachers provides \$175,000 over five-years to outstanding science and/or mathematics teachers in the North Carolina public primary and secondary schools.

The purpose of this award is to recognize teachers who have demonstrated solid knowledge of science and/or mathematics content and have outstanding performance records in educating children.

This five-year award presents opportunities for professional development and collaboration with other master science and/or mathematics teachers who will help to ensure their success as teachers and their satisfaction with the field of teaching.

Special consideration will be given to teachers working in hard-to-staff, economically deprived classrooms in North Carolina.

The award also offers schools and school districts the opportunity to fully develop teachers as leaders in the field.

The \$175,000 award (\$35,000 per year) is dispensed in annual installments as allocated below.

Teacher Salary

- \$10,000 stipend will be provided to the school district to supplement the teacher's annual salary or for fringe benefits, such as retirement or insurance.

- \$5,000 will be held annually by the Burroughs Wellcome Fund to be given to the teacher at the end of the five-year award, if the teaching professional remains in the K-12 classroom in a North Carolina public school.

- The State Board of Education will provide extra salary support to ensure that award recipients will receive a 12-month contract.

School or School District

- \$10,000 will be provided to purchase needed equipment and supplies for the teacher's classroom or laboratory or may



Aldred Mays with the Burroughs Wellcome Fund presented biology teacher Sallie Senseney with a \$175,000 Career Award for Science and Mathematics Teachers.



The grant funds, spread out over five years, are to enliven and enhance science-learning at all levels of the school district's curriculum.

AMY Wellness Foundation focus is on improving health outcomes

As a result of the recent sale of Mission Health System to HCA, the AMY Wellness Foundation has been created to focus on addressing the social determinants of health throughout WNC, specifically in Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties supported by the Dogwood Health Trust.

The Foundation board of directors will be comprised of 7 to 11 representatives of Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties. The foundation is accepting nominations for new board members.

If you would like to make a nomination for an individual who has knowledge of the health needs of your county, and would have an interest in serving on the board, contact info@amywellnessfoundation.org.

"AMY Wellness Foundation will be locally based, with representatives from the three counties on the board. This will offer us an excellent opportunity to funnel much-needed funds into the already existing organizations that support

the wellness of people in our area," said AMY board chair Dr. Randy Ellis. "We will be able to address social determinants of health, such as economic stability, education, social and community contexts, and more of the issues affecting the well-being of all citizens."

The AMY Wellness Foundation will partner with local non-profit organizations to improve the health of citizens in WNC.

Local organizations that are committed to addressing the social determinants of health in WNC are encouraged to submit grant proposals to the AMY Wellness Foundation.

These grant requests will be reviewed by the Foundation's board of directors and decisions will come directly from the board.

Information about submitting grant proposals to the Foundation will be provided at a later date.

For more information and updates please continue to check the website amywellnessfoundation.org.

Lady Cougar victory celebration planned for March 30 in Burnsville

The county, town and school system, along with businesses and the community are planning to celebrate the historic State Championship win by the Mountain Heritage Lady Cougars.

The celebration takes place in Burnsville this Saturday, March 30 (Rain date April 6).



A short parade begins at the old Chevrolet dealership parking lot at 6 p.m., going up West Main to Town Square where the Lady Cougars and coaches will take the stage. Stuart Jolley will be MC for the celebration. The event includes music and plans are to broadcast the game on a large screen behind the stage.

Food available for those who want to eat dinner: Pig & Grits, White Falls Catering, Twisted Laurel, Garden Deli, and others. So come early and grab a spot and enjoy the evening.

The celebration will wrap up with a fireworks display courtesy of Yancey County Government.

Congratulations to our Mountain Heritage High School Lady Cougar Basketball Team 2019 NCHSAA 2A State Champions

We would like to honor the members of the Lady Cougar basketball team, coaches, assistants, families, and fans. This group of young ladies, coaches and loyal followers represented our school and our county with outstanding honor and pride. The road to the state championship was a hard fought battle. But it was a battle that was won with outstanding sportsmanship and respect. We could not have been represented by a better group of individuals.



continued on page 3