

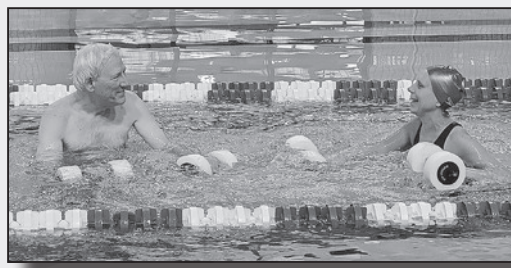
Jackson County Year In Review

JANUARY



Cindi Simmons returned to the Smoky Mountain basketball court on Friday, Jan. 17 for a special ceremony to dedicate and name the Smoky Mountain High School court after her. Simmons coached women's basketball for 30 years and volleyball for 26 years before serving as the county athletic director.

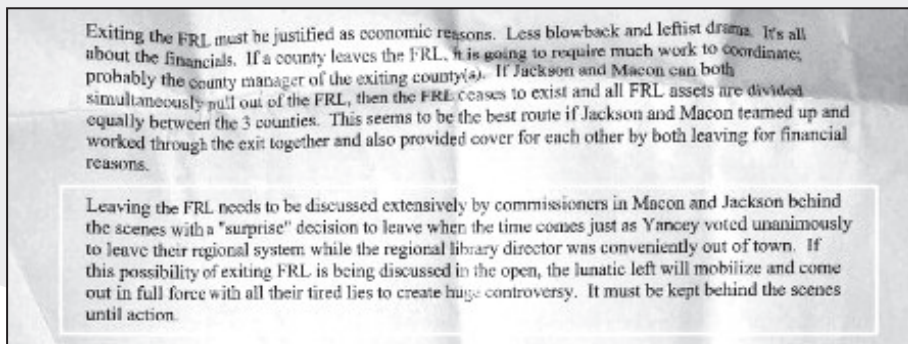
The new Aquatic Center in Cullowhee officially opened. The long-anticipated addition to Cullowhee Rec Center was a topic of debate for years and suffered multiple construction delays.



FEBRUARY



Jackson County emergency crews on Feb. 3 responded to a call about a bomb threat at CVS. An employee took a call from someone claiming there was a bomb on the premises. The employee alerted authorities. Traffic was diverted away from the area as a precaution and no bomb was found.



Macon County resident Jim Gaston sent an email to a like-minded Jackson County Republican resident outlining a plan to collude with Jackson commissioners to covertly dissolve the Fontana Regional Library system. The email called for commissioners to work "behind the scenes with a 'surprise' decision to leave."

MARCH

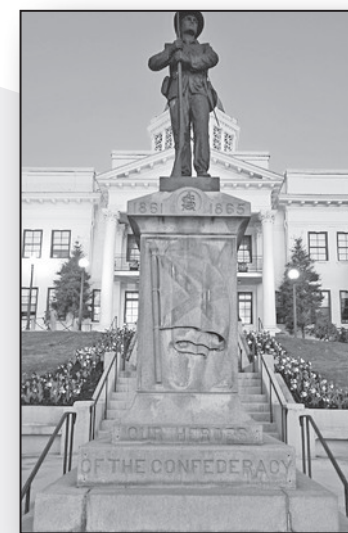


A hemlock tree that had stood sentinel below the Jackson County Courthouse for many years was felled. The tree was rotted, forcing its removal. Its age could not be determined due to the trunk being severely damaged from the rot. The removal made a significant change to Sylva's landscape, offering a clearer view of the Courthouse and Public Library.



Ingles expanded its landholdings by 24.5 acres, paying \$5.2 million for three tracts of land between Lovedale Baptist and Shepherd Of The Hills Lutheran churches along N.C. 107. The grocery giant already owned two area parcels totaling about 8.5 acres. The new middle school will go in next door.

APRIL



The Jackson County Board of Commissioners had the "compromise plaques" removed from Sylva Sam, the Confederate statue on their Courthouse steps overlooking Sylva. There was no public comment, discussion or vote by the Republican commissioners on the topic. It was a decision made in secret to overturn a 3-2 vote by the 2021 Board.



The old Sylva Supply building at 582 W. Main St. sported a refreshed logo on its western side. Tyler Watras of Signs & Designs put about 240 hours into returning the brick facade to its mid-century charm. Jackson County entrepreneur C.J. Harris constructed the building for his store, which operated there from 1902 until 1999.

AUGUST



The Cycle North Carolina Mountain Ride rolled into town and pedaled around Jackson County. Tents popped up around the Friends of Panthertown office and in Bridge Park. The 358 riders came from 23 states. The average age was 60, with the oldest participant 86 and the youngest 15.

One of Jackson County's most popular restaurants, Speedy's Pizza, rose from the rubble of its old building as owners Craig and Natalie Szymanski transformed the Junction Pub into "Speedy's Pizza and Pub."



JULY



Jackson County hopefuls threw their hat in the ring for local municipal political office. A total of 17 seats were up for grabs across Sylva, Webster, Dillsboro and Forest Hills.

N.C. Gov. Josh Stein and his wife, Anna, stopped in Sylva for ice cream, a tour and to promote the western end of the state. The couple visited Baxley's Chocolates on West Main for an ice cream, deciding on a pistachio milkshake. Anna would return to learn more about the Community Care Program.



A commissioners meeting about the future of the county's libraries and its membership in the Fontana Regional Library brought passionate voices to Southwestern Community College's Balsam Center. Supporters advocating for the library to stay with FRL donned yellow shirts while opponents waved red "JEXIT!" signs. Commissioners would go on to vote to leave the FRL.



The Jackson County Chamber of Commerce ushered in a new chapter with the appointment of Todd Vinyard as executive director and Holly Bryant as assistant director following the retirement of Julie Spiro Donaldson and Kelly Donaldson.



MAY



The 27th annual Greening Up the Mountain Festival brought an estimated 11,000 people to Sylva on a glorious day. The day started with the 5K race and spread to downtown and Bridge Park.



An earthquake shook area homes and rattled some nerves but caused no damage. The 4.1 magnitude quake originated about 23 km (14 miles) beneath the earth's surface near Knoxville, Tennessee, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

SEPTEMBER



The Sylva town board celebrated longtime Chamber leader Julie Donaldson (middle) with one of North Carolina's highest honors – the Order of the Long Leaf Pine. Recipients are chosen for exemplary service, significant contributions to their communities and lasting impact on the people of North Carolina. With her are Mayor Johnny Phillips, left, and Town Manager Paige Dowling.

The top two officers of the Fontana Regional Library Board of Trustees stepped down. Acting Chair Cynthia Womble and Vice Chair Tony Monnat sent resignation emails within 24 hours of each other.



OCTOBER

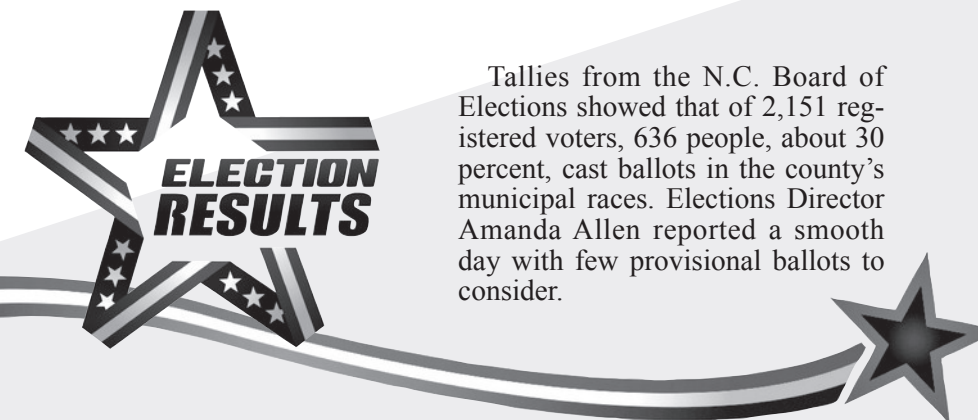


Bryson Park re-opened on Thursday, Sept. 25, after undergoing a transformative five-year restoration marked by landslides, unexpected closures and construction. The project began in April 2020 following a landslide that caused approximately 30 yards of Allen Street, uphill from the park, to drop nearly three feet.

The Sylva town board voted to keep the town's Support Stop at its current location near The Community Table after hearing from residents who spoke both in support of and in opposition to the community resource. The Stop offers food, clothing and other household items to folks in need.



NOVEMBER



Tallies from the N.C. Board of Elections showed that of 2,151 registered voters, 636 people, about 30 percent, cast ballots in the county's municipal races. Elections Director Amanda Allen reported a smooth day with few provisional ballots to consider.

The Aurora Borealis could be seen in hues of pink and green above areas of low light pollution in and around the county. Residents of Cullowhee and Sylva brave enough to face the cold had an opportunity to view the lights caused by to a disturbance of Earth's magnetic field.



DECEMBER



Filing for the partisan primaries, when voters choose their party's nominees for the Nov. 3, 2026 general election, started Monday, Dec. 1. Jackson County Elections Director Amanda Allen reported a "flurry of activity" Monday morning not long after the opening bell.

Town board member Mary Gelbaugh stepped down after 16 years of service to Sylva – 12 on the town board and four on the planning board. She served through some of the town's biggest projects in recent years – the downtown restrooms and Allen Street landslide repair.

