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NCDOT admits reduced biz-relocation number wrong

By Dave Russell

For a little while last week, county and municipal leaders believed the number of business relocations connected with the U.S. Business 23/N.C. 107 construction project was 39 instead of 55.

An inaccurate internal document led Division 14 Engineer Brian Burch, of the N.C. Department of Transportation, to provide an inaccurate number of possible business relocations, he said.

“Five residential relocations, 39 parcels containing 55 businesses, and 186 total parcels is the most current information. We will be preparing a new estimate based on the current 65-percent plans once the utility easements are added.”

— Division 14 Engineer, Brian Burch

Burch told a joint meeting of Webster, Forest Hills, Sylva, Dillsboro and county leaders last Tuesday that 39 businesses would be forced to relocate. NCDOT's

original estimate, as reported in the Herald in May 2018, was 55 relocations. That number remains the accurate, estimated tally as of today.

In a Friday email to Angie Winchester, clerk to the Jackson County Board of Commissioners, Burch requested assistance getting the word out about the mistake.

“In my slide discussing estimated (right of way) impacts, it listed 39 businesses being taken,” the email states. “This number was based on an estimate that we had received in Division 14 from our Appraisal Unit. This is actually the number of par-

▶see N.C. 107, 7A

Sylva welcomes new police chief

By Dave Russell

Sylva's new police chief is moving 103 miles southwest from Boone, as the crow flies, and bringing with him 21 years of law enforcement experience.

Chris Hatton, 44, will move Aug. 12 into the corner office reserved for the chief, taking

over from Tammy Hooper, who retired.

Hatton grew up in the Lenoir area, attending West Caldwell High School. His wife, Glennis, grew up in Asheville, attending T.C. Roberson High School before moving on to A-B Tech and Western Carolina University. The couple has two sons.



Chris Hatton

Koby, 21, is a telecommunicator at the Boone Police Department, where he will stay when his parents move. Christian, 24, lives in Lenoir.

For the past 31 years, Glennis Hatton has worked as a Caldwell County Department of Social Services worker. She previously served as a county probation officer for

about five years. She's seeking work in this area, Chris Hatton said.

On his days off, he plans to be somewhere near the water.

“My passion, when I am not working, is being with my family, of course,” Hatton said. “But other than that,

▶see Police, 7A

Wave of staff changes underway at Sylva Police Department

The Sylva Police Department will have a new look soon, starting at the top with a new chief. Chris Hatton takes the reins Monday, Aug. 12, replacing Tammy Hooper.

Officer Mark Connor is joining the N.C. Highway Patrol, town Manager Paige Dowling said.

K-9 Unit officer K.J. Adams left the force.

Officer Jamie Hyatt is taking over the use and care of Don, a Belgian Malinois that is about 5 years old. Hyatt is expected to attend training for handling the K-9, Dowling said.

Detective Doug Farmer is retiring after almost nine years on the force.

A new clerk is expected to come aboard soon. The 29-hour position paying \$12 an hour is

already advertised on social media and in The Sylva Herald, Dowling said.

The other open positions are being advertised this week, Dowling said.

The starting salary for the two patrol officer positions is set at \$35,212 per year.

Farmer's replacement would start at \$38,821.

WCU students dig into a rich heritage

By Beth Lawrence

Some students at Western Carolina University are reaching across the centuries to get a bit of hands-on archaeological experience this summer on the college's campus.

A group of 11 students are involved in an archaeological field techniques class. The course began July 5 and ends Aug. 6. Ben Steere, associate professor of anthropology and director of the Cherokee Studies program at WCU, is leading the project.

Students have spent seven hours a day digging in several sites to find artifacts related to the Cherokee culture. The digs are in front of Norton Residence Hall.

The class is helping students learn how to properly map and dig a historic site.

The group went to the field and marked off the proposed dig site. Every 15 meters (about 16-and-a-half yards), the students dug a test pit and screened the soil, or shook it through a sieve, to look for possible artifacts. While doing that, they have recorded the layers of the soil. Those layers could provide scientists clues as to the land's past uses.

“They're learning archaeological field methods and are actually doing a really important archaeological project for the university,” Steere said. “They have done a full scale archeology project, starting from mapping and surveying to full scale

excavation.”

The exploration is taking place in advance of university plans to build new intramural sports fields.

“Before they do that, they want to make sure they're not disturbing possible Cherokee artifacts, possible graves, houses and all things that we can identify archaeologically,” Steere said.

The class is part of the school's anthropology degree program, but drew in students majoring in history as well.

Many of the students came into the class with what Steere calls a “good back-

▶see WCU, 7A

Deaths occurred on Walter Ashe Road Sunday

Sylva men dead in apparent murder-suicide

By Dave Russell

Jackson County Sheriff's deputies responding to a request for a health and welfare check Sunday found two men dead in a home at 186 Walter Ashe Road, Sylva.

Investigators concluded the home was the scene of a murder-suicide. They said Travis Akers, 38, shot his father, Rick Akers, 63, then turned the gun on himself.

The 911 call came in at 6:56 p.m., according to 911 Communications Coordinator Wanda Hall, who provided a transcript of the call to the Herald.

One of Rick Akers' sons made the call from the Walmart parking lot. He told dispatchers his mother was at the 186 Walter Ashe Road property. According to Jackson County tax records, the home belongs to Rick Akers' wife, Melissa Akers.

“She arrived to go in and check on my Dad and the doors are locked and things are a mess inside and she can't get in,” the caller said. “I'm trying to get over there, but I was wondering if you could get someone there?”

At that point, the dispatcher took some information from the caller about his identity.

Then the dispatcher asks, “Do you think something's wrong with him or what's the problem? Do you have any idea?”

The caller replied, “Yeah, he's not responding. Nobody's coming to the door;

▶see Incident, 2A

Vehicle towing takes a scary turn

By Dave Russell

What started as Sylva police removing two derelict vehicles Tuesday became a bomb scare involving the State Bureau of Investigation.

The vehicles belonged to Marty Galik, whose house at 271 Keener St. burned in October. Town officials last week sent Galik a letter demanding a Toyota truck and work van in the county-owned lot between the house and historic Courthouse be moved.

Galik did not comply, leading Assistant Chief Rick Bryson and Lt. Detective Aimee Watson to visit the property and summon a towing company, according to a release from Watson.

“As officers were waiting on the tow company to arrive, a suspicious device was located on one of the vehicles,” the release stated. “The area was taped off and part of Ridgeway Street was



DAVE RUSSELL/THE HERALD

Abandoned vehicles are removed Tuesday from a public parking lot near the historic Jackson County Courthouse.

shut down, from the library to Beacon Street.”

The SBI was contacted. The agency sent bomb technicians to the scene.

Galik returned to the residence and spoke with the SBI agents. The device was determined to be safe and the vehicles were towed, the release stated.

Lt. Rollie James with the Jackson County Sheriff's Office, Jackson County Emergency Management Director Todd Dillard and Fire Marshal Michael Forbis were also on scene.

Galik received a citation last week for piling construction debris in the lot. It remained there as of Tuesday afternoon.

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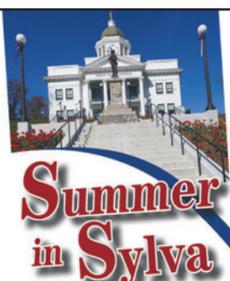
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'Wets' vs. 'drys'

on page 4B



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