

Crossroads Chronicle

Serving Cashiers, Glenville, Sapphire and Tuckasegee

Inside: Local COVID-19 cluster emerges following social gathering, page 5A

Trial date set for 2016 murder case

BY DAN BROWN
Staff

After nearly five years in jail, Thomas Glenn Palmer Jr. will have his day in court to answer the charges, including first degree murder, in the shooting death of his stepfather, Tim Norris.

The case is set to go to trial on April 19, according to the office of District Attorney Ashley Welch.

Palmer is accused of killing his step-

father on Feb. 2, 2016 in Cashiers. The 37-year-old is charged with first-degree murder, possession of a firearm by a felon, larceny of a firearm, possession of a stolen firearm, first-degree burglary, larceny after breaking and/or entering, possession of stolen goods and robbery with a dangerous weapon.

Norris' body was discovered in his bed at home on Panorama Trail on Feb. 3, 2016. The 49-year-old had been shot

multiple times.

Superior Court Judge Bradley B. Letts set jury selection for Palmer's trial to begin during the April 19 term of Jackson County Superior Court.

Palmer was extradited to Jackson County from Georgia in April 2018 to await trial for the murder charges in his stepfather's slaying. He has remained in the Jackson County Detention Center

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Free COVID-19 testing helps local students

BY CARTER GIEGERICH
Staff

The Highlands-Cashiers Health Foundation has partnered with Mountain Park Urgent Care in Sylva to perform free, weekly COVID-19 testing at three schools located in Cashiers and Highlands, in an effort to effectively monitor students for the virus and improve safety for in-person learning.

Summit Charter School and Highlands School have been testing students through this program since mid-September, and Blue Ridge School and Early College began implementing it during the week of Oct. 5. HCHF board member and program director Dr. Richard Ellin said the testing would continue at least through December, and could potentially be extended if it continues to prove useful to the community.

"Our initial intent when we got this started in August was to continue at least through winter break, which is around Dec. 18 for these three schools," Ellin said. "Depending on how the program went, if it was of value and it was helping, we would decide to talk again in November or December to see if we want to continue it."

Students and staff are offered testing every week, with nasal swabs collected by Mountain Park Urgent Care and sent to Ocala, Florida for analysis. Ellin said results from the tests are expected to come back within three to four days, although many tests have been coming back sooner than that.

So far, testing participation has been

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Providing care on the go

BY CARTER GIEGERICH
Staff

The Vecinos Farmworker Health Program has taken a major step forward in their efforts to provide vital medical services to the latino farmworker community in Jackson County with the recent unveiling of their new mobile health clinic.

The new clinic replaces the organization's outdated mobile clinic, which was housed in a rapidly aging 15-passenger van and severely limited the services clinicians were able to provide in the field. Now, the clinicians have access to a three-room facility built onto a 26-foot trailer with all the bells and whistles.

"The driving force behind the design of it was to really create a tool that allows somebody to seek healthcare in the same way you and I seek healthcare," said Marianne Martinez, executive director of Vecinos. "There's a room for behavioral health, there's a room for medical exams, there's a triage area. We can do urinalysis now, because there's a bathroom."

With the past clinic, the issue of privacy for those seeking treatment was an ongoing struggle. Limited space and cramped quarters meant patients' privacy and dignity were at risk of being compromised even for routine, straightforward checkups.

"With the old clinic, you would know what provider is going to the migrant camp that day," Martinez said. "So if the mental health therapist is there that day, everyone knows you're seeing the mental health worker. If you had a rash, everyone knew something was going on because the clinicians had to lower the shades on the van. Now, once you enter, you know what you're in there for but



Ashlie Mitchell-Lanning

Vecinos staff and supporters gather at the Oct. 25 open house for the organization's new mobile clinic at the Village Green. Pictured from left are Outreach worker Ricardo Ball, Outreach Intern Jessica Rodriguez, Outreach Coordinator Jessica Rodriguez, Rotary Club of Cashiers Valley Director Ron Keller, Vecinos Executive Director Marianne Martinez and Mental Health Therapist Kenny Parmenter.

75 of your closest workmates and roommates don't. It provides a level of confidentiality we couldn't provide before."

Vecinos took the new clinic on its first foray into the field on Aug. 13, as part of a joint effort with the Jackson County Department of Public Health to perform necessary bloodwork for a number of migrant farmworkers in Jackson County. This type of partnership is emblematic of how Vecinos is able to best serve this historically underserved population, Martinez said.

"Our first time using it was a collabo-

ration with the Jackson County Public Health Department, which to me is a really cool first-time use for it. That's the point of the clinic – to have a collaborative space to offer comprehensive services to people who can't get out to go where they need to go," Martinez said. "Not because they aren't allowed, but because their work and their hours are so demanding."

Serving the Cashiers community

On Oct. 25, Vecinos brought the

See **VECINOS** page 5A

A place of her own: Breathing new life into a longtime business

Natalia Tretiakov has put her own spin on The Corner Store since purchasing the Cashiers business in 2013

BY DAN BROWN
Staff

October is Women in Business month. This is the final installment of the Crossroads Chronicle's series featuring local women-owned businesses - this week's profile is on Natalia Tretiakov, owner of The Corner Store in Cashiers.

Local business owner Natalia Tretiakov considers herself fortunate, humble and honored to be a part of the sisterhood of women in business in Cashiers.

"I am honored to be part of the Cashiers community and very thankful to everyone who supports my toy and gift shop," Tretiakov said. "There are so many wonderful businesses for women in our town and I am grateful to know them and work side by side with them."

Tretiakov had long aspired to be a Cashiers business owner and was one of those who switched sides of the sales counter, being first a loyal customer of

the shop she now owns since moving to Cashiers in 2006.

"As a Mother, I spent lots of time here and enjoyed buying toys and gifts for my children and friends, and thought I want to have my own store one day," she said.

In 2013, Tretiakov bought The Corner Store from Lynn Srebalus, who had owned the business since 1988.

"I bought an established business seven years ago," Tretiakov said from behind the counter of The Corner Store, Toys and Gifts, located in the Village Walk Shoppes of NC 107 South. "I always wanted to own my own gift shop and told Lynn whenever she wanted to retire to let me know."

Tretiakov said she took what was already selling here and added some of her favorite things she found as a customer, and made The Corner Store her own.

Like most other Cashiers based busi-



Dan Brown/Staff

Natalia Tretiakov has owned her business, The Corner Store, for seven years, and was originally a loyal customer.

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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION



PALMER

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without bond ever since.

Palmer is accused of shooting Norris several times in the chest and abdomen with a 9mm handgun on the morning of Feb. 2, 2016. Norris’s wife, Tammy, discovered her husband in bed upon returning to their Panorama Trail home from working the night shift at Highlands-Cashiers Hospital. The 911 call was dispatched at 7:34 a.m., according to reports.

Prior to being extradited in 2018, Palmer was serving a 10-year prison sentence after pleading guilty in 2015 to the armed robbery of a gas station in Coffee County, Georgia. Palmer also served time in Georgia from March 2003 to May 2004 for second-degree burglary and criminal damage, and from April 2005 to August 2007 for possession of methamphetamine.

Jury trials resuming

After months of delay, jury trials resume on a limited basis next week in the 43rd Prosecutorial District, made up of the state’s seven western-most counties and overseen by District Attorney Welch.

The first jury trials in the district start Monday in Haywood County.

In March, Chief Justice Cheri Beasley ordered a statewide halt to jury trials to help combat coronavirus spread. She extended the restriction through Oct. 15.

Though jury trials have not taken place, North Carolina’s judicial system has continued its day-to-day functions, such as accepting pleas, holding traffic court and granting protections to victims of domestic violence according to a press release.

In anticipation of the gradual resumption of jury trials, Chief Justice Beasley directed senior

resident superior court judges, in consultation with local officials, to craft court safety plans. The state’s Administrative Office of the Courts and the public health director for each county reviewed and approved all safety measures.

The 43rd Prosecutorial District has two senior resident judges: Letts oversees 30B, made up of Haywood and Jackson counties; Bill Coward oversees 30A, made up of Macon, Clay, Cherokee, Graham and Swain counties.

The judges retain discretion to suspend jury trials in their counties in connection with COVID-19, based on local needs and conditions.

In this prosecutorial district, precautions in court include:

Requiring face masks or shields.

Separating summoned jurors 6- to 10-feet apart.

Maintaining proper social distancing during breaks and deliberations.

Limiting seating for spectators to designated spaces and holding one seat open for the press.

Presenting exhibits to the jury electronically or in a collective fashion; no paper distribution is allowed.

Providing COVID-19 medical screenings of jurors, court personnel, attorneys witnesses and other involved parties.

Restricting county court sessions to one week only.

Finding substitute sites for court if a particular county’s courtroom is too small to maintain social distancing.

Haywood County has adequately sized courtrooms, as well as a jury assembly room that provides still more space, Assistant District Attorney Jeff Jones said.

Jurors will be seated in both the juror box and in the audience area of the courtroom, providing 6- to 10-foot distancing; additionally, the courtrooms have been refigured with safety in

mind.

The one-week restriction for jury trials has shaped the types of cases that can be heard.

“Those selected for trial are factually brief and do not require a large number of witnesses,” Jones said.

After Haywood’s session, Jackson and Clay counties are scheduled to hold jury trials for one week each, beginning Monday, Nov. 2.

Assistant District Attorney John Hindsman Jr. said Clay County has adequate space for court proceedings, but jury selection will move from the courthouse to the recreation center/gym.

Haywood County has a second session for jury trials beginning the week of Nov. 9. Cherokee County will hold jury trials the week of Nov. 16, in the usual venue.

Macon, Swain and Graham counties start jury trials in the new year.

TESTING

Continued from page 1A

lower than expected. Ellin said he believed those numbers would pick up, though, as two of the schools have now reported confirmed positive cases among the student body.

“When we started, we were hoping the majority of people would take advantage of it. The first few weeks, though, we were only testing 18-20 percent of the students and staff. To be honest, I was disappointed with that,” Ellin said. “I had some conversations with principals about why we weren’t getting better participation, and then we had a positive test from a teacher and there was a significant increase in the number of teachers and students both wanting to get tested. As people become aware there have been some positive tests, they’re more inclined to be tested.”

HCHF has received positive feedback from many of the community members who have already taken advantage of the program, including teachers at the schools and parents of the children tested in recent weeks.

“We had our COVID-19 testing provided by the Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation. It was quick, easy and efficient,” said Brad Hughes, a math teacher at Summit Charter School and parent of one of Summit’s students. “By Friday, I had received my results, as well as my child’s results. It has already been a wonderful way to give my wife and me peace of mind as we work, and send our children to school, during a

pandemic.”

Testing rates have also gone up as fears about the COVID-19 swab tests begin to subside, Ellin said. Early descriptions of the tests, some forms of which require a nasal swab be inserted far into the recipients nose, may have created some anxiety among potential test participants, but Ellin said the form of test used at the schools is less invasive and shouldn’t deter anyone from receiving one.

“We’re doing a nasal swab – this is a swab that goes into your nose about an inch,” he said. “For about two or three seconds it’s mildly uncomfortable, but we’ve talked to children, including six-, seven- and eight-year-olds, and none of them complained. They said it tickles. I think there was anticipatory anxiety among parents fearing it would be uncomfortable, but now parents are realizing that’s not a reason to avoid being tested.”

Community representation

The benefits of widespread testing in a school environment goes beyond the borders of the school’s campus. Ellin said there are many critical pieces of data that can be gleaned by looking at testing data from the schools, and the more data there is to explore the better those insights might be.

“The thought is that when you have a pandemic, if you can do some type of surveillance screening in the community, it can go a long way toward reducing spread. That has downstream effects – you can keep businesses open, you can send kids to school,



Submitted photo

Students line up six feet apart for testing during a recent free testing event at Highlands School, sponsored by the Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation.

you can keep going to work,” Ellin said.

The schools provide an ideal setting to perform this community surveillance, he said.

“The question is, how do you do surveillance testing? One way to do it is to screen the schools,” Ellin said. “Where in Cashiers and Highlands can people congregate in large places? The schools are pretty much the only place. We’re applying these principles in the schools because that’s where the people are.”

Despite the fact that positive test results have been nearly nonexistent, Ellin said he still views the

testing program as a valuable tool for the community and for public health experts.

“I would say even if all

of our tests were negative up to this point, there’s still value in having that knowledge,” he said. “The fact that it does not appear

there is a significant percentage of positive tests in either community is an indication that the program is valuable.”

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EDITORIAL

If you're offered a free COVID-19 test, please take it

For the past several weeks, our local schools have had the good fortune of receiving free COVID-19 testing sponsored by the Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation. The program has improved to the point that many students and teachers are receiving their results in just two days, and almost all are receiving them within the projected 2-5 day window.

With such an important resource provided free of charge in one of the few places where large numbers of residents are congregating for an extended period of time, one might reasonably assume the participation rate would be near 100 percent.

As it turns out, only about a quarter of our students and teachers are participating in this free testing program. It's not clear why that might be, but it is disappointing that such a valuable resource is being overlooked by so many.

This is not intended as a criticism of our teachers or our students, to be clear - the hurdles they have all had to overcome this year are monumental, and this entire paper could easily be filled with the stories of hardships the COVID-19 pandemic has brought down on our public education system.

Instead, it is our hope that a bit of perspective and gentle encouragement will help drive further participation in a program that could provide incredible insights into the health of our community and help to prevent the types of widespread outbreaks that have been seen in other school systems and even elsewhere within the Jackson County school system.

Schools present a unique opportunity for community surveillance that can provide public health experts with information that would be otherwise quite difficult to obtain, offering a cross section of a large portion of the population and the spread of the virus throughout our community.

With a deeper understanding of the virus' spread, it is easier to make informed decisions about reopening businesses, allowing kids to attend classes in-person and all manner of other restrictions we've experienced due to the ongoing pandemic. The more testing we conduct, the better equipped we are to navigate these challenges safely and effectively.

So please, if you're given a chance to take a test safely and at no cost to yourself, consider taking advantage of that opportunity. You'll be providing our community with yet another tool to help us make it through this situation as quickly and safely as possible.

LETTERS POLICY

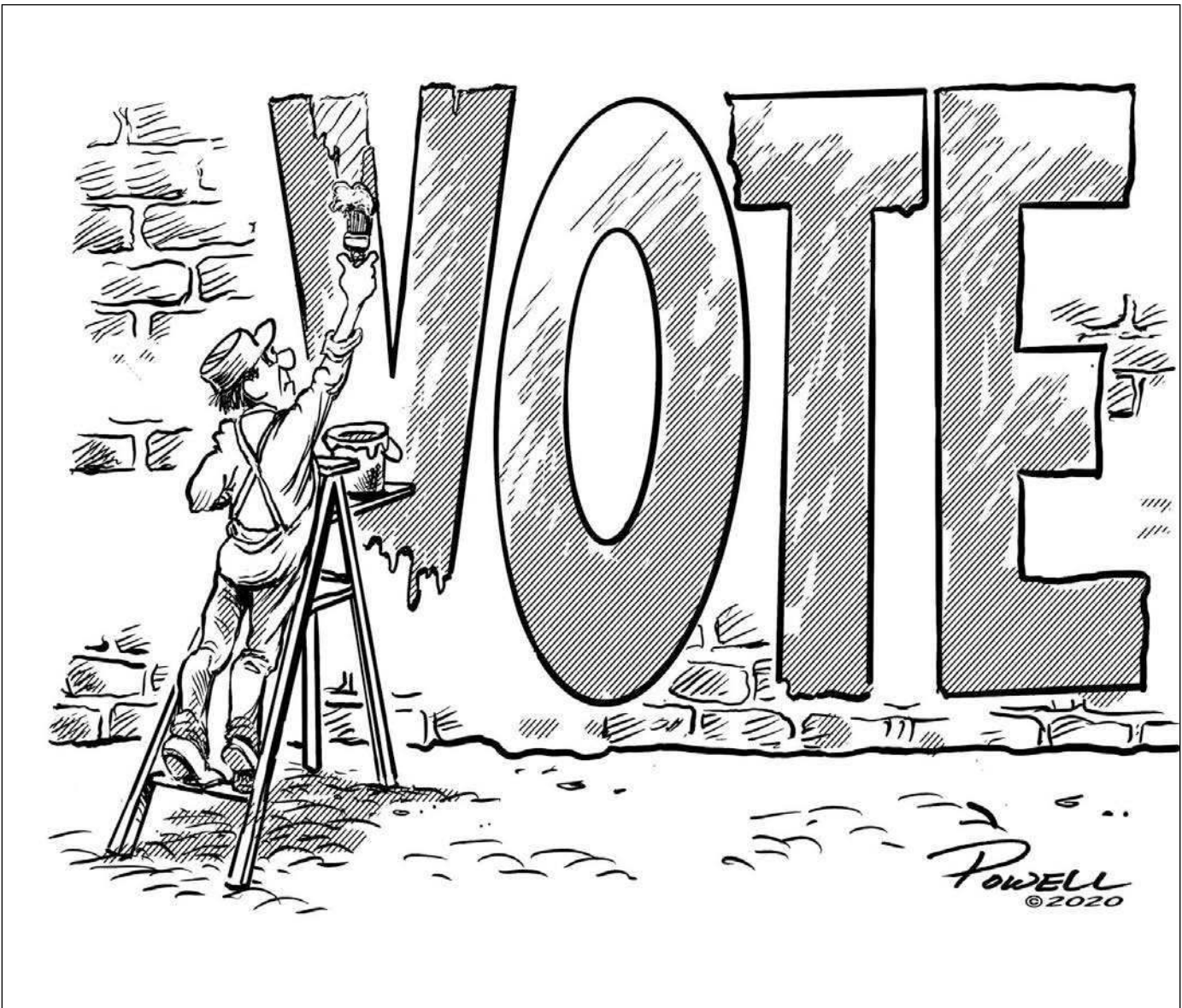
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All letters should include the writer's full name, address and daytime phone number. Addresses and phone numbers will not be published but will be used to verify letters. We reserve the right not to print any letter.

Letters are due in by 4 p.m. Friday to appear in the following week's paper.

Email letters to Editor@CrossroadsChronicle.com.

Letters may be mailed to P.O. Box 1040, Cashiers, NC 28717.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Compassion, conscience, discernment

I once met a woman who had an abortion twenty years before our meeting. She had never forgiven herself for aborting what she called her untimely pregnancy. We talked long over tears and many cups of tea. Her grief and suffering were real and alive.

Two years later I met a woman who openly and almost gleefully confessed her two abortions. She had no regrets, "It was an inconvenient time to have children." She and her husband later had two sons.

Abortion hurts, and abortion quickly "fixes a problem." Abortion also divides, and is the great dividing line that the parties in this election must deal with. Psalm 139 says "For I (GOD) put you in your mother's womb. You are fearfully and wonderfully made." Loud voices respond, "It's my body. Women have a right to choose."

How you view "life" is how you

will vote now, because no political parties have ever been so clear or divided on this one issue. One side fights for their right to "choose", the other argues it's a child not tissue. Some who utter the word "baby" have a lilt in their voices. Others, equally represented in our country profess the rights to their own body.

In 2015 I made myself listen to all of the undercover videos of Planned Parenthood officials caught ready to supply body parts, "baby" body parts, for a price. They felt no qualms about what they were doing.

In 2019 I watched New Yorkers cheer as if winning the Super Bowl as they approved The Reproductive Health Act, or approval of third trimester abortions.

America has aborted 60 million babies since 1973. That number is 54 million over the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust. Less than 1 percent of abortions are because of rape or incest.

Planned Parenthood this year alone has given \$45 Million in


election donations to Democrat organizations. In the undercover videos Planned Parenthood officials shared that there are more aborted body parts available for purchase on "Fridays" because Fridays are abortion days.

Further they explained that pricing for intact "specimens" (that is formed heads and little livers, tiny hearts and lungs) is higher than for sliced up specimens.

I know from the videos that Planned Parenthood has "volume" but encourages" buyers beware." When the "specimen" is shipped, and because the "fetal tissue" is fragile, they will ship it often "intact." Translation, when the research recipient opens the box, it looks rather like a baby. Yep. That's because "intact" means little livers and hearts and tiny lungs are woven within the precious body of a child, and do not come from specimens, they come from babies who were growing in the womb.

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A surprise candidate in 2024



DG Martin

Columnist

Guess what. The presidential election is just about to begin. "You mean just about end," I can hear you thinking. But I am talking about the 2024 presidential election campaign. It will be going strong even before all the votes in the 2020 contest have been counted. No matter who wins this year, there will be an open seat in 2024. If Trump wins, he will be term-lim-

ited and ineligible to run again.

Should Biden win, he will almost certainly not run for a second term that would begin when he would be 82. As he said earlier this year, "I view myself as a transition candidate."

Thus, whether or not Biden wins, Democratic presidential hopefuls will go to work immediately.

Kamala Harris, whether she is vice president-elect or simply a U.S. senator, will be pointing for 2024.

Other senators in contention include New Jersey's Cory Booker, Minnesota's Amy Klobuchar, Colorado's Michael Bennet, Virginia's Tim Kaine, and Massachusetts' Elizabeth Warren.

Kaine may be less ambitious

and flashy than his fellow senators, but is solid and has the experience of running a national campaign as Hillary Clinton's running mate in 2016.

Add former Colorado governor John Hickenlooper to the list if he wins a senate seat in the 2020 election.

Lots of Democratic governors will be thinking about running, including Andy Beshear of Kentucky, Andrew Cuomo of New York, Jay Inslee of Washington state, Gavin Newsom of California, J. B. Pritzker of Illinois, and Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan.

Should North Carolina's

See **MARTIN** page 6A

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