

The Highlander

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Dollar General coming soon

By Ryan Hanchett
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A new value retailer will soon be opening its doors midway between Highlands and Cashiers.

Officials with Dollar General Corporation confirmed Tuesday that the company is building a new store on Cashiers Road (US 64 East) near the intersection of Cherrywood Drive.

“Dollar General is currently under construction on a new location on Cashiers Road in Highlands,” Dollar General Public Re-

lations Representative Angela Petkovic said. “At this time, a store opening is slated for early 2021, but understand that construction progress may alter this date.”

Petkovic added that the store will employ 6–10 staff members and that anyone interested in working at the store can apply online at www.dollargeneral.com/careers.

According to Petkovic, the new store will bring name brand goods at discount prices to the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau. It will be roughly halfway between the Dol-

lar General store in Scaly Mountain and the store in Sapphire.

“Our customers are at the center of all that we do, and meeting customers’ needs is Dollar General’s top priority when choosing store locations,” Petkovic said. “In selecting store sites, we take a number of factors into consideration, carefully evaluating each potential new store location to ensure we can continue to meet our customers’ price, value and selection needs.”

Dollar General bought the prop-



Photo by Dan Brown/Staff

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Dollar General has started construction of a new store on US 64 East in Highlands.

Christmas parade called off



The Highlander file photo

The Highlands Christmas parade, originally scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 5, has been cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns.

Concerns over rising COVID-19 case numbers halt annual holiday event

By Ryan Hanchett
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With COVID-19 case numbers on the rise, and growing concern about the safety of group gatherings, the Highlands Chamber of Commerce made the decision to cancel the annual Christmas parade, originally scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 5.

According to Chamber Executive Director Kaye McHan the board of directors called for the parade’s cancellation following North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper’s most recent executive order, which called for increased mask usage and decreased the number of people allowed at public gatherings.

“Due to the cases rising rapidly in North Carolina the state has tightened existing mask requirements

and enforcement, and as of Monday, 10 more counties were designated as red for critical community spread,” McHan said in a written statement. “The Chamber board made this difficult decision in support of community health and well-being. Event plans are already underway for 2021 in hopes that we can once again bring the community together to celebrate.”

The Chamber had previously planned to go forward with the parade, albeit with a major format change. The 2020 event was going to be a drive-thru parade where visitors stayed in their vehicles and drove along Main Street to see stationary floats and displays set in the middle parking area along the street.

The route was going to continue through Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park, where Santa Claus would be stationed to greet children near the town

Christmas tree. The tree lighting ceremony was held virtually, via Facebook Live, on Saturday, Nov. 28.

Highlands School

Macon County Schools confirmed a positive case of COVID-19 at Highlands School on Monday afternoon. The confirmed case is the second in as many weeks and brings the total number of cases at the school to five since the academic year began in August.

Along with the additional confirmed case at Highlands, two cases were confirmed Monday at Franklin High School. MCS officials and the Macon County Public Health department are working to complete

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HCHF disperses 20 grants for 2020

From staff reports

The Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation recently awarded more than \$1 million toward grants and special projects.

“This has been an unprecedented year for everyone,” HCHF Board Chair Dr. Walter Clark said. “In late March, our board refocused their 2020 priorities to meet the new community needs that arose from COVID-19.”

Since then, HCHF has been in full swing addressing COVID-19 projects such as funding the distribution of 250 hand sanitizing stations in partnership with four Chambers of Commerce, sponsoring community COVID-19 drive through testing sites in Cashiers and Highlands, and funding COVID-19 weekly testing in three local schools.

“We want to put our dollars where the needs are greatest, and where needle-moving projects make a real difference,” Clark said. “Once we addressed critical COVID-19 projects our programs and grants committee went into action.”

Led by Stephanie Edwards, the committee proceeded with the original strategic priorities for 2020 grants—Health and Access to Healthcare, Education, Transformative and Collaborative Solutions.

Twenty grant awards (19 confirmed and one pending) total-

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MAMA

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tional training to learn the new controls.

“The instruments on this aircraft are so much more sophisticated than the previous model, so it took the pilots some getting used to,” Grindstaff said. “The number one reason we got this new aircraft was one word – safety. HCA saw the need and they invested in the safety of not only the flight crew, but also the patients who will use this service in the future.”

Mission Hospital Director of Communications Erin Young noted that the new helicopter becoming operational makes the previous vehicle available to work as a backup in times of maintenance or emergencies.

“We have two helicopters that work in tandem as part of Mountain Area Medical Airlift and that

will continue with the addition of the new MAMA unit,” Young said. “The previous helicopter will be maintained and be kept ready for use. That way if the two vehicles in rotation need to be serviced, that vehicle can step in and be ready to go.”

Young noted that the MAMA team — pilots, nurses and paramedics — has a total of 1,071 years of experience. The median for the medical team is 24.7 years, and 24.9 years for the pilots.

As part of the new helicopter’s tour of the Western North Carolina mountains, the flight crew took the vehicle on a tour of the hospitals in the Mission Health system as well as some local fire departments and community centers.

“We want everyone to get a feel for this new helicopter and understand its capabilities,” Grindstaff said. “It’s an impressive piece of machinery, but the most important thing to remember is this helicopter will save a lot of lives during its time in service.”



Photo by Ryan Hanchett/Staff

The new Mountain Area Medical Airlift helicopter will be able to fly safely in weather conditions that the previous model could not handle, according to MAMA Supervisor John Grindstaff.

DG

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erty for the new location from Highlands businessman JT Fields through a third-party property developer. Fields initially wanted to put a car storage facility on the lot, before the real estate offer came in.

“After we were under contract we learned that the buyer is a developer who builds Dollar General stores,” Fields said. “This was unexpected and we called our attorney to understand the options. After research and a lot of discussion, it seemed clear that they would locate somewhere on the road between Highlands and Cashiers. Knowing it would be our lot or another, we decided to move forward believing we could minimize the impact. To that end, we negotiated for them to build an upgraded facade costing an additional \$35,000 by taking a reduction in the purchase price.”

Fields noted that the end result will be a retail store in a location already designated for that kind



Photo by Dan Brown/Staff

With snow falling on Tuesday morning, construction work was halted at the site of a new Dollar General store on US 64 East.

of development and the store itself will look “much better” than the Dollar General stores in Scaly Mountain or Sapphire.

“It is unfortunate that there are no zoning restrictions out-

side of the town limits,” Fields said. “If not selling to the builder meant there wouldn’t ever be a Dollar General on that road, we would have tried to find a way out of the deal.”

Dollar General, headquartered in Goodlettsville, Tennessee, operates 16,287 stores across the United States. The new location will be the company’s eighth store in Macon County.

Grants

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ing nearly a million dollars were approved by the HCHF Board in October.

“These awarded funds will touch lives spanning from early childhood through end-of-life and support non-profit services that uplift and improve lives,” said Edwards.

Fifty-five percent of HCHF’s 2020 grants will support health projects such as school-based health, dental care and behavioral health services for the underserved. Nearly 20 percent will fund childhood education programs and the remaining funds went toward solutions to pressing health issues.

In addition to COVID-19 projects and grant-funding the Foundation unveiled its “Leap of Faith” initiative to open a new community health center operated by Blue Ridge Health incorporating a rural teaching practice operated by Mountain Area Health Education Center and the UNC School of Medicine.

“If all goes as planned, we expect to see an opening date by summer 2021,” said Clark.

Since its founding on Feb. 1, 2019, HCHF has invested more than \$3.6 million dollars across six counties through 73 grants to non-profit organizations and special projects.

“The foundation looks forward to another tremendously impactful year in 2021, as we continue to move the needle forward for improving health and well-being throughout Highlands, Cashiers, and the surrounding communities,” said Robin Tindall, CEO and Executive Director of the Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation.