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A Year in Highlands wall calendar 2021. Get ready for the New Year with a look at Highlands scenery.

Fire station build temporarily delayed

By Ryan Hanchett
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A mistake in Raleigh has caused a holdup in the loan closing process for the Town of Highlands' new fire department.

Town manager Josh Ward informed the board of commissioners in November that the town was working with the Army Corps of Engineers and the NC Department of Water Quality to determine the best way to mitigate a wetland area along Franklin Road that is now part of the property for the new fire station.

In order to close the loan for construction, a plan had to be in place to change the drainage in an approved way. That plan was developed and ultimately approved by the Corps of Engineers, but a paperwork error kept the loan closing from happening in December.

"In order to close the loan and get started on the project we need to have approval from the NC Local Government Commission, and for whatever reason they left us off of their December agenda," Ward said. "They were very apologetic and assured us that we will be on the Jan. 5, 2021

agenda for approval. Assuming that happens we can close the construction loan with BB&T on Jan. 8."

With the permits to mitigate the wetland in hand, site work could begin immediately after the loan closing. Ward noted that a one-month holdup would not affect the overall timeline of building the new fire station.

"Honestly, even if we would have gotten the permits in place and been approved by the LGC on Dec. 8, its unlikely that

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Pisgah Legal Services opens in Highlands

By Carter Geigerich
The Crossroads Chronicle

Access to free and reduced-cost legal services for residents of the plateau and surrounding counties has taken a big step forward this month, as Pisgah Legal Services puts the finishing touches on its newest office next to the Highlands-Cashiers Hospital.

PLS serves low-income community members in need of legal aid on matters ranging from housing concerns to custody disputes, domestic violence prevention and immigration matters. Executive Director Jim Barrett said the organization hopes the plateau office will act as a hub for those in Jackson and Macon Counties in need of these services.

"We have immigration law services that are spread pretty thin across 18 counties, and then we have other services that help people get stable housing, stop domestic violence, increase their income and access health-care," Barrett said. "That's why we expanded into Macon and Jackson Counties. We were able to do that because people on the plateau helped us raise a lot of money, and Highlands-Cashiers Health Foundation has made generous grant funding available."

Barrett said the placement of the new office on the plateau is in part because of the requests from funders to have the office

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Arts groups working together



Submitted photo

This artists rendering shows what the exterior of the Highlands Performing Arts Center will look like once a renovation and expansion project is completed at the Chestnut Street facility.

PAC and Playhouse share vision for future of performing arts partnership

By Ryan Hanchett
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The holiday season is often called the season of giving.

For board members of the Highlands Performing Arts Center and the Highlands Playhouse, the 2020 holidays are being marked as a season of collaboration.

With plans to expand the PAC on the horizon, both groups are busy working to determine what the impact of the new and improved facility will be on the arts community. In 2022, the Highlands Playhouse will take up residence at the PAC, leaving its current Oak Street location behind.

"We have been working on this plan for years now and we are really excited to see what the future holds," Highlands Playhouse board chair Dave Healy said. "As an organization we wanted to look toward the future and determine what is the best course of action for the Playhouse and the PAC. Being under one roof seems like a natural fit."

PAC Executive Director Mary Adair Trumbly noted that the transition has gone smoothly thus far as the groups have begun coordinating future show dates. The organizations now share a box office and ticketing system, which creates a one-stop shop for consumers.

"The Playhouse is known for their phenomenal summer performance

lineup, and also for showing movies throughout the year," Trumbly said. "Once the expansion is complete we will have no problem accommodating those shows at the PAC and we will be able to show movies as well. We've already measured the screen and the equipment and it will fit in our new theater."

Trumbly added that the new theater at the PAC will also have a fly system, something unavailable to the Playhouse staff at the current location. The addition of a fly system will allow the Playhouse to put on a wider variety of shows if they choose.

The original PAC expansion plans called for a new 400-seat theater to be added at the facility along with a Black

Box theater. Recently the PAC board unveiled revamped plans that feature a new 300-seat theater, to open in 2022. The Black Box theater has been put on hold, but is still in the facilities future plans according to Trumbly.

"The new theater will be state of the art and it will allow us to be so much more versatile with our offerings for the PAC, the Playhouse, and groups like the Highlands Chamber Music Festival and the Highlands Cashiers Players who also use this facility," PAC board president Nancy Harrison said. "It's a big undertaking, but once its done the PAC will be a hub for all things perform-

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Pisgah

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close by, and also by the availability of volunteer staff.

“We’re happy to be able to serve from the office in the plateau, because we can get a lot of volunteers – there are a lot of retired lawyers in the area,” Barrett said. “We also do most of our work over the phone, so people can still access us in the middle of the pandemic.”

The office, which is currently still operating remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has a number of full-time staff members as well, several of whom have long-time ties to the plateau. Staff Attorney Patricia Caddell grew up in Cashiers, returning to her hometown in the mountains after law school to serve the community in which

she spent her childhood.

“I’m really grateful for the opportunity to help the community I grew up in,” Caddell said. “I have lots of family and friends here, and when I left for law school I came back as soon as I could when this opportunity presented itself.”

The need for services on the plateau and the surrounding communities is great, Caddell said.

PLS offers free services to households with incomes at or below 125 percent of the poverty level. Barrett said he recognizes two distinct populations their services might be used by here on the plateau, each with their own unique needs.

“Kids on free and reduced lunch make up about half the school population – that alone tells you there are a lot of low-income families off the beaten path on the plateau,” Barrett said. “Then there are

the people who have to commute to work on the plateau. A lot of people working there can’t afford to live there, and you can see people coming and going in the morning and afternoon.”

It would be almost impossible for many of these individuals to make the trip to a larger town during the standard workday to seek services on a regular basis, Barrett said.

“You think about groundskeepers, wait staff, services workers. Frankly, the vacationers depend on them but they need to be able to get services if they need it. Nobody wants these workers to be experiencing domestic violence,” he said. “If they need a lawyer for something, especially something critical, and they’re working on the plateau, they couldn’t easily drive to Franklin or Sylva to see a lawyer.”



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