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Ashe County Arts Council announces new executive director

BY ANDREW COLE
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WEST JEFFERSON — Recently, the Ashe County Arts Council announced that High Country native Joni Ray will be taking on the role of executive director for the organization. Ray, who will be coming from the neighboring Florence Thomas Art School, is slated to assume her new position starting in late September. Having served as the Gallery Di-



Joni Ray

rector at Florence Thomas Art School for seven years, Ray will bring a wealth of experience and knowledge of both of the arts and working with the public to her new position at the arts council.

"I was fortunate to have that job because we have at least 30 to 40 artists on consignment there.

So, I was able to meet all kinds of artists in that position and about half of them were local, so I'll carry that into my new job," Ray said regarding her current position at Florence Thomas Art School. "Also, I got to work hands on with a lot of our board members and volunteers and that's really made a lasting impression on me."

Wesley Barker, president of the Arts Council's Board of Directors

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Remembering our heroes



PHOTO BY CHANDA RICHARDSON

Commissioner Chuck Olive, BOE Chair Josh Roten, Commissioner Jonathan Jordan, State Treasurer Dale Folwell, Sheriff Phil Howell, Congresswoman Virginia Fox, State Representative Ray Pickett and Vice Chair Commissioner William Sands gathered at the Civic Center to commemorate the 20 year anniversary of 9/11.

Ashe County pays tribute on the 20th anniversary of 9/11

BY CHANDA RICHARDSON
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WEST JEFFERSON — On Saturday, Sept. 11, Ashe County gathered in the Civic Center to pay tribute to those we lost on that day 20 years ago, and those who fought on after.

County officials, the honor guard, survivors of the attacks and others were present, each sharing words of encouragement and advice as "we continue to strive toward a better world."

The ceremony began with a time table of 9/11, including speakers going through the events that unraveled.

NC Treasurer Dale Folwell spoke about how Ashe County will never forget the tragedy that happened in New York City.

"I have a very local connection with this area," said Folwell. "This event that you're witnessing and being a part of today, didn't just jump up on the table by itself. Being a part of this and paying tribute is highly important. As your state treasurer, one of my main responsibilities is to pay attention to planning for nearly 1 million servants in North Carolina. Most of the people you see in uniform now are a part of our pension responsibilities. Those pensions



PHOTO BY CHANDA RICHARDSON

The American Flag stands tall and proud at the Civic Center on Sept. 11.

come as blessings, but unfortunately, we have to deliver checks to spouses and beneficiaries who were killed in the line of duty.

"It's important to remember that this outcome happens unfortunately too often in North Carolina. I will not only thank all of those in the

audience who are first responders, police officers, medics, firefighters, EMS and volunteers, but I want to also thank their spouses. As you know, it's sometimes the spouses who truly suffer in these public

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BOE keeps mask mandate policy, plans to revisit each month

BY CHANDA RICHARDSON
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JEFFERSON — The Ashe County Board of Education met in regular session on Sept. 13 to discuss the mask policy, updates and upcoming events. Boards of education are mandated to visit local mask mandates monthly.

Those in attendance were Chair Josh Roten, Vice Chair Dianne Eldreth, Dr. Kim Simmons, Polly Jones, Keith McClure, Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox and Finance Officer Amanda Coldiron.

Cox began the meeting with announcements. Vannoy Construction donated a flag pole which will be up by Sept. 17 and will commemorate the men and women who serve our country. Cox also commented on the

success of the first annual Back 2 School Blast and thanked all those who were involved in planning and executing the exciting day for students.

The board then discussed the question of whether or not to implement a mask mandate or to make masks optional.

The discussion began with public comment and three community members stepping up to speak to the board.

First was Jessica Carter who expressed her concerns on masking in schools.

"As an educator myself, I understand the responsibility of the school," said Carter. "Schools are not charged to serve as an authority on any child's health and wellbeing, but rather just to safeguard

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF APPHEALTHCARE

Ashe County, as well as neighboring counties, have remained into the 'red' stage which represents a high level of community transmission.

Ashe sees 50 active cases of COVID-19 along with the 54th death

BY CHANDA RICHARDSON
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ASHE COUNTY — As the COVID-19 pandemic reaches for another peak, Ashe County is continuing to contract the virus, standing at 50 active with 101 individuals in quarantine as of Sept. 13.

AppHealthCare has also reported the 54th death since the beginning of the pandemic. Neighboring Alleghany stands at 30

active, 84 in quarantine and six deaths as of Sept. 13. Watauga has 78 active cases, 98 individuals in quarantine and 35 deaths.

In the week of Sept. 4-10, Ashe County Schools reported that 41 students tested positive along with five staff.

No numbers on current quarantine have been provided. To keep up with the ACS COVID-19

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