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Mother, son die in fatal collision in Ashe County

STAFF REPORT

JEFFERSON — Two passengers were killed in a two-car collision on U.S. 221 near Shatley Road on Monday, Oct. 18, according to the N.C. State Highway Patrol, who responded at 7:15 p.m.

A 2005 Honda CRV, driven by William Calhoun, 65, of Laurel Springs, was traveling south on US 221, drove left of center and collided head-on with a northbound 1988 Ford Mustang. The initial investigation indicates the driver of the Ford

swerved to the left in an attempt to avoid the Honda, according to Master Trooper Jeffrey Swagger of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety and Highway patrol.

Calhoun was seriously injured and transported to the hospital by medical helicopter, according to Swagger.

The driver of the Ford, Hunter Luther, 23, of Jefferson, was not injured. The front seat passenger, Harley Marie Taylor, 22, of Jefferson, succumbed to her injuries at

the scene. The rear seat passenger, Bentley Taylor, 3, was transported to Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem with critical injuries, but died early Tuesday morning, Swagger said. Bentley was the child of Harley Taylor, and he was properly restrained in a car seat. Neither Luther nor Taylor was restrained by a seatbelt, according to Swagger.

Charges are pending the ongoing investigation and consultation with the Ashe County District Attorney's Office.



Choose n' Cut



Rusty and Beau Estes smile along with Dale Haney and previous North Carolina Winners including Joe Freeman, Jessie Davis and Larry Smith in front of the selected tree on Oct. 20.

White House chooses Ashe County Christmas tree for the Blue Room

BY CHANDA RICHARDSON
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JEFFERSON — Christmas at the White House has been an extravagant event for years and Ashe County has been no stranger to fulfilling the First Lady's tree selection with the finest Fraser firs the country has to offer.

Peak Farms from Ashe County was selected as the winner of 2021 with a 30 year old 19 foot tree to the White House.

In previous years, Ashe County tree farmers have been chosen as the Grand Champions of the National Christmas Tree Association Tree Contest — more specifically in 2008 and 2012 when a native county tree was placed in The Blue Room of the White House for former First Ladies Laura Bush and Michelle Obama.

This year, Rusty and son Beau Estes, owners of Peak Farms located in Jeffer-

son, were the Grand Champions for the selection of the White House's Blue Room Christmas Tree. The Estes clan were also the providers in 2008 and 2012 for previous presidents as well as in 2018 when a selection was made for the vice president's residence.

Peak Creek Farms has been growing trees since 1979 and now have over 400,000 Christmas Trees growing on their farms as a multi-generational family farm operation.

The honor of presenting a Christmas Tree to the White House is earned by being named Grand Champion Grower of NCTA's National Tree Contest, which has been going on since 1966. The tree itself must be between 18 and 19 feet tall to reach the ceiling of The Blue Room. In August of 2021, the Estes clan received the title of Grand Champion as they entered the Fraser fir contest.

White House Superintendent of Grounds

Dale Haney has been picking and choosing the tree since the beginning of his role, saying he was more than honored to have Ashe County represent this year's Christmas celebration.

Executive Director of the National Christmas Tree Association Tim O'Connor opened up the ceremony praising the Estes' farm for their beautiful trees and third title of Grand Champion.

"This is the 56th year that a member of the National Christmas Tree Association has presented the official tree to the White House," O'Connor said. "It's a wonderful thing that we really enjoy doing, it's an important opportunity for the industry, it's a wonderful partnership with the White House and we continue to appreciate and enjoy that."

"Beau and Rusty have now won this event

SEE TREE ON PAGE 3A



PHOTO BY CHANDA RICHARDSON

On Oct. 23, the concrete walls of the house were laid.

Habitat for Humanity sets off on new house for family

BY CHANDA RICHARDSON
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JEFFERSON — On Saturday, Oct. 23, the Ashe County Habitat for Humanity traveled up West Hickory Hill to continue working on a house for the Mullis family.

The house is set to be two stories with three bedrooms. It will contain insulated concrete walls and solar powered electricity, which makes the building three times more sustainable and efficient than a standard house.

This will be the eighth house that Habitat has built in Ashe County for those in need.

Charles Mullis and his family were on site helping with the structure of the house and said he couldn't be happier to have been given this opportunity.

"This is something I never thought I'd get to do," said Mullis. "It's really opened my eyes."

Habitat began working on the house in September and is hoping to have it done within a total of nine to 12 months.

Gerry Tygielski, treasurer of

SEE HABITAT ON PAGE 5A

Local conservationist surprised with Order of the Long Leaf Pine, Paddy Mountain under contract

BY ANDREW COLE
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LANSING — Ashe County resident Walter Clark has devoted much of his life to preserving many of North Carolina's natural treasures. Now, Clark's many contributions to the state have officially been recognized, when on the evening of Oct. 21 he was surprised with one of North Carolina's most prestigious awards — The Order of the Long Leaf Pine.

The ceremony took place as part of a Blue Ridge Conservancy event held at the Old Orchard Creek General Store, which is owned by both Clark

and Johnny Bursleson.

Clark was presented with the award in the presence of several state and local officials, including members of the Ashe County Chamber of Commerce, county commissioners Chuck Olive and Todd McNeill, county manager Adam Stumb, North Carolina Representative Ray Pickett and State Senator Deanna Ballard.

Also in attendance was the Chief Deputy Secretary of the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Staci Meyer, who made the trip to Lansing to present Clark the award on behalf of Gov. Roy Cooper.

Clark stated that he was both surprised and honored to have

received one the state's most treasured awards.

"It was a big surprise. I can't believe they were able to keep it a secret," Clark said. "It's an honor to get this. The Order of the Long Leaf Pine is probably one of the most special awards you can get in North Carolina. So, what can I say, I'm privileged."

Through the years, Clark has worked for NCDNR where he served as the Director of the Land and Water Fund, and has also served as Executive Director of the Blue Ridge Conservancy where he worked tirelessly to

SEE PINE ON PAGE 2A



PHOTO BY ANDREW COLE

Local conservationist Walter Clark is awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine by NCDNR Chief Deputy Secretary Staci T. Meyer during a Blue Ridge Conservancy event held the Old Orchard Creek General Store.



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