

Split vote lifts Blowing Rock state of emergency and mask mandate

BY DAVID ROGERS
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BLOWING ROCK — In a special called meeting on Nov. 17, Blowing Rock's town council voted, 3-2, to end the state of emergency due to COVID-19 and lifted the mask mandate within the town limits.

The commissioners were split 2-2 on the measure and mayor Charlie Sellers cast the deciding vote. In articulating the reason for his tie-breaking vote, Sellers said at this point it should be a matter of choice whether or not to wear a mask; that the mandate

was not being enforced and was challenging to enforce to begin with; the state and county do not have such a mandate; and that only four towns or counties in North Carolina currently have a mask mandate.

The motion by Albert Yount (seconded by Doug Matheson) to lift the state of emergency and mandate included a condition: if the 7-day moving average of the percent of positive tests is over 5 percent for seven consecutive days, then the town council will reconvene and consider reinstating the

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PHOTO BY DAVID ROGERS
Blowing Rock TDA executive director Tracy Brown loads up the last of the 'masks required' signs he collected on downtown sidewalks on Nov. 18 after town council voted to remove the state of emergency and mask mandate within the town limits at a special meeting on Nov. 17.



PHOTO BY MARISA MECKE
Cindy Kovalchin, Joanie Venza and Irene Sawyer pose with the winning decorated bra, the "Bra Ridge Parkway," which featured a hand-painted Linville Viaduct and an attached swinging bridge.

Bra decoration contest raises \$1,800 for High Country Breast Cancer Foundation

BY MARISA MECKE

BLOWING ROCK — Local artists, organizations and community members decorated a variety of themed bras to fundraise more than \$1,800 for the High Country Breast Cancer Foundation.

Vice president Joanie Venza said 54 bras were decorated to be sold, and that the group's founder, Irene Sawyer, donated her own money for the \$1,000 cash prize to the decoration competition's winner.

Although the High Country Breast Cancer Foundation has not been able to host all the events they usually would because of COVID-19, Venza said that they hosted their virtual 5K in late October and are continuing to accept donations as well as provide funds and aid to those battling breast cancer in seven different High Country counties.

The High Country Breast Cancer Foundation uses 100 percent of proceeds from fundraisers to give money directly to those battling breast cancer to cover anything from medical bills to transportation to doctor's appointments and more. Additionally, the organization has partnered with Paxman, a company which produces cooling caps to help prevent hair loss during chemotherapy treatment.

Beyond the generosity of the community members who donated or purchased the decorated bras, Venza said that local business owner Hailey Oliver offered the group her space for free to host the event. Oliver Style Boutique opened only last week in the Blowing Rock Tanger Outlets, but Oliver said she was happy to lend her space when recommended by the outlet's manager.

Oliver Style Boutique is a pop-up shop that will be open through Jan. 15, Oliver said. She originally sold just jewelry through Papparazzi, a multi-level marketing company, but wanted to expand into clothes and other goods in her own boutique.

Steve Dunphy provided music throughout the night, and while the public voted for their favorite bras, the competition was judged by two celebrity judges, Charles Hardin, the president and CEO of Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce and David Jackson, president and CEO of Boone Area Chamber of Commerce.

To learn more about the High Country Breast Cancer Foundation, their services and how to donate, visit hcbcf.org.

Marisa Mecke is a Report for America corps member for Mountain Times Publications. Report for America is a national nonprofit service program which places journalists in local newsrooms to report on under covered issues.

Reveal party



PHOTO BY DAVID ROGERS
A good crowd gathered in the American Legion Building on Nov. 18 to hear the 'State of the Town' presentations.

Pickett announces that Blowing Rock will receive \$4.8 million for the Main Street water and sewer infrastructure project.

BY DAVID ROGERS
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BLOWING ROCK — A governor's signature made for a big celebration at Blowing Rock's "State of the Town" event at the American Legion Building on Nov. 18. That's because included in the North Carolina state budget signed into law by Governor Roy Cooper on Thursday is an important line item: \$4.8 million to help with the cost to repair and replace water and sewer line infrastructure on Main Street.

Blowing Rock resident Ray Pickett (R) is the region's representative in the North Carolina legislature and helped push for the funding. He was on hand Thursday night to announce the news. State Senator Deanna Ballard (R) was also instrumental in



PHOTO BY DAVID ROGERS
NC Representative Ray Pickett (R) announced that Blowing Rock will receive \$4.8 million for the Main Street water and sewer project in the new state budget signed Nov. 18. His remarks came at the Nov. 18 'State of the Town' event produced by the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with the Blowing Rock TDA and the Town of Blowing Rock.

the line item's inclusion.

A short while later in the program, town manager Shane Fox provided some de-

tail for what the state funding allocation really means.

"It is actually more than \$4.8 million," he said. "When

you consider that we were planning to borrow the \$4.8 million over 40 years, with interest it would have cost closer to \$6 million."

During his portion of the evening's program, Fox noted that some of the town's water and sewer lines date back to their installation in 1910 and an even larger percentage are more than 50 years old. He showed images of cast iron lines that had been dug up for repairs that are riddled with holes.

"You touch one of those lines with a shovel and they just fall apart. So many are only being held together by the dirt around them," said Fox.

Fox reported that the \$4.8 million in state funding will be allocated \$3.7 million for

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Blowing Rock School's 6th grade Science Fair demonstrates student creativity, curiosity, growth

BY DAVID ROGERS
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BLOWING ROCK — Human beings often approach questions and problems with preconceived notions about the answers or solutions. As sixth graders at Blowing Rock School, Kate McKenzie and Katelyn Morgan admitted to approaching their 6th grade Science Fair project with a bias, too — but then learned something different.

"Our project was about the best ways to lower blood pressure in daily living. We thought that spending 10 minutes with a dog would have a more profound effect than 10 minutes of yoga or 10 minutes of meditation. Well, we were wrong. Through our project, we determined that 10 minutes of meditation actually did a better job of lowering blood pressure," said McKenzie.

McKenzie and Morgan's project was called, "Chill Out," just one of some three dozen science and math projects prepared by sixth grade students under the supervision of science and language arts

teacher, Allyson McFalls at Blowing Rock School.

"Every year this is an exciting competition because we see the kids grow so much from doing their projects," said McFalls. "Sometimes the topics even surprise us. This year, for example, there was a group who explored data about how hunters were impacting the local deer population over the last 10 years or so. It was really nice to see these students take a robust dataset, work with it, and come up with a project."

McFalls said that the sixth grade science project is the first really long term project that the students will tackle.

"When you think about a project at school, most think of one that lasts maybe two weeks as being long-term," said McFalls. "For these projects, it takes about 10-12 weeks to work through the scientific method and talk about how we determine independent variables and dependent variables. Then, how do we articulate the data in a way that



PHOTO BY DAVID ROGERS
Dogs may be man's best friend but Kate McKenzie and Katelyn Morgan discovered that meditation for 10 minutes is a better way to lower blood pressure than spending 10 minutes with a dog. The duo won first place in the Mathematics category of the Blowing Rock School's 6th grade science fair, Nov. 19.

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