



MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL

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Distance medicine project expands

Telemedicine growing in Mitchell and Yancey, new facility in the works for student education

Corey Hoilman
News-Journal Staff

With the Center for Rural Health Innovation's expanding school-based telemedicine service and the proposed health center at Mitchell High School, the partnership between the non-profit and Mitchell and Yancey's school systems continues to grow, reaching toward twin goals of expanding health care services and developing more rural medical professionals who will return to their roots to establish their practices.

When the pilot telemedicine program was rolled out at Micaville Elementary in Yancey County and Bowman and Harris Middle in Mitchell County last year, CRHI director Dr. Steve North said the ultimate goal was to roll out the service to every school in the two counties, with the exception of Cane River and East Yancey middle schools.

That aim is now within reach. The school-based telemedicine program is now available every school day in 10 schools in Mitchell and Yancey counties. Mitchell County schools include Greenlee Primary, Harris Middle, Bowman Middle, Mayland Early College, and Mitchell High School. Yancey County Schools include Bee Log Elementary, Clearmont Elementary, Micaville Elementary, South Toe Elementary, and Mountain Heritage High School.

The idea of using high-definition displays, cameras and medical diagnostic equipment remotely connected to a healthcare professional via fiber-optic cable had a slow adoption rate at first. North said that any initial hesitance to use the new medical technology was removed when word of mouth spread, and as students, parents and teachers saw the benefits of telemedicine for themselves.

"Utilization is definitely improving. More people know about it, the nurses are more comfortable with the services we're providing, and they are better advocates for the program," he said. "I think we're

doing a good job of being involved and seeing kids more quickly, thus preventing some of the spread of disease."

After a year of use, North said having access to high-tech healthcare in schools has proven its worth.

"We had a six-year-old with strange high blood pressure. We were able to take care of them and begin a workup, so when his primary care physician was able to see them the next day, they were able to initiate treatment because we had the lab results already. The primary care physician was ahead of where they would have been," he said.

"Another example would be a fair number of sore throats in kids, some with strep. Some avoided and saved trips to doctor's offices. We were able to provide follow-up, keeping mom and dad from missing work for them to be seen."

Schell McCall is the project coordinator CRHI's MY Health-e-Schools. By partnering with the school systems, she said the program can augment healthcare for students in a convenient way that doesn't circumvent family doctors or add to school system budgets.

"Students can get the care they need without missing school, without their parents missing work. The local medical staff is getting used to us and recommending us to their patients. It's just another tool available in the community when we need it," she said. "Best of all, it's all funded through grants we've received. It doesn't cost the school system or the counties anything, and it's not part of the budget that can be cut."

Mitchell County Schools associate superintendent Morgen Houchard said telemedicine availability has helped cut down on sickness-related absences and kept students in school.

"The good thing about it is it's on-demand healthcare," he said. "It's great for our kids and our faculty, because if there's something

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AIMING HIGH



MNJ PHOTO / COREY HOILMAN

Mountaineer center Dylan Forbes anxiously awaits the fate of his floater while an A.C. Reynolds defender gives him a shove in the first game of Mitchell's Christmas tournament in Ledger on Thursday. The men's and women's teams both went 0-2 during the tournament with losses to stiff 3A and 4A competition. **For more, see page 12.**

Anderson receives state award

Governor awards *The Order of the Long Leaf Pine* to director

Corey Hoilman
News-Journal Staff

While composing thank-you notes to those who sent their regards after she was inducted into The Order of the Long Leaf Pine, Mitchell County Economic Development Commission director Becky Anderson reflected on the partnerships created and collaborations shared during decades of service in communities across Western North Carolina.

Among those in attendance at the ceremony on Dec. 18 at the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources in Asheville were her cohorts who worked beside her across the years, those who collectively tried to create economic opportunities while retaining the unique qualities that make the state's mountain region a special place.

"I realized a bunch a people traveled a lot of miles together," Anderson said. "The honor of it was to look at the crowd and see people from everywhere who had invested so many hours to improve their communities."

Among the state's highest honors, The Order of the Long Leaf Pine was created in 1963. Issued by the office of the governor, the award is presented to outstanding North Carolinians who have a proven record of service to the state. Though typically presented upon retirement, it can also conferred after

30 years of exemplary service to North Carolina or to those who have demonstrated a lifetime of service to the state.

Other notable members of the order include Michael Jordan, Dale Earnhardt, Andy Griffith and Rev. Billy Graham. Anderson's brother, former N.C. poet laureate Fred Chappell, was inducted in 1993. Anderson said research has confirmed that she and Chappell are the only siblings to receive the honor.

After leaving the Land of Sky Regional Council, Anderson got her start in Asheville in the early 1980s. She was the first director of downtown development for the city, then moved on to an 11-year stint as the economic development director for the Asheville Chamber of Commerce.

The dramatic growth of Asheville over the last 30 years makes it hard to remember how it once was. Anderson laughed as she recalled how the only other light she saw at night near her apartment came from neighboring St. Lawrence Church as they fed the homeless.

"It was the 80s, a very good time to be in that business," she said. "We were very lucky. It was a great period to work there. It was a great shared partnership between the city and the chamber. They financially supported each other."

For her next act, Anderson and Biltmore Farms' Jack Cecil founded Handmade in America in the early 1990s. What they had in mind was to create a new approach for economic development in the mountains, one that preserved the culture of the region by embracing its history of skilled craftspeople.

"What we said to Western North Carolina with Handmade is you have a lot to offer this nation," Anderson said. "Look at Mitchell County. You have Penland School, you have more artists in Mitchell and Yancey counties per capita than any place in Western North Carolina and the state. We just said we could go back to our culture to develop our economy."

"We saw the value of crafts as an economic venue."

Anderson's nomination and selection by the governor's office caught her off-guard. Colleagues created a ruse to notify her that she, like her brother before her, would be honored by the state for her service to communities across WNC.

"They asked me to come by and sign a few checks. When I got there they told me they had a phone conversation for me telling me the governor had done this," she said.

"It was a nice event. It was a total surprise. I had no idea anybody was working on it. It was an honor."



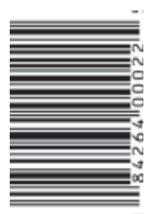
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Yancey County school nurse Yvonne Hardin, with student Zachariah M., demonstrates the telemedicine equipment at a photo shoot at Harris Middle School.

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Online poll

This week

Do you think teachers should be armed?

yes
 no

Answer online at www.mitchellnews.com

Last week

Do you keep your guns in a secure location?

yes 41 votes, 85%
no 7 votes, 15%

Total votes: 48

Rants & Raves

Call 765-0347 after 5 p.m.

If teachers don't want to carry guns why not let the principals and janitors carry guns? I think it is a great idea.

I think people in America must have finally lost their minds to think about teachers having to arm themselves in the classroom. I think our ancestors would be turning over in their graves.

See more on page 8.

telemedicine

continued from page 1
they're coming down with, we can get on it on the spot. Our faculty have used it as well. They've used it when we had the flu going around. Some parents have difficulty getting their kids to the doctor, and they don't have to worry about an appointment."

While there are a handful of other school-based telemedicine networks in the nation, MY Health-e-Schools is the only known telemedicine network that is exclusively community-based. The others are all connected with and funded by major medical centers or universities.

With the telemedicine service now firmly established, the next step for North and McCall is to build a health center on the Mitchell High School campus. That project got a needed boost when CRHI was recently awarded \$500,000 in federal funding for the facility's design and construction.

The award was part of more than \$80 million that went to 197 school-based health care programs across the nation, and made available through the Affordable Care Act to improve access to primary, mental, and oral health care for school-aged children.

The proposed facility will contain new health sciences classrooms to be used for healthcare instruction by Mitchell High School and Mayland Community College, a comprehensive school-based health center with the dual purpose of providing urgent care services and wellness space for all members of the community.

Houchard said the facility would be a boon for students at Mitchell High School taking occupational health classes, such as the CNA program.

"It will be a huge help. There's going to

be a learning space for them," he said. "To teach that course of study, their classroom is twice as big because they have to set up a hospital room environment."

McCall said building a dedicated facility for training future doctors, dentists and nurses will encourage students to return to practice here. It is part of a long-term vision that she said could improve access to healthcare in a small rural community competing with larger areas for providers.

"One of the things we hope to do is create a program to encourage youth to go into health fields and come back to this area," she said.

North said the preliminary plans include spaces for athletic training as well as other community activities, like yoga and zumba, that promote healthy living.

"It's an overall community wellness center dealing with adolescent healthcare," he said.

"It's going to be a training and education facility for the school system and the community college. One of the hopes will be the space will be used for training, not just for athletes but for other students as well."

McCall said early grant funding of \$260,000 has also been awarded by the Golden LEAF Foundation for construction and operational costs of the facility. The recent grant award is 54 percent of the estimated total cost of the project. Additional grant funding is still being sought.

"We have some preliminary plans, but we're still haven't hit the target we need," North said. "It would be nice if we could break ground in the fall of 2013, but we need to raise more money. We're not there yet."

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***- Dr. Steve North
Center for Rural Health Innovation***

SPPD brings charges in thefts

Corey Hoilman
News-Journal Staff

Two Spruce Pine men have been arrested by town police for separate and unrelated thefts.

Joshua Robert Arrowood, 23, was arrested Dec. 13 on two felony counts of breaking and entering, and two more for larceny after breaking and entering.

Spruce Pine Police Capt. Bill Summerlin said Arrowood was arrested for breaking into the same home on two separate occasions in March and October. Summerlin said cash was stolen during the first break-in. Jewelry and a .357 Ruger were taken from the victim in October.

Summerlin said the thief gained entry both times by prying open a back door and breaking the same pane of glass on an inside door.

The victim, a relative of Arrowood's, told Summerlin that he suspected Arrowood in the break-ins due to his knowledge of the victim's weekly routine, and also because the items taken were hidden so well that only someone familiar with the home would have been able to find them.

"It was clear that a stranger couldn't have found the gun without rummaging through the whole house," Summerlin said. "The jewelry was hidden at the bottom of a drawer at the other end of the house. Both items couldn't have been found without having some knowledge of their location."

When Summerlin interviewed Arrowood, who was being held in McDowell County Jail on other charges, he denied breaking into the victim's home. Summerlin said Arrowood did mention that his relative was a victim because he kept the same routine.

Summerlin said Arrowood was arrested after a witness called him with information regarding the break-in. Another witness told Summerlin that Arrowood tried to trade the same Ruger taken from the residence for drugs.

Mark John Biddix, Jr., 23, of 484 Duke Franklin Road, was arrested Dec. 13 for misdemeanor larceny, felony obtaining property by false pretense and felony forgery of endorsement.

Summerlin said Biddix stole a Blue Ridge Regional

Hospital employee's purse and used their credit card to make a purchase at Pandora's Dreams.

On Nov. 28, the victim told police that her purse was stolen while she was working. Summerlin said that a \$74.73 charge was made with her Discover card at Pandora's Dreams before the card was canceled.

Summerlin said the owners of the shop provided surveillance video from the time of the purchase that identified Biddix as the user of the stolen card.

In his statement to Summerlin, Biddix told the police captain that he had taken the purse from the labor and delivery department while taking out the trash. Summerlin said Biddix then took his father's truck to Pandora's Dreams and purchased two units of a product called "Monkey Butt" with the stolen card. After using the product to get high, Biddix told Summerlin he threw the purse away.

Arrowood is scheduled to appear in district court on Jan. 29. Biddix's date in district court is set for Jan. 2.

BRIAN CENTER HEALTH & REHABILITATION

SANTA VISITED THE BRIAN CENTER!



He made his rounds through the residents as well as the staff. In addition to Santa, the residents received a special gift thanks to Deb Buchanan and Shelia Buchanan in the activities department. They were able to "shop" in a special store so that they had gifts to give their families. The gifts were donated and when the residents made their selections, the gifts were wrapped and ready to be presented.

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Dr. Steve North (center) with Center for Rural Health Innovation/MY Health-e-Schools members and their families.

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