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Living Unified:

Alexander High School chooses to include

Imagine walking into your first day of high school: the excitement of taking the next step in your journey, the fear of the unknown, the anxiety of wondering if you will fit in. Now, imagine stepping into the doors of a school knowing you are different than the rest of your classmates or wondering if you will get bullied. For Zachary Boston, these thoughts filled his mind on his first day at Alexander Central High School.

After a ten-year career with Special Olympics Alexander County, Boston has made great friends and has become a seasoned athlete. Yet, taking that first step into high school was like taking a giant step out of his comfort zone.

"You just don't know sometimes. I was so worried that Zachary would get bullied for being different," Zachary's mom, Heather, shared. "When I was in school, kids like him got bullied. I didn't want that for him."

Despite the fears the Boston family had, when Boston returned home after his first day, they knew Alexander Central High School would be different.

"I have lots of friends at school," Boston says.

"I have never seen a group of high schoolers rally around a student with a disability," says his mother. "I couldn't have put Zachary in a more perfect school."

Boston and his mother say that his best friend, Jaycie Knight, helped ease him into his high school experience.

"She is definitely his best friend," says Boston's mother. "He loves his Jaycie!"

The pair immediately hit it off and found that

they had a lot in common. Like Boston, Knight loves to swim. She competes on Alexander County High School's swim team. After learning that Boston also competed in swimming for Special Olympics Alexander County, Knight and her mother, Charman, a teaching assistant in Boston's classes and the assistant swim coach, asked Boston to join her on the school's swim team.

"About a year ago, Ms. Charman and Jaycie approached me to ask if Zachary could try out for the high school swim team," says Boston's mother. "I really trusted them and knew they would keep an eye on him while he was at practice so I let him. Since then, he has grown so much!"

A year later, Boston continues to swim for his team — competing in the 50-meter men's division. Boston even achieved a new personal record in a December 2017 meet.

"The team really embraced him when he joined," states his mother. "But more than that, the whole school has united around him. The students at ACHS are his biggest fans. They come to all of the meets and cheer so loudly when Zachary is swimming. It has been amazing to see!"

Boston, a normally shy student, has not only grown as an athlete, but as an individual, too.

"We go to the grocery store anywhere in the county and ten people know him and Zachary has to shake each of their hands," explains Heather.

But even more than that, Boston has gained confidence that extends beyond the pool.

"Zach is seen as a leader

around the school. Students watch him take initiative to assist others when needed," Special Olympics Alexander County Local Program Coordinator, Amy Pruett explains.

Thanks to Alexander Central High School, a Unified Champion School, Boston has a place to call home.

"We are blessed to have a supportive and accepting student population. Our students are respected and are involved in every aspect of school functions, from pep rallies to proms to graduations," Pruett exclaims.

When you walk through the hallways of Alexander Central High School, you see a welcoming environment where students and educators alike are beginning to understand the value of inclusion. Students are embracing their differences and are learning what it means to live and play Unified.

"I wish every school could be just like my school one day," says Boston. "We all deserve that kind of school."

As schools across the United States and the world join the Special Olympics movement, Boston's hopes may come true. Students and educators continue to come together to build a future where no student fears walking into their first day of school and is embraced by a climate of inclusion, acceptance and respect.

(This article first appeared on the SONC website.)★



Alexander swimmer Zach Boston posted a career best time in December.

First Citizens in Bethlehem to close

First Citizens Bank customers in the Bethlehem area will have to travel a bit farther to visit a branch starting this summer. The Bethlehem location and its ATM (automated teller machine) will close in late June 2018.

First Citizens account holders in the Bethlehem area were sent letters in late March notifying them of the upcoming closure, which is slated for June 27.

Terry Haggerty, Manager of Public Relations for First Citizens Bank, told *The Times* that the bank is always looking at its branch network to determine several factors that make operating branches feasible. She noted that the move to close the Bethlehem branch is "purely a business decision."

The Taylorsville, Viewmont, and Hickory branches will remain open, Haggerty stated.

She said one associate from the Bethlehem branch will transfer to the Viewmont location and the other employees will be able to apply for open positions within First Citizens Bank.

Taylorsville Savings Bank planning upgrades in Bethlehem

The closure of First Citizens will leave Taylorsville Savings Bank's branch in Bethlehem as the only physical bank location in that community.

Taylorsville Savings Bank President Tim Keever told *The Times* that the bank is revamping its drive-thru, which began Monday, April 9. Keever said TSB will also be installing a new ATM at the bank at the end of April. (These upgrades were planned prior to First Citizens' announcement.)★

Republican State Senate Candidate Forum is April 16

The Alexander County Republican Women's Club presents a Candidates Forum on Monday, April 16, at 7 p.m., among the NC Senate District 42 Candidates.

The candidates who have filed for this seat are, Senator Andy Wells (incumbent) Mark Hollo, Dustin Long and Ryan Huffman.

All Republican candidates are invited to attend

and will be given an opportunity to speak.

The forum will be held at Republican Headquarters, 9 South Center Street in Taylorsville, across from the Alexander County Courthouse.

Registered Republicans and Unaffiliated voters are invited to attend, stated Shari Wetherspoon, President, Alexander County Republican Women's Club.★



BETHELEHEM BANK CLOSING ITS DOORS THIS SUMMER — The branch of First Citizens Bank in Bethlehem, shown above, will close by closing in late June 2018, after the financial institution's leaders determined it was no longer feasible to keep the branch open. Branches in Taylorsville, Viewmont, and Hickory will continue to serve customers.★

Alexander among Top 2 places in NC to own a home, according to study

A study from SmartAsset, a financial technology company, makes it easier by deter-

mining which markets are the best for buyers. Alexander County ranked among the best places

to own in North Carolina in SmartAsset's study, which compares average rent and home prices in counties across the U.S. to find the places where buying makes the most sense.

Methodology
Where is the country's strongest buyer's market? To answer that question, SmartAsset gathered data on average rents and home prices, and compared buying to renting in every county in America.

Specifically, they compared the total costs of buying and renting a typical home or rental in each county, for a household earning \$100,000 a year. For the "buy" scenario,

SmartAsset made the following assumptions: a mortgage rate of 4.5%, closing costs of \$2,000 and a down payment of 20%. For each county, they calculated the breakeven point in the buy vs. rent decision—the point at which the total costs of renting becomes greater than the total costs of buying.

The counties with the shortest time to break even are the best places to buy. Breakeven times range from 1.0 year in Alexander County to 4.1 years in Charlotte and Atlanta, to 14 or more years in places like San Francisco, Seattle, or New York (18.3 years).★

Fellowship Church plans dinner theater April 20-22

Well, shiver me timbers! Ghosts & monsters, psychoanalysis, and a whole lot of intrigue play out at the Wiki resort. Nothing is as it appears at this poor excuse for an island getaway.

It's "game on" as Jarvis the pirate races the landlubbers to get the elusive hidden treasure. Dinner theater guests will try to decipher the mystery and guess the culprit. Aargh!

This play will be pre-

sented April 20-22, with dinner served at 6:30 on Friday and Saturday evenings, and a 2:30 p.m. desert matinee on Sunday afternoon. Seating is limited for these presentations so everyone is encouraged to call 495-8086 to make their reservations as soon as possible! Tickets

are \$12.00 each for the Friday and Saturday dinner shows and \$7.00 for Sunday's dessert-only matinee. Children under 12 are half-price, and under age four are free.

"The Last Pirate of the Caribbean," was written by Kimberly Mendoza and is produced by spe-

cial arrangement with Christian Publishers.

Crossroads Community Theater's performances are at Fellowship Advent Christian Church, 833 Icard Ridge Road in Bethlehem (located one mile west of Highway 127 and one mile south of West Alexander Middle School.)★



SPRING PERFORMANCES - The Crossroads Community Theater's spring performances at Fellowship Advent Christian Church have been scheduled for April 20-22. Cast members are pictured from the left. Sitting: Deanna Kirby, Tanya Reid, and Jessie Reid. Standing: Matt Hennessee, Sharon Norris, Bill Millinor, David Hafner, Savannah Minyard, Lynn Preslar, Jake Reid, and Joel Teague.★

Mt. Bethel United Methodist Men plan Spring BBQ May 5

The Mt. Bethel United Methodist Men will host their annual Spring Barbeque Saturday, May 5, 2018, beginning at 11:30am. Barbeque pork, chicken will be served with baked beans, cole slaw, roll, and drink. The cost per plate is \$9.00. Sandwiches and plates will be available for carry-out at lunch beginning at 11:30am



(but if you wish to dine-in you will be welcomed). Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church is located on Hwy 127N in Bethlehem. Beginning at 4:00pm you may dine in and enjoy good food and fellowship or carryout plates will also be available. Proceeds from this fundraiser are used for community outreach projects.★

Next Star prints May 17
The next issue of *The Bethlehem Star* will be printed on Thursday, May 17, 2018. The deadline for advertising and correspondence is Tuesday, May 15, 2018, before 5 pm.

