

Master Gardener Classes beginning at Extension soon

Have you ever thought about learning more about flowers, trees, shrubs, gardens, and lawns? Have you ever considered taking a fun series of classes and improving your horticulture skills? Then the Nationally known Extension Master Gardener Program might just be for you, said Lenny Rogers, Alexander County Extension Director.

“Our Master Gardener Program is an educational program designed to enhance public education and in horticulture in our communities. It provides a comprehensive 13 session educational program to its participants,” Rogers said.

The Master Gardener Program is supported by a State Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator housed in the Horticultural Science Department at N.C. State University and by various Extension specialized agents and subject matter specialists.

As a participant in the Master Gardener Program, you will receive 40 hours of training in all aspects of Horticulture, including fruit and shade trees, lawn care, weed/insect/disease ID and control, vegetable gardening, propagation, botany basics and much more.

After the training, if you wish to be certified as a Master Gardener, you will have the opportunity to provide 40 hours of volunteer service. This can be done by either judging 4-H gardens, planting or caring for community or public gardens/landscaping, or assisting with educational programs through the Extension Center.

Plans are well underway for the 2020 series of Alexander/Caldwell Master Gardener classes. Classes will be meeting on Wednesdays, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., beginning on February 19 and ending May 20.

“From the looks of things, this is going to be one GREAT YEAR! We have recruited outstanding speakers, presenters, and subject matter specialist to meet the needs of interested citizens. Some classes will be taught in the Alexander Extension Center, three at outdoor settings, and several at the Caldwell Extension Center to which we will ride together to attend jointly with the Master Gardener groups there,” Rogers indicated.

Application for acceptance into the Extension Master Gardener Program will be taken into February or until the class is full which ever comes first. The cost is \$125 which will be used to cover the costs of the Master Gardener Notebook, hands on supplies, and field trip expenses.

Call the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Alexander County Center at 632-4451 for more information, or to register for the 2020 Extension Master Gardener Program. Please plan to register now as the class often fills up.

Teague named to Dean's List at Baylor U.

Baylor University student Benjamin Jacob Teague, of Taylorsville, was named to the Dean's Academic Honor Roll for the 2019 fall semester.

Students honored on the Dean's List are Baylor undergraduates with a minimum grade-point average of 3.7, while enrolled in a minimum of 12 semester hours.

Baylor University is a private Christian university and a nationally ranked research institution in Waco, Texas.



Boy Scouts/Explorers donate snacks to Sheriff's Office

Local Boy Scouts and its specialty program, Exploring, joined forces to make a donation this week to the Alexander County Sheriff's Office. Boy Scouts of America District Director Chris Scruggs noted that the Explorers Post for the Sheriff's Office has been in operation for nearly 30 years. The district has similar Explorers posts for the Lenoir Police Department, Caldwell County Sheriff's Office, and Granite Falls Fire Department. Boy Scouts usually donate \$2,000 of popcorn and other snacks to troops overseas each winter, but never get to engage with the recipients. This year, the District scout leaders decided to donate the \$2,000 of snacks to the four host agencies of the Explorers posts, each to receive \$500 worth. On Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2020, the group made a snack donation to the Alexander County Sheriff's Office. Pictured above, left to right: front row – Explorers Cadet Lt. Laurah Payne, Scout Gavin Roupe, Sheriff Chris Bowman, Explorers Cadet Captain Logan Payne, and Sheriff's Office Explorers Advisor Corporal Brian Bolin; back row – Troop 275 of Bethlehem Scoutmaster Robert Duncan and District Director Chris Scruggs.

Commissioners relinquish control of school board's salaries at Jan. 7 meeting

At their Monday, January 6th meeting, Alexander County Commissioners considered a request from the Alexander County Board of Education for a salary increase for board members. According to NC General Statute 115C-38, the tax-levying authority for a local school administrative unit “may” fix the compensation for the board of education.

“It's a rather unusual statute, I think, that we set their salaries,” commented Commissioner Jeff Peal. “They have to present that to us, so they can raise their salaries. But it's a budgetary issue on their end, not on our end.”

“It's still taxpayer money,” Ronnie Reese, fellow Commissioner, replied. “That's what we manage.”

“We don't manage their budget,” Peal stated.

“If they run out of money, they come to us,” Reese said.

“Both sides of this issue have valid points,” Chairman Ryan Mayberry stated. “It is taxpayer money. If we approve this, it does not mean that additional tax dollars come out of Alexander County Government and go to the Alexander County school system. What it does mean is that the money that they are already getting, and already have, those additional dollars for salary come out of that. I really have to agree with Mr. Peal. This shouldn't be our decision; it should be a decision of their board. I don't know why [the statute] is written this way. The voters have complete control. If they don't like it, what the school board's done, then they can vote for new people.”

Commissioner Larry Yoder said the school board members have a difficult and important job. He suggested approving a salary increase for the Board of Education, but in a lesser amount. Yoder offered the figure of \$420 per month per member instead of the requested \$600 per month – the current regular monthly meeting pay is \$120 per member, with school board chairman receiving \$240. However, the compromise idea did not gain traction.

Reese noted he was on the school board in his first term back in 2004 when the last salary increase request (\$60 to \$120 per month) was approved.

“I'm not opposed to an increase, but I am opposed to a five-times increase of what they're getting,” Reese explained.

Commissioner Marty Pennell said he believed the pay increase could spark more interest in candidates for the school board.

After discussion, the board unanimously approved a motion to grant authority to the Board of Education members to set their own salaries.

Board declares Radon Action Month

Commissioners approved a proclamation declaring that January is National Radon Action Month in Alexander County. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. One in 15 homes in the U.S. has an elevated level of radon. Board members encourage citizens to have their homes tested for radon.

Board honors Extension staff

County leaders recognized Extension Service county director Lenny Rogers, and staff. The Alexander County crew won the NCCE Search for Excellence the Overall Team Award and South Central District Team Award at the North Carolina Cooperative Extension (NCCE) State Conference held earlier in Raleigh.

Public comments aired

The Board heard from two citizens who voiced issues in the public comment portion. Kathy Riddle of the Alexander Friends of the Library, urged the public to join the Friends

group, to assist library programs. The FOL membership drive is underway.

Alexander County Republican Womens Club President Shari Wetherspoon asked the Commissioners to consider a resolution to make Alexander County a Second Amendment Rights sanctuary county. Alexander County Commissioners do not respond to public comments during the meeting, as a rule; thus, no action was taken on the resolution by the board. [Editor's Note: Surry County commissioners unanimously approved a similar resolution Monday night; Wilkes County commissioners passed a resolution on Tuesday night.]

Road name approved

Commissioners unanimously approved a new road name off Rocky Face Church Road. Road #3860AR will be known as Chetola Ridge Drive.

Resolution of tentative award

Also on Monday, the board unanimously voted to pass a formal resolution required to award the bid of the Bethlehem Sewer Collection System Expansion and Pump Station Upgrade Project to Two Brothers Utilities, LLC, in the amount of \$5,149,557.40.

Budget amendments OK'd

Commissioners approved Budget Amendments #29-33. Amendment 29 increases the JCPC Budget \$19,308 for FY 2019-2020 Expansion funds from the State, which includes “Raise the Age” provision, allowing most 16 & 17 year olds charged with crimes to be served in the Juvenile Justice System, rather than being charged as adults. Amendment 30 transferred \$67,975 from the General Fund to the School Capital Improvements Fund, based on the amount of FY 2019 school sales tax revenue in excess of school debt service payments. Amendment 31 reduced the General Fund budget \$1,000 for the portion of the Code Red (telephone warning system) user fees to be paid by the County Water & Sewer Fund. This \$1,000 share of the annual fee is not an expense or revenue of the General Fund budget. Funds are available in the Water & Sewer budget for FY 2020. Amendment 32 increased the DSS budget for the cost of replacing the shingle roof on DSS buildings and for the purchase of two new vehicles through the NC Sheriff's Association vehicle procurement program (available for any county vehicles), a total of \$94,325 appropriation. Amendment 33 increases the budget by \$71,270 for a 2.5% cost of living adjustment, effective on Feb. 1, 2020, a transfer between departments, and the year-end payroll accrual that will affect the first two pay dates in July 2020.

Board appointments made

To the Region E Aging & Adult Care Community Advisory Committee, the board re-appointed Donna Aubuchon for three years. Linda Clements was appointed to the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (replacing Kristin Icard, term expires June 30, 2021).

County Manager's report

County sales tax revenues are up, said Rick French, County Manager. The main sales tax is 10.8 percent above this period last year and the new sales tax is about 7 percent better than 2019.

French said the easements are closer to being obtained on the Bethlehem Sewer Project and the Stony Point School Sewer Project. The water project in Bethlehem is moving along well. Buckeye Bridge is finishing up in Wittenburg Springs subdivision and will move next to Fox Court.

The next County Commissioners' meeting will be Feb. 3, 6:00 p.m., at the CVCC Alexander Center in Taylorsville, Rm. 103.

Gastroenterology Assoc. MDs named “Best Doctors”

Best Doctors, Inc. named six physicians of Gastroenterology Associates, P.A., to the 2019 Best Doctors in North Carolina list. Carol Koscheski, MD, FACG; John Meier, MD, FACG; Simon Allport, MD; Gregory Diamonti, MD; Gaa Richardson, MD and Susan Nikrooz, MD, are included in the prestigious list.

Each physician is recognized in the December issue of *Business North Carolina* magazine. All six Gastroenterology Associates physicians are board-certified in gastroenterology.

Hickory-based Gastroenterology Associates had the highest number of physicians represented from any private practice listed in the gastroenterology specialty. The six physicians honored were the only gastroenterologists in the Unifour area to be included in the 2019 Best Doctors list.

Boston-based Best Doctors, Inc. asks doctors to identify specialists they think are the best in their fields. Lists are excerpted from The Best Doctors in America® 2019-2020 database, which includes close to 40,000 U.S. doctors in more than 450 medical specialty/subspecialty combinations.

About Gastroenterology Associates

Founded in 1996, Gastroenterology Associates, P.A. specializes in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of digestive and liver diseases. The practice provides advanced evaluation and treatment of diseases of the esophagus, stomach, small intestine, colon, pancreas, biliary system (gallbladder and bile ducts) and liver. The medical staff includes eight board-certified physicians and three advanced practice providers.

All physicians and advanced practice providers are affiliated with Catawba Valley Medical Center and Frye Regional Medical Center in Hickory.

The gastroenterologists are specialists committed to delivering quality health care, expertise and advanced techniques in endoscopy in a comfortable, compassionate environment.

Gastroenterology Associates features a 3,500 square foot endoscopy facility recognized for outstanding quality measures by the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE). It is accredited by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, Inc. (AAAHC), and licensed by Medicare and the State of North Carolina.

Gastroenterology Associates serves patients in a multi-county 50-mile region, including Greater Hickory and the Unifour area. The practice is located in the Medical Specialties Center at 415 North Center Street, Suite 300, in Hickory.

Learn more at Gastro-associates.net or call 828-328-3300.

About Best Doctors, Inc.

Founded in 1989 by Harvard Medical School professors, Best Doctors® is a global benefits provider that serves more than 40 million members in every major region of the world.

Best Doctors' innovative services include access to an unrivaled network of physicians who have been selected as the best in their field by other leading doctors. With every service offered, the goal remains the same: to help people in need get the right diagnosis and treatment, significantly improving health outcomes.

In 2017, Best Doctors became a part of Teladoc Health, the largest, most trusted provider of virtual care delivery in the world.



KOSCHESKI



MEIER



ALLPORT



DIAMONTI



RICHARDSON



NIKROOZ

Next Star prints February 13

The next issue of *The Bethlehem Star* will be printed on Thursday, February 13, 2020. The deadline for advertising and correspondence is Tuesday, February 11, 2020, before 5 pm.

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