

IN THE SHADOW OF HOGAN’S MOUNTAIN

By Dr. Warren Hollar • whollar@charter.net

Back to the past to see the future of Bethlehem?

The recent demolition of the First Citizens Bank building gave me a reality check. I realized that in my life I had seen not one bank building, but two bank buildings be demolished on the same site in Bethlehem. Who would have thought in the 1990’s that the 3 of 4 banks would not be here anymore? And who would have believed that one bank building would be a restaurant/bar and the other location would be a convenience store/gas station? In the mid-1960’s I remember the construction of the first Bethlehem Hardware. We now have our third Bethlehem Hardware at a third different location. Clayton Marcus was built in the 1960’s providing employment for hundreds of people and then closed. New schools were built changing the structure of education. Outside our religious beliefs, one constant in life is change shown by the ebb and flow of the fortunes of businesses and communities.

The 1960’s and 1970’s were years of rapid

growth in the Bethlehem with many houses being built along Lake Hickory by Bethlehem Realty, Hefner Construction, and others. Businesses, restaurants, and community organizations were formed to provide services to the community. Organizations like the Bethlehem Community Development Association, the Bethlehem Fire Department, extension groups, park committee, Jaycees, Optimist, and Lions were founded during this period to meet community needs and enhance community involvement. Citizens built a community building and pool in 1967 for \$45,000 and paid it off by 1976. Churches and civic organizations banded together to provide funds for the construction of the first lighted ballpark. Men’s and women’s slow pitch softball, youth baseball, girls’ softball, horse shows, community fundraisers, cooperative church programming, and school programs were regular social activities. Churches and businesses sponsored adult and youth

teams.

The Bethlehem Star became a focus and symbol for our community. A post office and community newspaper supported by the Taylorsville Times were started. A new community park was finished in the early 1970’s and paid for by the community by extensive fund-raising and later turned over to the county.

In the 1960’s the steel bridge across Lake Hickory was a major bottleneck for people traveling into Alexander County. The bridge was barely wide enough for two cars to pass. Residents were proactive with state government to advocate for a new bridge. A modern new bridge was opened in 1968. Today, we are awaiting the fate of the construction of an additional bridge and the widening of NC 127. A water bond was finally approved after first being defeated. Even today, the expansion of water and sewer lines is a continuing process in the Bethlehem community.

As I watched the demo-

Bank, my thoughts came back to the spirit of community present in Bethlehem in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Today, many organizations such as the Bethlehem Community Development Association, Jaycees, extension groups, Optimists, and other organizations no longer exist. Other civic groups such as the Ruritan Club are struggling to exist. Churches saw much expansion during this period, but today most churches are showing modest or no growth as we end the first quarter of the present century.

As businesses and organizations come and go, we must band together to identify and address the needs of the Bethlehem community. With the millstone of a low county tax base, our community must come together with groups that are working piecemeal on community projects and programs. The culture shock in the 1960’s and 1970’s of bringing people from many different locales to Bethlehem served as one of the stimuluses for cooperative planning.

As Bethlehem approaches the second quarter of the 2020’s, citizens must come together to invigorate a community where residents can live, work, and play. Futurists understand the world of work is changing and the necessity for communities and municipalities to see the new normal in a post-pandemic world.

The reality of escalating costs of housing and day-to-day living, future health concerns in population centers, our temperate climate, and less danger from potential future pandemics could make our county and area attractive home locations for future generations. Political leaders must plan and locate funding for quality-of-life programs such as parks, high-speed internet, affordable housing, central retail locations, roads, etc. to enhance a small-town atmosphere especially as businesses see the validity of working from home.

A unified sense of community was very evident during the 1960’s and 1970’s as Bethlehem

received top awards for community development from the Northwest North Carolina Development Association. Most of the leaders during this period are no longer with us. Having been involved in many changes in Bethlehem over the last 50 years, I challenge new, young, and older residents to step forward to provide civic, religious, and social capital to define, develop, and lead agreed-upon community goals. Even with tough economic times we can develop more social capital. Social capital makes use of social networks, bonding similar people, and bridging between diverse people to develop mutually benefitting community expectations.

A reenergized sense of community must be an integral part of what residents will desire in the future. We cannot let a weak manufacturing tax base or lack of community awareness be the excuse for not developing the social capital to support a functioning identity and not just be a bedroom community to Hickory.

★TEAGUE

• From Page 1

around. Hurshel had a good sense of humor.”

A community minded man, Hurshel was active in the Bethlehem Community Development Association.

“As former principal of Bethlehem Elementary School and former President of the Bethlehem Community Development Association, I always appreciated Hurshel’s ability to develop viable plans for improving community programs and school facilities. Not only did he develop plans, but he also had the tenacity to help make his forward-looking plans become reality,” said Dr. Warren Hollar, of Bethlehem.

Hurshel, along with other members of the Bethlehem Community, helped bring about the construction of the Bethlehem Community Building and pool in 1966-67. He worked to raise the funds to pay off the debt by 1976.

Hurshel was supportive, with Board of Education members including the late Gary Lail, to work with government entities for the construction of the present Bethlehem School.

Nancy Sharpe, of Taylorsville, has been personal friends with Hurshel and Dot for years and worked with Hurshel in the Alexander County Republican Party, where Hurshel served as Chairman for a time.

“He was a special man and very, very talented. He developed a system at Clayton Marcus to move furniture from one area to another...They would put pieces of furniture on this track, like a flatbed track, and it would go to different levels within the company, moving furniture where it needed to go. It was amazing. Nobody else had anything like it,” Sharpe recalled. “He had so much talent and ability. He never let his handicap stop him.”

The first water lines in the county came about as a result of the actions of Hurshel, along with others, working to get water supplied to the Bethlehem Community, Sharpe said.

Fellow County Commissioner Harry Robertson, who served on the then-three member board with Cecil Fry from 1978 to 1982, said he and Hurshel were good friends.

“Hurshel was honest and a hard-working, straight-shooting man who loved this county,” said Robertson. “He was good for Alexander County and he was especially good for Bethlehem.”

Bethlehem resident



A FRIEND TO THE COMMUNITY — Hurshel was heavily involved in improving community programs throughout Bethlehem. He helped to build and pay off the funds for the construction of the Bethlehem Community Building and pool.

and former County Commissioner Wes Bolick fondly recalls Hurshel. Bolick said he met Hurshel when Bolick worked at a sheet metal fabrication firm and Robert, Hurshel’s father, bought some sheet metal pieces to build a camper. Hurshel’s brother Bobby Gene later also sourced sheet metal for a camper from Bolick. Then, Bolick moved and became a neighbor of Hurshel and Dot. Bolick also attended church with Hurshel at Fellowship Advent Christian Church.

Hurshel convinced Bolick to run for office and become a county commissioner. After he became a commissioner in 2002, Bolick would often consult with Hurshel in various matters before the board.

“Hurshel helped me a lot,” Bolick commented. “Hurshel was a good advisor.”

Here’s another example of Hurshel’s ingenuity: Bolick said Hurshel designed a motor coach with a special door mechanism to accomodate his entry and exit. One of the motor coach dealers offered him a proposal to build similar mechanisms for their RVs, but Hurshel declined.

“Hurshel could figure something out and make it work. His brother, Bobby Gene, was also that way. They engineered a lot of things,” Bolick said. “Bobby Gene even figured out a way to steer a car with his feet, and Hurshel helped with it.”

“Hurshel was a very wise man. He was a great friend. He would help anybody. He was fair and he was a community man, up to the end,” Bolick related.

Rubner’s Nursery and Landscaping Receives “Best of Houzz” Award for seventh year

Rubner’s Nursery & Landscaping of Bethlehem, for the seventh year, has been awarded “Best of Houzz Service” 2021, by Houzz, a leading platform for home remodeling and design.

The local company, known for creating beautiful landscapes, unique water features and stunning outdoor kitchens, has been serving Hickory and surrounding areas for over

20 years. They are also owners and operators of The Arbor Garden Center, just off Rink Dam Road in Bethlehem.

“We are very proud of the Houzz Awards that we have received, which we feel show our customers our commitment to the quality and service of our work,” the Rubners commented.

Rubner’s Nursery & Landscaping is also a

licensed NC Irrigation Contractor and a licensed NC Landscape Contractor.

At Rubner’s Nursery & Landscaping, they enjoy creating extraordinary outdoor environments that both reflect and enhance people’s lives. From design to installation to maintenance, they listen to their customers and create a landscape that is a reflection of their lifestyle.

“We cover every aspect of outdoor living, such as patios and walls, outdoor kitchens and rooms, ponds and fountains, outdoor lighting and irrigation. Your yard is an extension of your home and we want you to enjoy it to its fullest potential.”

Follow Rubner’s Nursery & Landscaping and The Arbor Garden Center on Facebook and Instagram and find them at <http://www.rubnersnurseryandlandscaping.com/>.



PLAYER’S RIDGE RESTAURANT NOW OPEN — The restaurant and brand new “Coffee and Tee” bar are now open at Player’s Ridge Golf Course in Bethlehem. The coffee bar includes a new espresso machine and a wide tea selection. Pictured above is chef Watachara ‘Rak’ Rakansit, on the left, and general manager Andy Mayhew, right.

Next Star prints March 18

The next issue of The Bethlehem Star will be printed on Thursday, March 18, 2021. The deadline for advertising and correspondence is Tuesday, March 16, 2021, before 5 p.m.

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<u>THURSDAY</u> Fundraiser Night 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM Book a fundraiser with your local VIP and receive a percentage of sales	<u>FRIDAY</u> - Free Breadsticks With the purchase of 2 Medium or 2 Large Pizzas Limit 1 free order of breadsticks per order * Participating locations	

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Hickory, NC 28601
828-495-8467

HICKORY SPRINGS ROAD
2467 Springs Rd NE
Hickory, NC 28601
828-328-3010

HICKORY VIEWMONT
Viewmont - 1021 2nd St. NE
Hickory, NC 28601
828-322-2929

LENOIR
1234 Morganton Blvd.
Lenoir, NC 28645
828-758-8900

NORTH WILKESBORO
1922 West Park Dr.
N. Wilkesboro, NC 28659
336-667-1912

MORGANTON
1016 Burkemont Ave.
Morganton, NC 28655
828-437-1515

STATESVILLE
TAYLORSVILLE HWY.
West Park Shopping Center
3233 Taylorsville Rd.
Statesville, NC 28677
704-873-1101

STATESVILLE CINEMA DRIVE
1503 Cinema Drive
Statesville, NC 28625
704-873-0256

MOORESVILLE
539-M East Plaza Dr.
Mooreville, NC 28115
704-799-3330

SALISBURY
Mkt. Place Shopping Center
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