

Wittenburg Access Swim Beach has reopened to the public

By ANGELA FARR KING
Wittenburg Access
Swim Beach, located at 175
Wildlife Access Road in the
Bethlehem Community,
was temporarily closed on
Monday, June 29, due to a
wastewater pump station
failure that impacted the
quality of the water at the
beach. The City of Hickory
announced that approxi-
mately 6,080 gallons of
untreated wastewater had
been discharged into Lake
Hickory near the swim
beach and that was the

Testing was done consistently to determine when the water was safe enough to reopen the beach. After the water samples were deemed safe by the criteria established by Duke Energy's safety guidelines, the beach was able to reopen on Tuesday, July 7. According to Park Attendant Carlee Caskaddon, who had worked every day of their reopening week, the beach was very busy on

Wednesday, July 8. She said the beach isn't usually open on Wednesdays, but they opened on the 8th since they had been closed for so long. There were a few families enjoying the beach on July 9th around 11:30 a.m., but Caskaddon said the crowd usually picks up after lunch.

The Whiteburg Access Swim Beach, also known as the Bethlehem Swim Beach, is a great place for families to beat the heat in Alexander County. ★

Ribbon cutting Aug. 21 at new counseling center in Bethlehem

Guiding Hand Therapy and True You Counseling invite the public to a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Friday, August 21, at 10:00 a.m. The new mental health counseling center is located at 71 Rink Drive Road in Bethlehem.

Guiding Hand Therapy is owned and operated by Fay Hand. She listens to clients' stories, understands their goals, and builds a safe, nonjudgmental space where they feel heard and empowered. Hand believes therapy is not about fixing someone; it's about giving clients the support and tools to help them heal and grow.

"I started this practice because I truly love helping people untangle the messy, complicated, beautiful parts of being human," said Hand. "Attending therapy is not easy. No one wakes up excited to talk about their struggles, pain, or trauma, and yet, there's real courage in choosing to face what's difficult rather than avoid it. You don't have to face it alone."

She serves adolescents and adults with telehealth and in-person services, specializing in the following areas: anxiety, depression, mood disorders, ADHD,



FAY HAND

**SARAH RODA**

trauma and PTSD, relationship conflicts, and life transitions.

True You Counseling is owned and operated by Sarah Roda. She desires to provide a safe and authentic space for adults and teens facing anxiety, depression, or overcoming trauma, and encourages potential clients to start their journey toward healing today.

"Starting therapy is a courageous step toward healing, and I'm here to support you through the weight of trauma, grief, and life's transitions," said Roda. "I focus on providing a warm, grounded environment where you feel truly seen. I create an authentic space to help you find the True You. Together, we

will navigate your healing journey at a pace that feels safe, whether you are seeking trauma-informed care for yourself or your teen.”

Roda’s top specialties are trauma and PTSD, grief, and self-esteem, with expertise in the following areas: anxiety, depression, dissociative disorders (DID), impulse control disorders, mood disorders, psychosis, relationship issues, substance use, and thinking disorders.

For more information about Guiding Hand Therapy, call (828) 220-3576 or visit www.guidinghand-therapy.org.

For more information about True You Counseling, call (828) 781-2378 or visit www.trueyoumentalhealth.com. ★

Antioch Baptist Church to celebrate 200th Anniversary with events July 19-29

Antioch Baptist Church, which is located in the Ellendale Community of Alexander County, was organized on July 29, 1826, and will be celebrating its 200th Anniversary on July 29, 2026.

No beginning history of Antioch Baptist Church would be complete without a brief sketch of the history of the New Meeting House Baptist Church. According to Dr. W.R. Paschal of Wake Forest in his *History of North Carolina Baptists*, this was one of the first Baptist churches to be built in the state. This building was located at what is now known as the Teague Munday Memorial Cemetery (formerly the Munday Graveyard) on North Carolina Highway 127 leading from Taylorsville to Hickory. The New Meeting House Baptist Church was organized June 7, 1797, and was built in the area to serve the people who moved westward to escape the tyranny of Governor Tryon after the Battle of Alamance. The church burned in 1825.

Former members of the New Meeting House Baptist Church decided to build a new church building upon the grounds near the present site of Antioch Baptist Church. The new church, which began in an old log building, was organized on July 29, 1826, and was named Antioch Baptist Church. Antioch is the oldest church in the Alexander Baptist Association.

Antioch has been blessed through the years to have had multiple people

called into the ministry. The first person was ordained as a minister of the gospel by Antioch in 1849. A second was ordained to the ministry in 1857 and a third in 1859.

During the first half of the 1900's, several men were ordained and licensed by Antioch to preach the gospel. Several others were licensed and ordained into the ministry by Antioch during the 1970's and 1980's. This was an answer to prayers prayed by members of the Antioch congregation.

Also, in June of 1871, sixteen members of Antioch were granted letters of dismission to aid in the founding of Bethlehem Baptist Church. Knowing that Antioch Baptist helped establish a church that continues to thrive and spread the gospel in this county, nation and world is truly a blessing.

The Old Antioch School, which served the community for many years as a grade school (grades 1-7), was located on the church property.



ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH

A large photograph of a park area with picnic tables, umbrellas, and a lake. An inset photo in the bottom left corner shows a smiling woman with dark hair, wearing a grey shirt.

READY FOR SWIMMERS — Carlee Caskaddon (inset photo), a Park Attendant at the Wittenburg Access Swim Beach, above, said the beach reopened on Tuesday, July 7, after being closed due to a wastewater pump station failure that impacted the quality of the water at the beach. She said the beach was very crowded on Wednesday, July 8, as families were happy to be back out enjoying the water. The Wittenburg Access Swim Beach is located at 175 Wildlife Access Road in Bethlehem.

Mitchell named Assistant Alexander County Manager

Long-time Alexander County employee Josh Mitchell has been selected to serve as Alexander County Assistant County Manager, effective July 6.

A lifelong Alexander County resident, Mitchell brings 22 years of county government experience, extensive leadership skills, and thorough knowledge of county operations.

**MITCHELL**

“Josh’s experience, knowledge, and abilities will be invaluable in this new role. He has earned the trust and respect of the Board of Commissioners, county staff, and citizens through years of dedicated service,” Mundy said. “Josh already plays a key role in many county projects and operations, and this new position will allow him to provide even greater support to Alexander County.”

Mitchell began his career with Alexander County in 2004 as an Agricultural Cost Share Technician in the Soil & Water Department before being promoted to solid waste director. Over time, his role expanded to

include the county garage, public buildings/grounds, and water/sewer. He currently serves as the public works and facilities director.

As assistant county manager, Mitchell will continue to oversee public works and facilities, while also providing oversight for additional county departments and assisting with county projects.

Alexander County Board of Commissioners Chairman Larry Yoder said Mitchell's long record of service makes him an excellent fit for the position.

"Josh has dedicated much of his professional career to serving the citizens of Alexander County," Chairman Yoder said. "His leadership, institutional knowledge, and commit-

Brantley is new Assistant Principal at West Alexander Middle School

By ANGELA FARR KING
Kelly Brantley recently joined the team at West Alexander Middle School as the Assistant Principal and she and Dr. Amy Daigle learned that they have much in common. They are both Appalachian State graduates and they are both former science teachers. They both have sons around the same age so they are in the same season of parenting. They are both faith based women and neither of them began their journey as educators the traditional way. These are the ties that have instantly made them compatible, but they have also rolled up their sleeves together this Summer to plan for the coming school year. It is obvious to see that they have an instant chemistry.

Mrs. Brantley is a 2007 graduate of Appalachian State University, where she majored in Pre Med Biology. She worked in a lab for 10 years. It was crazy long hours, sometimes as many as twelve hours a day. When her mother passed away in 2017, she made a decision to go into teaching. She said, "God opened a door for me to teach science at Lake Norman High

School.” Brantley taught Earth Science, Biology, and AP Environmental Science. She started as a lateral entry teacher as she earned her teaching credentials.

Mrs. Brantley then began working on her administrative degree through Gardner Webb University in 2021. She finished in May of 2023 and began her role as an Assistant Principal at Alexander Central High School in August of 2023.

Brantley said she learned a lot at ACHS and is excited



NEW A.P. AT WEST — Mrs. Kelly Brantley (right) is the new Assistant Principal at West Alexander Middle School. She comes to West after serving as the Assistant Principal at Alexander Central High School for three years. She is excited to work alongside Dr. Amy Daigle (left) and lead the West Bulldogs.

ment to our community make him exceptionally qualified for this position. We are fortunate to have someone with his experience helping guide Alexander County.”

Mitchell said he is honored to be selected for the new role.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as assistant county manager for the county I love,” Mitchell said. “I look forward to continuing to work with the Board of Commissioners, County Manager Justin Mundy, department heads, and county staff as we serve our citizens and plan for the future of Alexander County.”

Mitchell graduated from Alexander Central High School in 1997 and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial Technology/Construction from Appalachian State University in 2003.

He and his wife, Melinda, have a 10-year-old son, River.

For more information about Alexander County Government, visit the Alexander County Government website or follow Alexander County Government on Facebook (@alexandercounty). ★