

# DECEMBER

## Swearing-in

New Buncombe County Commissioner **Jennifer Horton** was sworn in Dec. 2 surrounded by family members. She is the first Black woman to serve on the board.



Photo by Carmela Caruso

## Updates on Ramada Inn

Friendship for Affordable Housing finalized its purchase of the former Ramada Inn in East Asheville on Dec. 2. The organization intends to turn the former motel into 50 units of permanent supportive housing and 50 affordable apartments. Former owner, Shangri-La, lost the property to foreclosure. ❌



Photo by Cindy Kunst

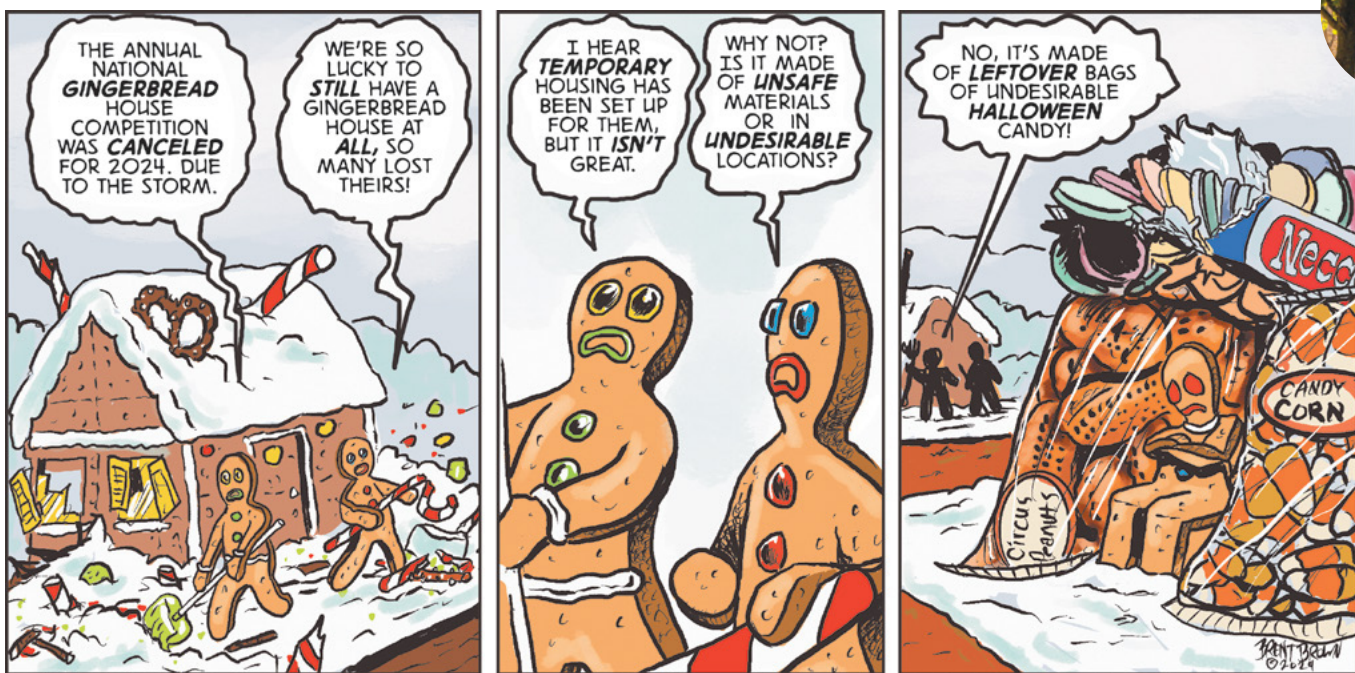
## COVER OF THE Month

## Shining star

On Dec. 3, The Flat Iron Hotel revived a tradition dating back to 1929: installing a 7-foot star atop the historic building's rooftop. According to a press release, the initiative was launched by a local radio announcer "to help save the 'Christmas Cheer Fund,' which was short of its goal in 1929." The initiative surpassed its goal and "hundreds in Asheville received food and gift donations." In a similar spirit, The Flat Iron Hotel has partnered with local nonprofit Elben Charities to help raise funds for the latter's annual St. Nicholas Project toy drive, which provides assistance to over 1,900 families each year in WNC. Donations can be made inside the hotel through Friday, Dec. 20. ❌



Photo by GarageCap



Cartoon by Brent Brown

## J.D. Vance tours Fairview

Vice President-elect **J.D. Vance** toured Fairview on Dec. 6 with U.S. Sens. **Ted Budd** and **Thom Tillis**. According to *BPR*, Vance met with local first responders and firefighters who lost members of their community during Tropical Storm Helene. ❌



Photos by Thomas Calder

## Holiday cheer in Black Mountain

Asheville's annual Holiday Parade was canceled this year, but the bands played on at the Black Mountain Christmas Parade on Dec. 7. ❌



## A first

The Dec. 9 swearing-in of newly elected Asheville City Board of Education member **Pepi Acebo**, pictured, along with reelected incumbents **George Sieburg** and **Jesse Warren**, marks a new era for the board. In 2021, the N.C. General Assembly passed a law switching the city school board from being appointed by Asheville City Council to being elected. Now, with the latest swearing-in ceremony, all seven board members have been elected. ❌



Photo by Greg Parlier

**Bold Rock** closed its North Lexington Avenue location (its site in Mills River remains open). **Little Pearl** also shuttered. But in West Asheville, **Potential New Boyfriend** launched at 647 Haywood Road.

## FOOD NEWS

## IN CONVERSATION WITH Esther Manheimer



Photo courtesy of City of Asheville

Amid ongoing recovery efforts, Mayor **Esther Manheimer** took a moment to reflect on the year and how Tropical Storm Helene transformed everything for Western North Carolina.

**Xpress:** Pre-Helene, what stands out to you as the most pressing issue City Council faced in 2024?

**Manheimer:** Affordable housing continues to be a challenging issue for the city both before and after Helene. The storm displaced many from already scarce rental housing, and the challenge of finding affordable housing is even greater than ever.

**What 2024 public event, prior to the storm, was most memorable to you and why?**

Leading up to the election, the first visit from Gov. **Tim Walz** to the Salvage Station was a fun community event and my first ride in a motorcade, albeit in a van in the back of the line. So much has happened since

that time — a storm, the destruction of Salvage Station, the election.

**What impressed you most about the community's response to the post-Helene recovery efforts?**

The community, the people of Asheville and WNC were wonderful, beautiful and inspiring in their immediate response to selflessly help everyone in need. For me, this goodness created a kind of energy that helped me and so many others to push through and do the work that needed to be done.

**Is there an interaction you had with a community member,**

**post-Helene, that has made a lasting impression on you? If so, could you share with us some of what was said and how it has inspired your thinking about the next phase of our recovery?**

Like your readers, I have had profound interactions with many in our community, whether it's meeting with someone whose business was destroyed, or someone seeking rent relief at Grace Covenant, or crying alongside me at a vigil, or meeting the aunt of a young Helene victim, or a first responder traumatized by the chaos and sadness of working in harm's way for days on end. These experiences inspire me to work for our people and dedicate myself to the recovery effort that will take months and years.

**In the aftermath of Helene, you've played an essential role in our community's recovery. In the process, you've interacted with top government officials, including**

**an aerial tour of the region with President Joe Biden. Could you share your reflections on surveying the community by helicopter with the president?**

It was my honor and privilege to represent Asheville in accompanying the president and [Gov. **Roy Cooper**] surveying the damage across our region. The president and his staff expressed to me their care and concern for all of us in WNC, and the president talked to me about his personal experience with loss, and his, frankly, vast experience with other natural disasters. I explained to the president the challenges we're facing and the help we needed and continue to need. The president reassured me that we would receive assistance to recover.

For the full interview, visit [avl.mx/ee7](http://avl.mx/ee7). ❌

## SONG OF THE Month



## The Get Right Band, "Christmas as a Kid"

Frontman **Silas Durocher** captures the nostalgic joys of the holidays in this semiautobiographical reflection on youth and the excitement of reviving those feelings each December as an adult. In tandem with the imagery-rich lyrics and angelic harmonies, **Chuck Lichtenberger's** gentle piano conjures memories of softly falling snow and visions of sugarplums that are sure to put even grinchies in a good mood.

Listen at [avl.mx/ed9](http://avl.mx/ed9). — Edwin Arnaudin ❌

Photo by RaeAnne Genth