

FEBRUARY

Woodfin westsiders petition to leave town... unsuccessfully

A coalition of residents on the west side of Woodfin, the town immediately to the north of Asheville, said they didn't want to live in the town anymore at a community meeting Feb. 1. It had been 17 years since the area was originally annexed, and hundreds of those who live between Crest Mountain and Olivette Farms said the town's taxes weren't worth the services provided.

Despite the group's grievances and efforts to de-annex, Woodfin Town Council voted April 14 to oppose the request. At an earlier meeting, state Sen. **Julie Mayfield** encouraged residents to stay engaged with the town and work with officials to make improvements. She plans to check in with residents ahead of the 2025 legislative session to see how things are going. **X**



Photo by Thomas Calder

Feds say Mission Hospital is in 'immediate jeopardy'

Drama surrounding WNC's largest hospital intensified in February when federal regulators informed HCA-owned Mission Health that it was in "immediate jeopardy" of losing Medicare and Medicaid funding due to deficiencies in care, according to *Asheville Watchdog's* **Andrew R. Jones**.

While Mission avoided a potentially disastrous defunding, the episode was the latest in a yearslong saga of accusations of deficiencies in care, nurse strikes and an exodus of former doctors after HCA's purchase, culminating in the establishment of a community coalition in July calling for HCA Healthcare to give up the Mission Health network. **X**

Asheville City Schools faces budget shortfall

The Asheville City Board of Education voted Feb. 12 to make 2% raises permanent for district staff. The raises were initially promised to them on June 20, 2023, when the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners raised taxes to meet the request. Facing a \$4.5 million

budget shortfall, Asheville City Schools Chief Financial Officer **Heidi Kerns** said the district may have to dip into reserves in the 2024-25 school year to help pay for the sustained raises. Teacher advocates had originally asked for 7% raises. **X**

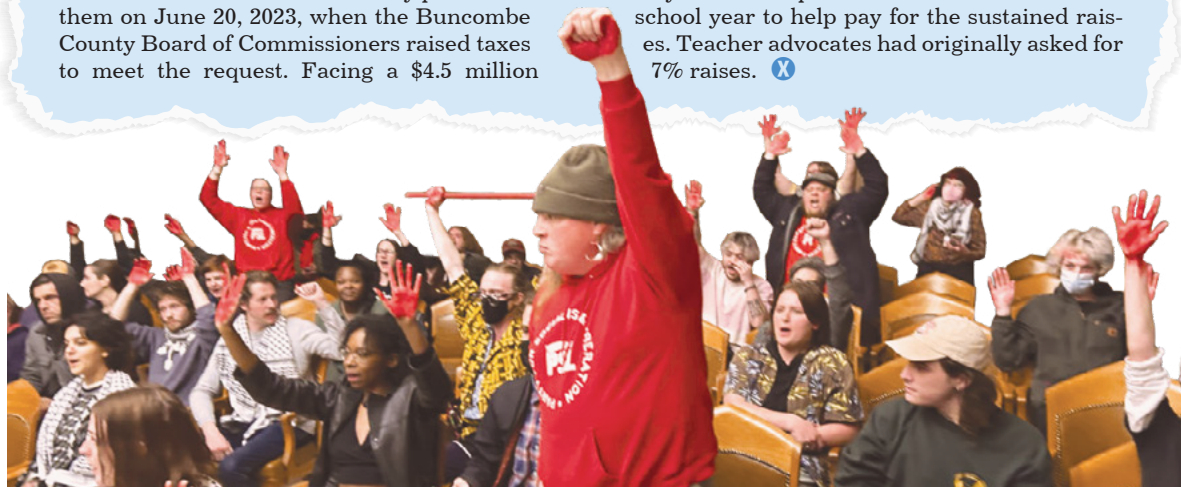


Photo by Jennifer Castillo

Banned

Ellen Hopkins' 2009 novel, *Tricks*, was the most banned book of the 2022-23 school year. But it wasn't until Feb. 8, 2024, that the Buncombe County Board of Education joined the club, voting to remove it from all the district's high schools.

A request to remove nine additional books from school libraries at a March meeting failed. **X**



INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS: While the Feb. 27 Asheville City Council meeting started like any other, it quickly became a Hamas-Israel war protest site with more than a dozen demonstrators silently raising their red-painted hands and demanding a ceasefire resolution from Council. Tensions rose as both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian speakers made comments for and against a ceasefire resolution in Gaza. Photo by Brooke Randle

SONG OF THE Month

Tyler Ramsey, "Where Were You"



Photo by Parker J. Pfister

The tallest man alive (at least in Asheville's music scene) continues to evolve as a solo artist, exploring mental health in more poetic depth as he continues to walk in this crazy world. Recorded in Seattle with a team of Pacific Northwest studio players, the standout track on his latest album, *New Lost Ages*, feels like a sonic marriage of that rainy area's musical traditions and the harmony-rich layered vocals of the Laurel Canyon scene's heyday. Guiding these inspired sounds, his heartbreaking verses about detachment, loneliness and generally feeling adrift grow more profound with each listen. *Listen at avl.mx/edb.*

— Edwin Arnaudin **X**

IN CONVERSATION WITH Katie Cornell



Photo courtesy of Carol Spags Photography

Katie Cornell is the executive director of ArtsAVL, which supports arts professionals and businesses in Buncombe County through connection, advocacy and grants. In February, the designated arts agency opened its survey to collect feedback from local artists and arts organizations about affordability and space challenges.

The results of the nearly 100-page report were presented at a town hall event hosted by Asheville Community Theatre on May 10. The data came from 400 surveys — 305 (76%) completed by arts professionals and 95 (24%) by arts businesses — across Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson and Madison counties.

ArtsAVL's comprehensive Creative Spaces study found that earnings by local professionals aren't keeping pace with the cost of living in the four-county Asheville metro area, leaving access to studios, rehearsal rooms and similar locations outside of many artists' budgets.

The issue was compounded by the devastation brought on by Tropical Storm Helene.

Xpress recently caught up with Cornell to discuss some of the 2024 highlights in the local arts scene as well as how Helene required her organization to pivot.

Xpress: What specific responses to the post-Helene recovery gives you hope for our area's creative sector?

Cornell: The outpouring of local and national support for our local artists and arts organizations has been amazing. For the arts, Buncombe County was definitely the hardest hit, but creatives throughout WNC have been drastically impacted. ArtsAVL has been contracted by the N.C. Arts Council to be the lead partner for arts recovery in WNC, and over the last several weeks we have been working with a number of different partners on a WNC arts relief plan. The process will be long and complex, but the storm has given us an opportunity to address several issues that were already negatively impacting our arts community, such as space affordability and the cost of living.

What was ArtsAVL's greatest achievement in 2024?

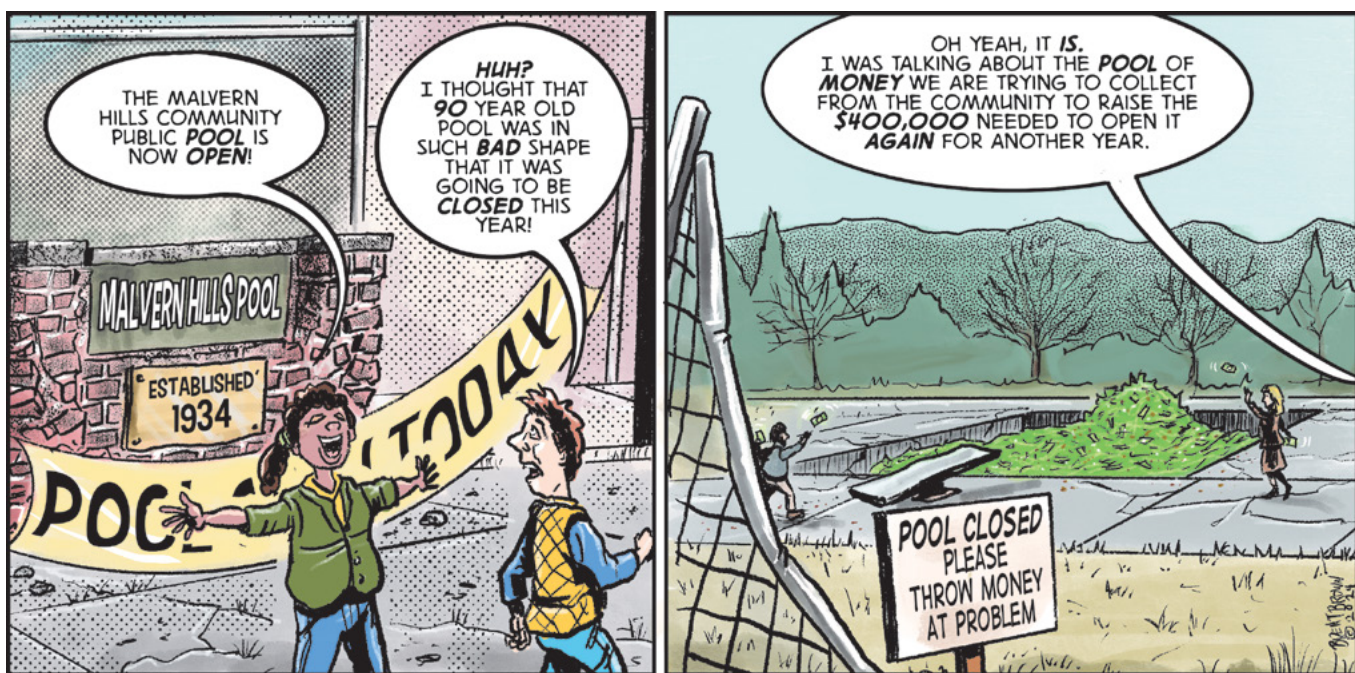
ArtsAVL is on track to award over \$1 million in arts relief funding. Our position as a leading arts funder allowed us to mobilize quickly and provide much needed aid not just in Buncombe County but throughout the 26 counties most impacted by Hurricane Helene. We firmly believe that the arts have a key role to play in WNC's recovery, and we are doing everything we can to support our creative community during this extremely difficult time.

For the full interview, visit avl.mx/edx. **X**

FOOD NEWS

After 15 years, Little Bee Thai, 45 S. French Broad, closed at the end of February. Its owners, **Tuk Charemwong** and **Rick Corcoran**, announced the decision in a social media post, noting their desire to retire.

Sovereign Remedies Exchange, 2645 New Leicester Highway, and Asheville Sandwich Co., 794 Haywood Road, also closed this month. The latter reopened in Arden in July.



Cartoon by Brent Brown