

MAY



Canton's paper mill site gets a buyer (maybe)

Spirtas Worldwide, a Missouri company that redevelops closed industrial sites, signed a letter of intent to buy the shuttered Pactiv Evergreen paper mill in Canton. The deal was announced May 15. Spirtas didn't unveil specific plans for the 184-acre former mill site, but owner **Eric Spirtas** said community needs and economic development would guide the company.

The news, which came a year after the 115-year-old mill closed, was welcomed by Canton officials and residents. The closing led to the loss of about 1,200 jobs and forced "Paper Town" to start planning for a future in which it was no longer defined by its biggest employer. Knowing the mill site wouldn't be sitting vacant indefinitely was a huge relief, Canton Mayor **Zeb Smathers** said.

Spirtas and Pactiv Evergreen, owner of the mill, were scheduled to close the deal on Sept. 30, but Spirtas threatened to back out, citing disagreements over several issues. When Tropical Storm Helene hit three days before the scheduled closing and caused damage to the site, Spirtas asked for the sale price to be reduced. Pactiv then sued to try to force the sale under the original terms. On Dec. 9, Pactiv announced it was being acquired by Charlotte-based food packaging company Novolex.

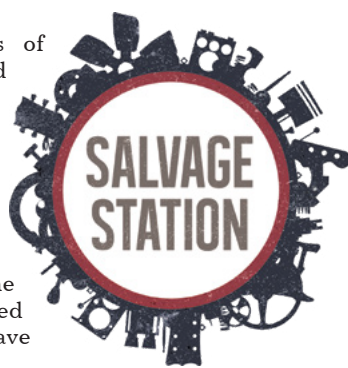
Smathers said he is confident Spirtas still intends to buy the site once the litigation with Pactiv is resolved. That could happen before the end of the year, he said. **X**

The end of Salvage Station

On May 23, the owners of Salvage Station announced the popular music venue in the River Arts District would shut down at the end of the year due to the Interstate 26 Connector project. The N.C. Department of Transportation used eminent domain to acquire the property Salvage Station leased at 466 Riverside Drive and gave owners a timeline to vacate.

The plan was for the venue to complete its 2024 schedule, but that changed on Sept. 27 when Tropical Storm Helene hit. In the wake of massive flooding of the French Broad River, Salvage Station's building was destroyed, and the venue had to shut down three months early. A number of shows were canceled as a result, including the fourth annual Psychedelic Circus, put on by Asheville band Snozzberries. Salvage Station, which opened in 2016, had a capacity of 3,000 for outdoor shows and 750 inside.

The I-26 Connector will be a 7-mile, median-divided freeway connecting I-26 in southwest Asheville to U.S. 19/23/70 in northwest Asheville. **X**



Highland turns 30

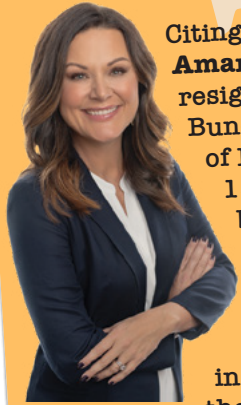
Highland Brewing Co., Asheville's longest-running brewery, celebrated its 30th anniversary with a weeklong series of events leading up to the big May 4 celebration. Owner **Oscar Wong** and head brewer **John McDermott** founded the company in 1994 in a rented, 12,000-square-foot basement space below Barley's Taproom & Pizzeria in downtown Asheville.

In the early days, Highland created such craft beers as Celtic Ale (later Gaelic Ale), St. Terese's Pale Ale and Oatmeal Porter. Gaelic Ale, which can now be found in nearly every area taproom and grocery store, helped put Asheville on the craft beer map. The brewery moved to its current East Asheville location in 2006, when it took over the former home of Blue Ridge Motion Picture Studios. Highland bought the 40-acre property and added more building space. These days, its outdoor space includes popular volleyball, disc golf and cornhole areas. **X**



Highland Brewing Co. founder Oscar Wong. Photo courtesy of Highland

Photo courtesy of Simpkins



Citing personal reasons, **Amanda Simpkins** resigned from the Buncombe County Board of Education on May 15. On June 6, the board picked **Glenda Weinert** to fill the at-large seat. Weinert was defeated in a three-way race for the seat Nov. 5.



COLORFUL CRIME: In late May, a cleanup crew rappelled down Beaucatcher Mountain to pressure wash the rainbow-paint design, which vandals created alongside Interstate 240 on May 14. No one has been identified or arrested for the crime. Photo by Caleb Johnson

IN CONVERSATION WITH Karis Roberts

"Before Helene, the Asheville Brewers Alliance (ABA) was focused on growth, collaboration and expanding the visibility of the local beer scene. Local initiatives involved promoting local breweries, organizing events, supporting industry education or facilitating partnerships between breweries and local businesses to strengthen the area's craft beer culture.

However, after the storm, the ABA's focus has shifted toward recovery and resilience. Such efforts include:

- Disaster relief efforts: Helping breweries rebuild by way of grants, recover from damage, manage water tanker delivery trucks and more.
- Community solidarity: Strengthening connections within the local beer community, whether through charity events, fundraisers or shared resources.
- Adapting to new challenges: Reevaluating how breweries can thrive in a post-storm landscape, which could involve adjusting business strategies, increasing resilience to future crises or boosting local tourism to help attract visitors back to the area.

In short, the ABA's focus pivoted from growth and expansion to recovery, community support and ensuring that Asheville's craft beer industry can bounce back stronger." — **Karis Roberts**, executive director of Asheville Brewers Alliance. The organization celebrated its annual Asheville Beer Week in May.

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



SONG



OF THE Month



Photo by Chuck St. Laurent

Santiago y Los Gatos, "Aura"

Over the decade between the rockers' last album and this year's *Washing Away Wetiko*, it seems as if each band member has experienced a significant loss or three. Among them is frontman **Jeff Santiago**, who pays tribute to his late mother with this heartfelt track named in her honor. Sweetening the eulogy is cello from his neighbor, **Melissa Hyman**, who performed a different song at Aura's memorial service with her husband and The Moon and You bandmate, **Ryan Furstenberg**. Listen at avl.mx/ede.

— Edwin Arnaudin **X**

Downtown bar Asheville Beauty Academy closed in early May.

Terra Nova Beer Co. and Mission Pizza Napoletana opened at 101 S. Lexington Ave.

Flour also launched this month inside the S&W Market.

FOOD NEWS



COVER OF THE Month

BOOK RELEASE

Tessa Fontaine's debut novel, *The Red Grove*, came out on May 14. A coming-of-age tale set in the late 1990s, the work of literary fiction blends elements of mystery, horror and suspense. At its center, the novel is about a woman gone missing and her teenage daughter's quest to find her. Fontaine, an occasional contributor to Xpress, is also the author of the 2018 memoir, *The Electric Woman: A Memoir in Death-Defying Acts*. **X**



STRONG AS OAK: Black Mountain resident Faith Butterfield helped lead efforts to preserve the trunk of Black Mountain's Robo Oil Tree after a tornado toppled it May 9. Experts believe the white oak dated to the 18th century. Photo by Joe Galone

Illustration by Randy Molton

