

# Reclaim store, housing summits on the CHC's agenda for 2018

## Nonprofit targets growth to fit community needs

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A local nonprofit focused on housing issues has big plans for the new year. While continuing its work promoting and facilitating safe and affordable housing, the Community Housing Coalition of Madison County (CHC) hopes to revive a shuttered small business into a kind of home improvement headquarters.

For roughly three years, Coal, Feed & Lumber Company, Inc. on Bridge Street in Marshall has sat vacant due to the declining health and subsequent death of longtime owner Howard Riddle. The site could have a new life in 2018, if an initiative CHC has dubbed "Project Reclaim" proves successful. Backed by a grant from Minnesota Housing Partnership, which supports nonprofits across the country, CHC plans to transform the space into a community hub where residents can buy salvaged and donated materials for their home improvement projects.

"We want to turn it into a drop off point for resources, like second-hand or unused building materials, that are currently being trucked out of the county," said Chris Brown, CHC's executive director. "The next piece of that is the outflow and helping the people of Madison County buy good, solid building materials at affordable prices. CHC can also use the materials in our existing home repair program."

In an interview inside his office, Brown said the nonprofit is working with the Riddle family to reopen the hardware store as a reclaim thrift store by the end of the year. Long term, CHC envisions the site as an extension of its "Neighbors helping neighbors" approach to advancing lives in the county. "We want to open it up as community center, where we can have workshops and classes, and not just on home improvement projects," Brown said. "We want to open up the space to the community in general, to other nonprofits and groups who believe in community empowerment and community development."

CHC has found success adopting that collaborative approach to affordable housing issues in Madison. Over the last five years, Brown said the organization has seen "incredible" growth. "Staff has jumped from one part timer in 2013 to the equivalent of three and a half full time employees at the start of 2018," he said. The organization's operations budget, which helps finance home repairs to keep residents inside safe, affordable homes, has grown to roughly \$700,000, five times what it was five years ago according to Brown.

The nonprofit is focused on continuing that growth well beyond 2018. Within the next five years, Brown said CHC hopes to step into both specialized new home construction and workforce development training. He described a scenario that would see the nonprofit develop a modular home design that could be built with the help of volunteers. This vision, Brown said,



Volunteers with the Community Housing Coalition of Madison County reroof a home in the Grapevine community in 2016. PHOTOS BY PAUL EGGERS/PAUL@NEWSRECORDANDSENTINEL.COM



The Community Housing Coalition of Madison County hopes to revive Coal, Feed & Lumber Inc as a reclaim thrift store and community center in 2018.

would see the construction of new homes costing about \$20,000-40,000 in materials while helping students create a path from high school to the workforce. "We hope to give them hands on experiences

where they can get workforce training while giving back to the community," he said. "And oh by the way, they'll be rebuilding Madison County's affordable housing at the same time." In the short term, that focus

on affordable housing will see CHC host a series of "housing summits" across the county in 2018. The aim, Brown said, is to hear from residents as they share perspectives on affordable housing issues. Brown cited the proliferation of short-term vacation rentals, through sites like Airbnb, and the expansion of Asheville into Madison as important topics that need to be discussed.

"We want to be a solution for Madison County neighbors to create and maintain affordable housing options," he said. "Our theme this year is capacity building and making sure our growth is directly correlated to the needs of the community."

# WNC's deep freeze stopping waterfalls

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Baby, it's inhumanely cold outside.

Western North Carolina has been in "Frozen"-like clutches since the last day of the year, complete with frozen waterfalls, making the eight days around the new year one of the longest periods of such dangerously cold weather on record.

"These eight consecutive days of extreme cold is the third longest period of temperatures this cold. It is quite significant," said meteorologist Doug Outlaw with the National Weather Service in Greer, South Carolina.

The old year went out with an icy bang, clocking in with a high of 30 degrees and low of 19 in Asheville Dec. 31. But the new year trumped the 2017 chill, setting a record for the coldest high temperature for a New Year's Day at 21 degrees.

The average temperature for the first four days of the year is 20 degrees, Outlaw said, which is 17 degrees below the normal average temperature.

And those don't tell the tale of the wind chills, which have made the "feels-like" temperatures way below zero.



Catawba Falls, in Old Fort, were frozen over Jan. 5. TODD RUNKLE/TRUNKLE@GANNETT.COM

The coldest spot in the mountains this past week has most likely been Mount Mitchell State Park, Outlaw said. The temperature at the 6,684-foot-high mountain - the highest in the Eastern United States - was

6 below zero Jan. 5. That's nowhere near the record, which was minus 34 on Jan. 21, 1985.

While the stinging cold has been bursting pipes and running up heating bills, it has

brought at least one sparkling highlight - frozen waterfalls.

Looking Glass Falls, arguably one of the prettiest in the Pisgah National Forest, and the most accessible for photographing, has completely

stopped in its 60-foot-high tracks.

The waterfall on U.S. 276 is a draw for Snapchatters, but also for ice climbers.

Sliding Rock Falls, also off U.S. 276 near Brevard, and Catawba Falls in Old Fort, are also frozen.

Dave Casey, District Ranger for the forest's Pisgah District, said there is no closure order in effect, which means that accomplished ice climbers can climb the vertical ice sheet, but he wouldn't recommend it.

"Just like rock climbing, ice climbing is not something that you can do safely just because you have the right gear," Casey said.

"You have to know how to use the gear appropriately and be able to properly evaluate the ice you're thinking about climbing. Not all ice is created equally and can pose different risks."

Ice above can break off, and falls onto ice can be deadly. At any time of year, forest visitors are warned to stay off slippery rocks around waterfalls, never walk across the top of waterfalls and never cross closure barriers.

But do see the natural spectacle before it starts to thaw. Temperatures are expected to warm up all the way to up to the 50s.

# WNC school snow day = discount day at ski areas

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Even though Western North Carolina is not technically in the death grip of Winter Storm Grayson, it certainly feels like it's breathing down our necks.

Some WNC ski areas offer discounted rates on snow days.

The drive to Wolf Ridge in Madison County is less than an hour off Interstate 26 West. The ski area, which has 15 slopes, prides itself on being family-oriented. Thirty percent of slopes are beginner-intermediate, half are advanced and the rest are black diamond.

There is a small tubing park two miles from the ski area, open 9 a.m.-10 p.m. The 100-yard run is perfect for small children and adults who don't feel the need for speed.

On snow days, when school is out in

Madison County, the ski area offers discounts of \$15 for a full day lift ticket and \$7 per ski rental or \$15 per snowboard rental.

Thursday Night College Night: All college students get \$15 lift tickets.

Learn To Ski: If you are a new skier or Snowboarder and want to lean the sport, this is learn to ski month - \$40 per package that includes full day lift ticket, rentals and a beginner group lesson at 9 a.m. or 1 p.m.

The ski area is open 9 a.m.-10 p.m., as well as the Terrain Park and Tube Run.

Wolf Ridge Ski Resort is at 578 Valley View Circle in Mars Hill. Call 828-689-4111 or visit skiwolfbridgenc.com for more information.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Beech Mountain Resort in Avery and Watauga counties. It is the highest ski area in the East, 5,506 feet in elevation.

In honor of its anniversary, Beech Mountain is holding "Ski Like its 1967" prices, including \$9 Ladies Night every Tuesday, \$9 Men's Night every Wednesday and \$24 Couples Night every Thursday. (Sorry, but no romantic deals during the holidays, Dec. 18-Jan. 1).

On snow days, students and teachers from closed K-12 schools in Avery, Ashe, Watauga and Mitchell counties ski for \$10 and rent skis or snowboards for \$10. Students and teachers can also snow tube for \$15.

The town of Beech Mountain also has a free youth sledding hill, equipped with its own snow gun, pumping out snow throughout the winter for ages 12 and younger.

Beech Mountain Resort is located at 1007 Beech Mountain Parkway, Beech Mountain. For more information visit beechmountainresort.com.



Skiers and snowboarders hit the slopes at Wolf Ridge Ski Resort. ANGELI WRIGHT/AWRIGHT@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM