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Trail Mix

Explore the NC mountains this fall
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Poll Position

Early look at the November ballot choices

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Let the Wild Rumpus Start

BY LINDSAY MARTELL

When we moved to Huntersville from Massachusetts in 2018, we heard a lot about “the bubble.”

“We don’t often leave ‘the bubble,’” they’d say. “There’s just so much to do here.”

The bubble is, of course, Lake Norman. Despite not knowing much about the area before we moved here, we quickly understood what our neighbors were talking about.

We were smitten with our new home in all the ways that count: Our daughter was thriving in kindergarten, we quickly fell in step with both native North Carolinians and transplants, and Lake Norman just fit us as a close-knit party of three (we didn’t adopt our dog until 2021). Lush, outdoorsy, tons to do and very, very chill.

And yet, we leave the bubble. A lot.

And as much as I hate driving, traffic and paying to park, we love getting out and exploring. Whether it’s catching a Knights game or visiting a museum in Charlotte, sweating ourselves into oblivion while cheering on the Kannelapolis Cannon Ballers or lacing up to roller skate in Gastonia (seriously, the most fun way to spend an afternoon), exploring the cities and towns around us tops the list of what we love about the Carolinas.

Lately, we’ve been fusing two of our favorite things (pets and books) at Charlotte Humane Society with its Book Buddies program. On our last visit, I pulled a copy of *Charlotte’s Web* from the shelves and sat in front of a plexiglass wall, where a bully mix with warm, kind eyes watched my every move.

I turned the first pages, reading aloud the story of a farmer’s daughter pleading with her father to spare the life of a tiny piglet. I showed the pup — whose name I can’t remember — the illustrations, and I was immediately a new mom again, sharing a favorite book with my baby girl back when she was all sweetness and tiny fists.

It’s a moment that reminds me of the power of words and how they connect us isn’t just person to person, but creature to creature.

My daughter and I have to tear ourselves away after an hour with the ani-



The Charlotte Humane Society Book Buddies program

mals, and we always, always leave with the same heavy heart. Yes, we would love another dog, but our little man is The Dog, and we just can’t.

So we appreciate having our buckets filled, knowing that most of these fur babies will be with their new families by the time we come back with more books and more moments of connection.

On a different excursion in Charlotte — the Whitewater Center — we followed our dog’s lead as we explored the hiking trails and watched the zipliners high above our heads.

It’s a place that you kind of forget is so cool, as much for parents pushing strollers as it is for mountain bikers and rafters facing the rapids, one stroke at a time.

We asked ourselves why we don’t take the Whitewater Center paths every week, or at least every month. I guess because there is just so much to see in the cities and towns we have yet to explore. We don’t want to miss a single thing, a single place, a single moment.

Milling About is a column about life around Lake Norman, written by Lindsay Martell.

The column name is a nod to life around the lake and our town’s mill history.

Lindsay Martell lives in Birkdale with her husband, daughter, and a scruffy mini mutt named Dug.



Martell



Going Green
Signal retiming on
West Catawba



Flag Day
Hough girls kick off sanctioned
season



Acting Class
Intimate theater
returns to town
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New '20s-era
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Cover photo by Jon Show
View atop Bluff Mountain

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Canopy Housing Foundation has established the **Cristina Grossu Biffle Memorial Award** to honor her life of service to her community. The award will recognize a nonprofit actively engaged in addressing housing and children's needs, issues that she deeply cared about.

In 2024, the Foundation presented Cristina with its Humanitarian Award, in recognition of her monumental work following the disaster of Hurricane Helene.



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DISCOVER MORE



Get Out and Enjoy the Mountains This Fall

BY JON SHOW

October might be my favorite month in the North Carolina mountains.

The leaf peepers are out in full force, but there are plenty of spots that are less trafficked. Also, the weather has cooled enough that you aren't likely to encounter a random 80-degree day that requires you to shed three layers while walking uphill.

Here are a few day trips and lunch spots if you're tired of watching ACC football games played by teams from California.

Bluff Mountain Trail

The easiest of the hikes, and the one most customized to the experience you're looking for. It follows the Blue Ridge Parkway west of Sparta. Depending on where you park, you can hike 8 miles or 3.5 miles, with views of Stone Mountain State Park below.

The 3.5-mile hike has only 587 feet of elevation gain, with most of the vertical climb at the end as you head to the top of Bluff Mountain. It meanders through the woods and fields and has great views at the peak.

If you extend the hike through the parking lot at Bluff Mountain, there's a shade tree where you can sit, relax and recharge.

Pro tip: Check the Blue Ridge Parkway website for closures. That section is one of the quicker areas to close in the winter months.

Lunch: It's a little out of the way, but the Harvest Grill at Shelton Vineyards is a great place to grab a beer and a seasonal cup of soup on a cold day.

Basin Creek Trail

I much prefer a hike with a view at the end, but one of my favorite river hikes is climbing up Basin Creek Trail to the Caudill Cabin, located in the valley below Bluff Mountain.

Park in the dirt lot near the creek crossing and follow the creek up 1.8 miles to the Basin Cove Campground, where you'll find the most out-of-place-looking stand of 100-foot pine trees.

If you're feeling spry, you can tack on another 3 miles up to the Caudill Cabin, where a generation of mountain folk lived until the summer of 1916, when a massive flood changed the landscape of the area forever.

Speaking of floods, more than a century later, the scars left behind by Hurricane Helene are evident throughout the climb to the cabin. There are



Views from Bluff Mountain | Photo by Jon Show

stretches where you might consider turning back, but things always look better just around the corner.

Pro tip: Many people dislike river hikes because they must navigate water crossings and wet feet, but the only crossing up to the campground has a raised footbridge. There are water crossings between the campground and Caudill Cabin.

Lunch: Downtown Elkin is a weird little haven on the way home. My friends like the beers and wings at the Angry Troll, but I much prefer the shaded outdoor beer garden and food truck spot called The Railyard on the edge of town.

If you're not looking for a place with beer, Speedy Chef serves up a great cheeseburger and milkshake on the way into downtown. There's also a new spot called Blue Oregano that has delicious Greek fare with huge portions.

Grassy Ridge Bald

My favorite hike in the North Carolina mountains is a long day trip, but it's worth every minute of the 2½-hour drive.

Starting out from Carvers Gap on the Tennessee border, it's a short hike up a wide gravel path to the ridgeline. Along the way, you experience two different ecosystems, passing through a rain forest to reach a ridgeline with large grassy meadows that come alive on a

windy day.

This is another "choose your own adventure" hike. It's less than a mile to top, but you can continue up and down the ridge for another 2 miles to Grassy Bald.

The hike traverses portions of the Appalachian Trail and is one of the few in North Carolina that offers true 360-degree views of the Blue Ridge Mountains in both North Carolina and Tennessee.

Pro tip: Do your best to pick a day with bluebird skies and get there early. The balds can be fogged in even on a partly cloudy day down in the valley. If you run out of water, there are fresh piped springs in the woods at the end of the parking lot.

Lunch: On the ride home, there's a spot called Fox & Fig just over the river in Spruce Pine. It has a rotating BLT that changes each season; I still dream about the one with pickled onions and chipotle mayo.

It's a long day, so the Fig also has great coffee and cookies if you need a little pep in your step for the ride home.

Pinnacle Trail to Kings Pinnacle

This is the closest real hike to home, and by real, I mean a hike that isn't paved or flat or just feels more like a walk in the woods.

It's roughly 45 minutes to the Kings Mountain visitor center parking lot. We

park about a half-mile past the entrance to a connector trail that cuts off the most boring and flat part of the hike, which was reconfigured years ago to make it a little more accessible.

At the peak, you'll reach a rock staircase, but do not turn around and go back. Climb up the rock and over the ridge for 100-mile views of western North Carolina.

Most people stop there, but we like to turn right and head up to an area near the peak that I'll keep to myself. It was the first hike I took my then-girlfriend on when she visited me for the first time, and it's where I proposed to her four years later.

Pro tip: Don't confuse this hike with nearby Crowders Mountain, which is mostly stairs and less impressive views.

Lunch: Veronét Vineyards & Winery is located on the way home and has a great food truck and seating area out back. I'm not much of a wine drinker and it's North Carolina vines so my wife sticks with the bubbles.

The woods and mountains of North Carolina are our background and our playground. Get out there and enjoy them.

Happy trails.

All hikes are listed on the AllTrails app by entering the name of the hike. The app provides a link to parking areas and the trailhead.



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NCDOT Signal Timing Aims to Improve West Catawba

BY DAVE VIESER

A comprehensive project to retune the traffic signals on West Catawba Avenue from U.S. 21 to Jetton Road is scheduled to be performed in October by the North Carolina Department of Transportation, which maintains all the traffic signals on state-managed roads in Cornelius.

“Our division traffic engineer has indeed confirmed with the signal systems team in Raleigh that the project should be starting very soon,” said Jennifer Goodwin, an NCDOT spokesperson.

Will this effort have a positive impact on traffic flow along and across the major east-west artery in town?

Local officials certainly hope so.

This isn’t something NCDOT does everywhere, and officials purposely waited until fall and the opening of schools to start in order to tabulate the extra traffic generated when schools are open. Nonetheless, the timing will be a challenge, with so much construction work being done along West Catawba Avenue.

How Signals Work

Years ago, traffic signals were controlled by timers. However, virtually all of the signals are now triggered by the flow of traffic detected by monitors. When these detectors malfunction, traffic flow can get congested.

Motorists in our town learned much about damaged traffic signals earlier this year after construction crews cut cables at the West Catawba Avenue/Nantz Road intersection. It took months for the timing to be corrected by the contractor, and in the interim, westbound traffic piled up at times. The signal is functional at this time, but the intersection has still not been completed.

Reporting Signal Problems

It’s not just construction that could hamper signaling efficiency. Prompt reporting of inoperative signals is a vital element in keeping the system working at top efficiency.

NCDOT has crews throughout each region in the state that can be called



Intersection of West Catawba and Jetton Road

out to correct timing defects. However, they can’t be everywhere at all times. Far more frequent observations can be reported by workers in local communities, such as police, who patrol the roads in town.

Cornelius Police Chief David Baucom said officers are trained to report signals that are not functioning correctly.

“NCDOT has a 24-hour number we

can call anytime there is an issue with a DOT traffic light,” said Baucom. “However, we are part of Region 10, and the main headquarters for Region 10 are based out of Albemarle. When we call, it does take some time for them to respond if there is not someone in our area. This practice has been in place for many years.”

Chief Baucom said the department has a set protocol for an inoperative signal.

“When we get complaints, typically an officer responds and determines if there is an issue with a traffic light, and then we make the call to NCDOT,” he said.

If the issue involves a safety factor, an officer will be assigned to remain at the signal until NCDOT arrives.

Motorists may notice NCDOT crews working on signal lights along West Catawba Avenue between now and the end of October.

NCDOT officials hope they will also notice an improvement in the flow of traffic once the timing project is completed.

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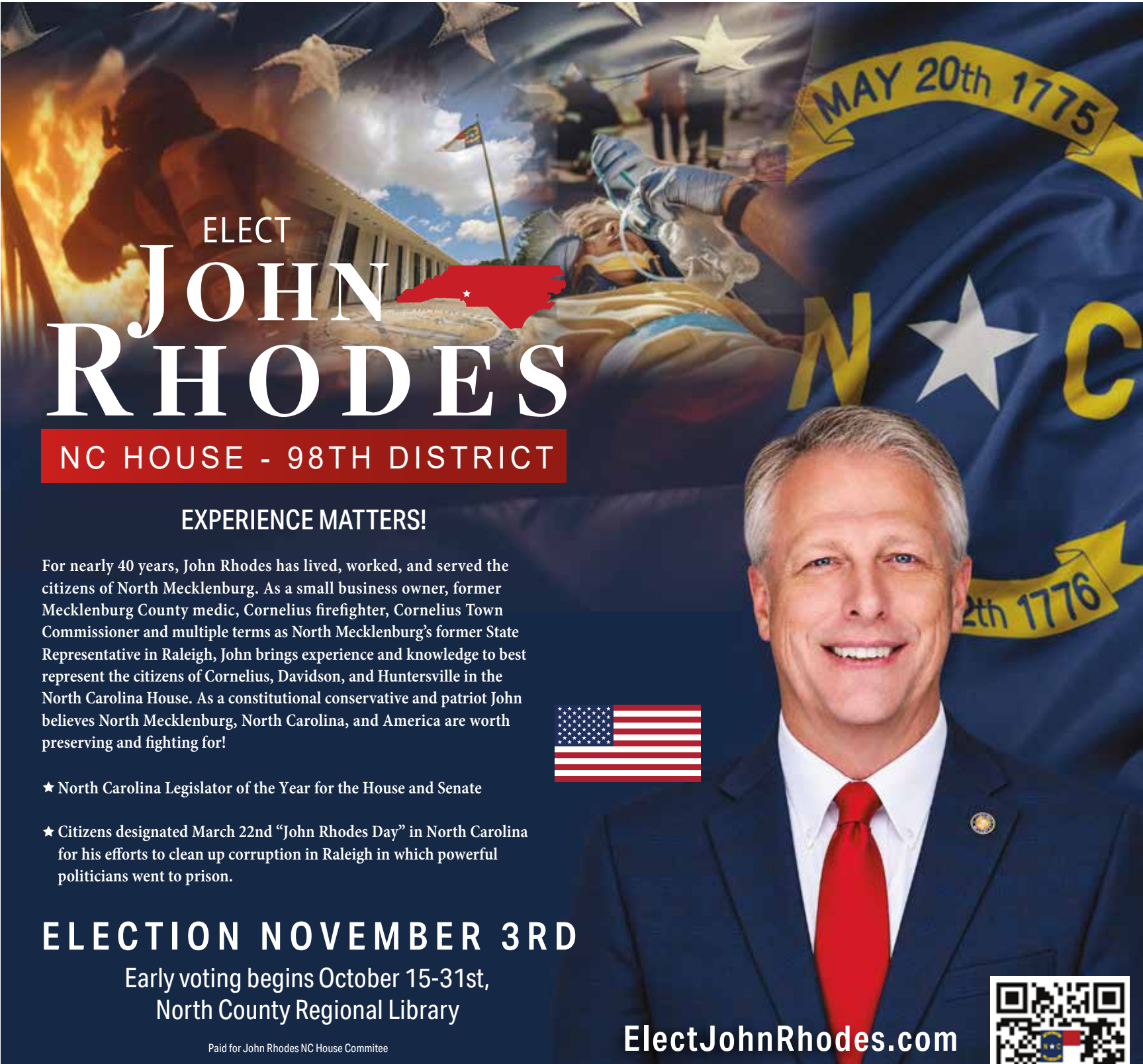


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Partisan Control at the Center of November Elections

BY DAVE VIESER

It's a relatively quiet election locally this year. None of the town positions in Cornelius, such as mayor or town commissioner, are up for election until next year.

However, a U.S. Senate seat from North Carolina is on the ballot, along with several county and state representatives and three constitutional amendments, one of which was strongly opposed by Cornelius officials.

Here's information on the candidates and amendments. For brevity, we have omitted the many judicial positions also on the ballot.

U.S. Senate

Former Gov. Roy Cooper (D) is running against Michael Whatley (R). Whatley has never held elected office but has held several political positions, including chairman of the Republican National Committee. Cooper served as governor of North Carolina from 2017 to 2025.

Whatley has primarily focused on crime, illegal immigration and the economy. Cooper has centered on

affordable living and working across the aisle.

The race has drawn national attention because the result could affect the partisan balance of the U.S. Senate. Incumbent Republican Sen. Thom Tillis chose not to seek reelection.

U.S. House of Representatives District 14

Lakesha Womack (D) is running against incumbent Tim Moore (R).

Moore serves on the House Committee on Financial Services and the Budget. His campaign has revolved around fiscal responsibility. He previously served in the North Carolina House of Representatives, including 10 years as speaker.

Womack has not previously held elected public office and has two decades of experience in financial services and small-business development.

N.C. Senate District 37

Incumbent Vickie Sawyer (R) is seeking reelection against Raygan Angel (D).

Sawyer chairs the Senate Transportation Committee and has focused on

transportation infrastructure, conservative principles and education.

Angel is a law student and Democratic organizer. He has never held elected public office.

N.C. House District 98

Incumbent Beth Helfrich (D) is being challenged by John Rhodes (R).

Helfrich was elected to the state House in 2024. Republicans finished the 2024 election with 71 of the House's 120 seats, one short of the three-fifths majority needed for a veto-proof supermajority. Helfrich was one of the Democratic candidates elected that year.

She has emphasized communication with residents during her first term and an emphasis on responsible growth, education and public safety. Rhodes, a former Cornelius town commissioner and state representative, has focused on roads and transportation, cost of living and public safety.

Mecklenburg County offices

County Board of Commissioners:
Leigh Altman (D), Yvette Townsend-Ingram (D) and Arthur Griffin Jr. (D) are

all running unopposed for three at-large seats. Morris "Mac" McAdoo (D) is running unopposed for commissioner in District 1.

Clerk of Superior Court: Elisa Chinn-Gary (D) is running unopposed.

County sheriff: Garry McFadden (D) is also running unopposed. He won a four-way Democratic primary earlier this year. No Republican candidate is on the general-election ballot.

Constitutional amendments

Amendment 1 would require all voters, not just those presenting to vote in person, to present photo identification before voting.

Amendment 2 would keep the state income tax rate from being raised higher than 3.5%.

Amendment 3 would require limits on property tax increases by local governments. Cornelius commissioners adopted a resolution opposing the measure earlier this year, arguing it would reduce local control and make it more difficult for towns to fund essential services.




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Downtown Plan Must Deal with Traffic, Red Line

BY MARK WASHBURN

A long-term vision for a village main street through Old Town Cornelius has a vexing obstacle on its edge: N.C. 115.

That topic and others were broached at September’s Newsmakers Breakfast at The Peninsula Club, organized by Cornelius Today.

Rox Burhans, director of the Cornelius Planning Department, and David Cole, assistant planning director, outlined the town’s 25-year plan to nurture a pedestrian-friendly destination district in the historic east end.

Split Decision

Audience comments quickly focused on the congested corridor, which parallels the future Red Line rail tracks and splits the old downtown from the bustling retail and residential Antiquity development.

“That was the first point we got from everyone,” said Cole, referring to an 18-month public input process that preceded the master plan.

Both Cole and Burhans stressed that the master plan is a 25-year vision, not a step-by-step urban planning document.

It will evolve as interest and concepts develop in the area.

One idea under consideration, Cole said, was realigning some streets to create alternatives to using Catawba Avenue to cross downtown. Mulberry Street, for example, might be reengineered to relieve some traffic at N.C. 115 and Catawba Avenue and possibly connect to the new Red Line station, he said.

The N.C. Department of Transportation, which controls N.C. 115, is also expected to examine alternatives, he said.

Linking Antiquity to the historic district is a challenge because of the rail and road corridor, Cole said. A bridge or tunnel to cross N.C. 115 would be costly, he said.

“Antiquity feels like an island,” he said. But as development fills in open lots, storefronts approaching N.C. 115 from Antiquity might make the streetscape scale feel more pedestrian-friendly, he said.

Other Considerations

Moving the police station from downtown is still under consideration, Burhans said.

A more central location, possibly closer to the town’s west side, might be a good option. The department, he said, has outgrown the building erected only two decades ago.

“There could be a more active use of that space,” said Burhans, even a boutique hotel sometime in the future.

Among the core concepts of the master plan is to encourage retail shops along Catawba Avenue with residential units upstairs.

One participant had a blunt question: Why does the town need three vape shops between the I-77 gateway and Main Street?

A new ordinance restricts where such businesses can go, Cole said, but the three on Catawba Avenue are grandfathered in place. It’s a bit awkward, he acknowledged, for so many vape shops to be in an area that is building on the energy of the Cain Center to become an arts-centric district.

New storefronts have opened recently along the corridor, including Pure Olive, Starlight Bakery and Jaleedy’s Dairy Bar. Cain Center’s expansion includes The Puckett Pottery House and new office space in the historic Goodrum House.

Save Our Trees

Removal of old-growth trees on West Catawba where road widening is soon to begin spurred a question from the audience: Will trees need to be removed from the historic district as well?

“Mature-growth trees help establish the character of an area,” Burhans said, and efforts are being undertaken to save as many as possible. A tree census was recently conducted in the downtown area, and 231 trees were examined and their health evaluated, he said.

Road projects often require trees to be removed because of relocating utilities, which is the situation on the west side, he said.

Three or four parking decks may eventually be needed in the east end to serve the district and the Red Line, which has an estimated arrival in nine years, Cole said.

The event was attended by more than 50 residents, business owners and government officials.

Details on the November Newsmakers Breakfast will be announced later this month.

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Fall for Reading

BY LYN MULDROW

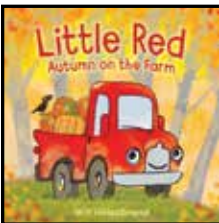
It's fall, y'all! The leaves are changing and the weather is cooling, so now is the perfect time to cozy up with a new book to usher in autumn and spooky moods. These staff picks are sure to share thrills amid the chills.



"The Witches of Cambridge"
By Alice Hoffman
(Adult fantasy, historical fiction)

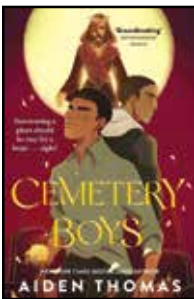
In this practically magical book, join a couple of Radcliffe College students in the 1950s as they discover the mysteriously intriguing Lilith Society, a group of witches from colonial times.

Friendships and bonds form and are tested as the girls walk into their power. Perfect for lovers of historical fiction, this cozy and creepy tale, written by the author of the "Practical Magic" series, is sure to share witchy delights.



"Little Red — Autumn on the Farm"
By Will Hillenbrand
(Children)

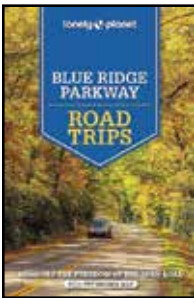
Pumpkins and hay and Halloween costumes, oh my! Nothing feels more like fall than a festival, and Little Red agrees. In this delightfully drawn picture book, join Katie and the little red truck as they get all the other vehicles ready for the harvest festival.



"Cemetery Boys"
By Aiden Thomas
(Young adult)

What happens in the cemetery ... doesn't always stay there. After a failed ritual, a would-be brujo and a dead popular kid meet between worlds in this queer, coming-of-age young adult novel.

Will they get what they want? The love and acceptance of their families and a chance for redemption looms, and amid it, love grows. An enchantingly spooky pick for the season.



"Blue Ridge Parkway Road Trips"
By Amy Balfour
(Adult nonfiction)

Want to go on an adventure this autumn? Instead of using your GPS

and gaining #TravelTok suggestions, grab this book and go on a road trip to see the changing fall leaves along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Complete with a full map, this guide details some fun things to do and experience along your journey. Go analog this season and stop by the library to tell us about your trip.

Fall is better at the library! We have a wide range of programs for all ages, including baby and toddler story times, young child and teen art and science clubs, as well as adult book clubs, crafting and painting workshops, and more.

Lyn Muldrow is a library associate at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library in Cornelius. Visit cmlibrary.org for more information about upcoming programs.

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Girls Flag Football Kicks Off First Sanctioned Season

BY RYAN MOXON

After more than 40 years as a gym-class and backyard staple, flag football has become an official high school sport in North Carolina, with the Hough High School girls team taking the field for the inaugural NCHSAA-sanctioned season.

Flag has been offered at a local level since 2022 under a partnership between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and the Carolina Panthers, but received sanctioning last spring by the NCHSAA, with the first official contests this fall. This season marks the first time a state champion will be crowned.

The transition from spring to fall has presented some challenges, said head coach Ryan Redd, including a short turnaround to prepare for the season, athletes choosing between flag football and other fall sports and a state-mandated dead period that limited opportunities for tryouts and preparation.

The new varsity designation also brings additional requirements, including using a school activity bus for road games and meeting NCHSAA eligibility requirements.

On the field

Hough is building on a spring season that ended with a loss to West Charlotte. The Huskies returned a strong core of players and Redd has set his sights on a conference championship and a deep playoff run.

"We have a lot of talent and returning players," Redd said. "We have the potential to be a very good team that can compete with anyone in the state."



Hough's Bria Karpeh | Photo by Hough student Gisselle Meza-Hernandez

The Huskies have several returning players contributing on both sides of the ball.

Defensively, Abby Yang is back at cornerback, where Redd points to her intelligence and coverage ability. Angie Rueda returns as a rusher and linebacker, while Ella Carnes is back at safety and Madison St Denis returns at linebacker.

Offensively, Deonna Parker is back at wide receiver, along with Gabby Hinds at receiver and center. Jocelyn Pradas contributes on both sides of the ball,

while Ja'myra Dorce returns as a receiver.

Several newcomers also have become contributors.

Bria Karpeh plays receiver and defensive back, while Kate Gilmore, Laila Herriott and center Alanna Montemurro have contributed on offense.

Defensively, Alannah Broadway has returned after missing last season because of track, and plays cornerback. Anna Rahaim and Mackenzie Kamara provide speed at rusher, while Lilly Franklin contributes at linebacker.

Hough uses many players on both sides of the ball, keeping its playmakers on the field in different combinations.

Zoie Klakulak, Dorce and Karpeh rotate at quarterback depending on the play call.

Season update

Hough opened the season against Palisades, which has won the last three city championships. Palisades beat the Huskies 31-0 in the season opener.

Hough responded with a gritty 19-14 win over Chambers.

The Huskies also face Hopewell and Myers Park during conference play, matchups Redd identified as ones to watch.

There were no changes to Hough's coaching staff for the new season. Redd, who played football in high school and college and has coached football for 15 years, is in his third season coaching flag football at Hough after playing the sport for more than seven years.

He said the team's depth has been one of the most encouraging aspects of the season.

"I love that we have the ability to sub players in and it doesn't change the level of play that we have on the field, offensively or defensively," he said.

The Huskies also have emphasized playing for one another.

"We have a very unselfish team this season that are playing for one common goal — to win," Redd said.

Flag growth

The sport has grown rapidly in North Carolina in recent years, with 117 teams competing in 2024-25 and 135 in 2025-26. By the time the NCHSAA approved sanctioning, 154 high schools had committed to field teams for the 2026-27 season.

The inaugural NCHSAA championship is scheduled for Nov. 14, with playoffs beginning Oct. 31.



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Wegmans Eyes Cornelius

Wegmans has signed an agreement to purchase a large tract near Atrium Health on Statesville Road, the company confirmed. The Rochester, N.Y.-based grocery chain is evaluating the site as a possible future store, along with other potential uses. No final decisions have been made.

The property is part of a 90-acre tract at Westmoreland and Statesville roads, with the Atrium facility occupying about 30 acres and the remainder available for development. Wegmans



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typically seeks 10 to 14 acres for a store. A grocery store would require rezoning.

Davidson Program Builds Friendships

Davidson College students and older adults in the Lake Norman area can

participate in Adopt-A-Grandfriend, a program that pairs participants based on shared interests.

The program, sponsored by Davidson College and the Town of Davidson Parks & Recreation Department, is free. Participants can meet for coffee, take walks, attend sporting events or performances, share meals or simply spend time together.

The program is designed to encourage friendships between generations rather than assign participants to a set schedule. Registration remains open throughout the year.

commercial parcels through the end of 2026.

The new assessed values will reflect estimated market values as of Jan. 1, 2027. The higher assessments do not directly determine property tax bills; county, city and town officials will establish tax rates in 2027.

Bailey Tennis Complex Wins Award

Bailey Road Park was recognized by the United States Tennis Association, receiving the 2026 Outstanding Facility Award for its new 12-court complex.

The North Carolina USTA also named the Cornelius parks department its Outstanding Department of the Year. Both awards recognize the development and programming at the facility.

Parks Commissioner Jana Ritter received a state merit award for starting a tennis program for Bailey Middle School students at the facility.

Cornelius Man Charged in Peeping Case

A Cornelius man was arrested after police said he was standing outside a residence window while committing a sexual act in the presence of a minor.

Police responded to a residence in the 19000 block of Feriba Place after receiving a report of a peeping incident. Following an investigation, officers arrested Andrew Mark Bruce and charged him with felony indecent exposure in the presence of a minor.

Bruce was taken to the Mecklenburg County Detention Center and later given a \$15,000 secured bond. Police released information about the case to alert residents and encourage them to report suspicious activity.

Giant Flag Approved

An 1,800-square-foot American flag will be allowed at the Randy Marion dealership on Torrence Chapel Road near Exit 28 after the town approved a special-use permit.

The flag will fly from a 114.84-foot flagpole. The town's normal rules limit flagpoles to 30 feet and flags to 40 square feet.

The Town Board changed the development code in January to allow larger U.S. and North Carolina flags with approval from the Board of Adjustment. The Randy Marion flag is the first to receive approval under the revised rules.

\$500,000 for Bailey Road Parkland

Cornelius received a \$500,000 state grant to help offset the cost of acquiring 37 acres of future parkland north of Bailey Road.

The property, purchased by the town for about \$962,000, is adjacent to 36.18 acres acquired in 2025, creating a contiguous 73-acre area of town-owned land. The mostly wooded property includes several creeks and is intended for future park development and passive recreation.

The grant came through the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. Cornelius' application ranked first among projects considered in the competitive review.

West Catawba Clearing Tied to Widening

Tree clearing along West Catawba Avenue and Westmoreland Road is connected to the planned widening of West Catawba, officials said.

EnergyUnited said trees are being removed in areas where power lines will eventually have to be moved for the road project. That explains why some clearing extends well beyond existing power lines.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation currently has construction on the widening project scheduled to begin in 2028.

Home Values Rise in Revaluation

Mecklenburg County's preliminary 2027 property revaluation shows a median increase of about 15% for residential properties and 30% for commercial properties.

The figures are not final. County assessment staff are continuing to review more than 428,000 residential and

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HOME SALES

Cornelius

8/24/26, \$450,000, 11364 Heritage Green Dr, 3BR/2.5BA, Heritage Green, 1749 sq ft, built 2004

8/24/26, \$1,570,000, 17229 Green Dolphin Ln, 5BR/4BA, The Peninsula, 3439 sq ft, built 1996

8/25/26, \$497,000, 10427 Danesway Ln, 3BR/2.5BA, Wellsley Village, 2050 sq ft, built 1994

8/25/26, \$405,900, 11148 Heritage Green Dr, 3BR/2.5BA, Heritage Green, 1737 sq ft, built 2004

8/26/26, \$345,000, 8955 Rosalyn Glen Rd, 2BR/2BA, Edinburgh Square, 1620 sq ft, built 2006



\$4,700,000 | 20711 Bethel Church Road, Cornelius

8/27/26, \$375,200, 19866 Lamp Lighters Way, 2BR/2.5BA, Antiquity, 1296 sq ft, built 2011

8/27/26, \$595,000, 17718 Morehampton Ave, 3BR/2BA, Baileys Glen, 1962 sq ft, built 2018

8/27/26, \$3,505,700, 17821 Carlow Rd, 4BR/4.5BA, Cornelius, 3739 sq ft, built 2008

8/27/26, \$812,000, 17426 Springwinds Dr #122, 3BR/2.5BA, The Peninsula, 2264 sq ft, built 2000

8/28/26, \$420,000, 8304 Viewpoint Ln, 3BR/2.5BA, Harborside Townhomes, 2330 sq ft, built 2007

8/28/26, \$2,700,000, 20107 Bascom Ridge Dr, 5BR/5BA, Crown Harbor, 7024 sq ft, built 1996

8/31/26, \$660,000, 8707 Lake Pines Dr, 4BR/2.5BA, Westmoreland, 2485 sq ft, built 2008

8/31/26, \$860,000, 17120 Players Ridge Dr, 3BR/2.5BA, The Peninsula, 2456 sq ft, built 1996

8/31/26, \$856,000, 21904 Torrence Chapel Rd, 6BR/4BA, Torrence Chapel Estates, 4371 sq ft, built 2017

9/1/26, \$465,000, 10139 Caldwell Depot Rd, 3BR/2.5BA, Caldwell Station, 1970 sq ft, built 2004



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9/1/26, \$4,685,000, 18407 Peninsula Cove Ln, 4BR/4.5BA, The Peninsula, 5604 sq ft, built 1999

9/1/26, \$248,000, 18809 Nautical Dr #302, 2BR/2BA, Admirals Quarters, 940 sq ft, built 1987

9/3/26, \$285,000, 7500 Woods Ln #46, 2BR/2BA, Wood Duck Cove, 1024 sq ft, built 1987

9/3/26, \$620,000, 17721 Morehampton Ave, 3BR/3BA, Baileys Glen, 3029 sq ft, built 2017

9/3/26, \$535,000, 17726 Morehampton Ave, 3BR/2BA, Baileys Glen, 1712 sq ft, built 2018

9/3/26, \$4,700,000, 20711 Bethel Church Rd, 6BR/7.5BA, Flagship, 7097 sq ft, built 2002

9/4/26, \$1,300,000, 18607 John Connor Rd, 4BR/3BA, The Peninsula, 3309 sq ft, built 1993

9/8/26, \$636,636, 19330 Yachtman Dr, 4BR/3BA, Yachtman Shores, 2585 sq ft, built 1987

9/8/26, \$360,000, 8942 Rosalyn Glen Rd, 2BR/2BA, Edinburgh Square, 1290 sq ft, built 2000

9/9/26, \$970,000, 17925 Kings Point Dr Unit F, 3BR/3BA, Kings Point, 2118 sq ft, built 1991

9/9/26, \$282,500, 18001 Delmas Dr Unit 2E, 2BR/2BA, Oakhurst, 1178 sq ft, built 2006

9/10/26, \$774,900, 8703 Lake Pines Dr, 4BR/3.5BA, Westmoreland, 3153 sq ft, built 2010

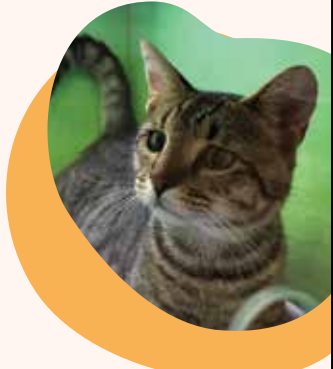
9/10/26, \$549,000, 10432 Audubon Ridge Dr, 3BR/2.5BA, Washam Potts Townhomes, 2272 sq ft, built 2023

9/10/26, \$477,500, 18749 Vineyard Point Ln, 2BR/2BA, Vineyard Point, 1043 sq ft, built 1990

9/11/26, \$799,000, 20417 Harborage Ct #507, 2BR/2BA, Harborage, 1738 sq ft, built 1985

9/11/26, \$5,625,000, 16906 Lake Shore Dr, 5BR/5.5BA, Lake Norman Island, 6427 sq ft, built 2024

9/15/26, \$550,000, 21064 Nannie Potts Ln, 4BR/2.5BA, Cornelius, 2847 sq ft, built 2021





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4424260 Five bedrooms, four full baths, a fenced backyard, and a thoughtfully designed floor plan give this Mooresville residence the versatility today's buyers are seeking. From the oversized kitchen island and walk-in pantry to the main-level guest suite and impressive primary retreat, each space brings something special to the floor plan. Set in Meadows at Coddle Creek near Publix, Mooresville schools, restaurants, and Main Street, this property is ready for its next chapter. **\$499,999**



4424230 Experience the best of Old Town Cornelius from a residence that pairs timeless character with tasteful enhancements and versatile spaces. Hardwood floors, vaulted ceilings, a main-level primary suite, screened porch, and oversized garage come together for an inviting place to call home. Step outside your front door and into the energy of Cornelius, with dining, arts, entertainment, Lake Norman, and I-77 just a short drive away. **\$499,000**



4418933 A spacious backyard, no HOA, three bedrooms, and an extensive list of recent upgrades make this Wellsley Village property one worth seeing. Original red oak floors, a sun-filled 300-square-foot flex space, cedar siding, and a beautifully refreshed interior give the residence plenty of personality. With Downtown Cornelius, Lake Norman, greenways, and dining in close proximity, this is a home that blends character with an enviable Cornelius address. **\$429,000**



4424866 Wake up above the city and end the day with panoramic Charlotte skyline views from your private 17th-floor balcony. This one-bedroom Trademark residence pairs floor-to-ceiling windows and an open layout with recent enhancements, assigned parking, and an impressive collection of building amenities. From stadium events and Uptown dining to light rail and Charlotte Gateway Station, the best of the city unfolds just beyond your doorstep! **\$355,000**



4422376 A renovated one-story bungalow, a generously sized backyard, and no HOA put this charming Mooresville property in a category of its own. Inside, original heart-pine character meets a refreshed kitchen, renovated bath, new flooring, recessed lighting, and a modernized electrical system. With Main Street restaurants, coffee shops, shopping, the new baseball park, and Lake Norman a short drive away, this is an exciting opportunity near the heart of Mooresville. **\$259,900**



4422370 Trade the hustle for a little more breathing room with this well-maintained home on approximately one acre. Wood floors, a welcoming kitchen, and an above-ground pool come together to provide an inviting backdrop that is ready to be enjoyed. Whether you're dreaming of gathering outdoors, or simply having more space, this property brings country charm and everyday comfort together. **\$280,000**



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9/15/26, \$612,000, 18201 Coulter Pkwy, 3BR/2BA, Baileys Glen, 1945 sq ft, built 2014

9/15/26, \$535,000, 18814 Coachmans Trce, 4BR/2.5BA, Glenridge, 2540 sq ft, built 2003

9/16/26, \$1,285,000, 9133 Robbins Preserve Rd, 4BR/3.5BA, Robbins Park, 3214 sq ft, built 2014

9/16/26, \$760,000, 20112 N Cove Rd, 5BR/3.5BA, Jetton Cove, 3089 sq ft, built 1998

9/17/26, \$678,000, 18613 Vineyard Point Ln, 3BR/2BA, Vineyard Point, 1269 sq ft, built 1990

9/17/26, \$380,000, 19303 Pocono Ln, 3BR/2BA, Heritage Green, 1456 sq ft, built 2010

9/17/26, \$305,000, 20128 Zion Ave, 3BR/1BA, Starmount, 1415 sq ft, built 1936

9/18/26, \$1,133,100, 17318 Players Ridge Dr, 4BR/3.5BA, The Peninsula, 3163 sq ft, built 1995

9/18/26, \$290,000, 18429 Streamline Ct, 3BR/2.5BA, Caldwell Station, 1271 sq ft, built 2006

Davidson

8/25/26, \$1,000,000, 20029 Callaway Hills Ln, 3BR/2.5BA, Runnymede, 3254 sq ft, built 2006

8/25/26, \$1,600,000, 12820 Westmoreland Farm Rd, 5BR/4.5BA, Westmoreland Farm, 3748 sq ft, built 2005

8/25/26, \$2,400,000, 419 South St #32, 5BR/5BA, Davidson, 3623 sq ft, built 2025

8/26/26, \$515,000, 3388 Brackhill St, 5BR/3.5BA, The Farm At Riverpointe, 2621 sq ft, built 2026

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Visit CorneliusToday.com for a comprehensive list of all live music and comedy events. Details are subject to change – visit venue websites for up-to-date information.

OCTOBER 1

The Serve Pickleball + Kitchen | 6 p.m. — John Sullivan — (Rock) — Free

The Alleyway | 6:30-9:30 p.m. — Holly Hopkins Jazz — (Jazz) — Free

OCTOBER 2

Lost Worlds Brewing | 6 p.m. — Carolina Ridgeline — (Bluegrass) — Free

H2 Public House | 7 p.m. — Jared Evans — (Rock) — Free

Harp & Crown | 7-10 p.m. — Bullfrog Moon — (Acoustic) — Free

Torrence & Knox | 7 p.m. — Casey Clark & the Sugar Bush — (Rock) — Free

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 8 p.m. — Hells Bells w/ TNT — (AC/DC Tribute) — Paid

Bin110 | 9 p.m. — John Sullivan — (Multi Genre) — Free

OCTOBER 3

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 6 p.m. — Generation Radio w/ U-Phonik — (Benefit Concert) — Paid

760 Craft Works | 6:30 p.m. — Kristy Scheirer & Michael — (Acoustic Rock) — Free

Royal Bliss | 7-10 p.m. — String Theory — (Classic Rock) — Free

Cain Center for the Arts | 7:30 p.m. — American Elton — (Elton John Tribute) — Paid

OCTOBER 9

H2 Public House | 7 p.m. — Little Johnny Trailor Trash — (Rock) — Free

Cain Center for the Arts | 7:30 p.m. — Jass Legacy Project — (Louis Armstrong Tribute) — Paid

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 8 p.m. — PUSHH — (Rock) — Paid

Bin110 | 9 p.m. — Josh Holland — ('90s Rock Ballads/Country) — Free

Rudder & Rose | 10 p.m. — String Theory Full Band — (Pop/Classics) — Free

OCTOBER 10

Primal Brewery | 5 p.m. — Matt Walsh & The Movers — (Blues) — Free

760 Craft Works | 6:30 p.m. — Dugi B & Burl — (Acoustic) — Free

Harp & Crown | 7-10 p.m. — Ryan Winter — (Piano/Vocalist) — Free

Cain Center for the Arts | 7:30 p.m. — To the Limit — (Eagles Tribute) — Paid

The Alleyway | 7:30-10:30 p.m. — Bobby Thomas Trio — (Jazz) — Free

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 8 p.m. — On The Border — (Eagles Tribute) — Paid



Saturday, October 31 | Brightside & Krak'd Vinyl

Lake Norman's sixth annual Halloween Party. Cash prizes for best costumes. High-energy live bands. Tricks, treats and plenty of fun. Tickets on sale now. Boatyard LKN, 7 p.m. Paid.

OCTOBER 11

The Serve Pickleball + Kitchen | 10 a.m. — Acoustic Solutions — (Jazz) — Free

Cain Center for the Arts | 6 p.m. — Stundom — (Nordic Folk) — Paid

OCTOBER 14

Peninsula Prime | 6 p.m. — Coconut Groove Band Duo — (Acoustic) — Free

OCTOBER 15

The Serve Pickleball + Kitchen | 6 p.m. — Acoustic Solutions — (Jazz) — Free

OCTOBER 16

H2 Public House | 7 p.m. — The Righteous Jamstones — (Rock) — Free

Royal Bliss | 7-10 p.m. — Carolina Firestorm — (Rock) — Free

Torrence & Knox | 7 p.m. — John Tice — (Rock) — Free

Cain Center for the Arts | 7:30 p.m. — Chatham Rabbits — (Americana) — Paid

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 8 p.m. — Wannabe — (Spice Girls Tribute w/ Avalora) — Paid

Bin110 | 9 p.m. — Vinyl Live — (Classic Rock) — Free

OCTOBER 17

Lost Worlds Brewing | 5:30 p.m. — Keith Wilson — (Singer Songwriter) — Free

760 Craft Works | 6:30 p.m. — Joe Middleton — (Classic Acoustic) — Free

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 7 p.m. — Post Nation & Ella Nation – Rusty Rudder 10-Year Reunion — (Post Malone & Ella Langley Tributes) — Paid

Harp & Crown | 7-10 p.m. — Velcrows — (Rock) — Free

Cain Center for the Arts | 7:30 p.m. — Dark Echoes — (Pink Floyd Tribute) — Paid

The Alleyway | 8-11 p.m. — Holly Hopkins — (Jazz) — Free

Rudder & Rose | 10 p.m. — Velvet Edge — (Pop) — Free

OCTOBER 18

The Serve Pickleball + Kitchen | 10 a.m. — Acoustic Solutions — (Jazz) — Free

Cain Center for the Arts | 3 p.m. — NC Youth Orchestra — (Classical) — Paid

OCTOBER 22

The Serve Pickleball + Kitchen | 6 p.m. — John Sullivan — (Rock) — Free

OCTOBER 23

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 8 p.m. — Slippery When Wet — (Bon Jovi Tribute) — Paid

Bin110 | 9 p.m. — Stormin Norman Experience — (Classic Rock/Country) — Free

OCTOBER 24

760 Craft Works | 6:30 p.m. — Brian English — (Acoustic) — Free

Torrence & Knox | 7 p.m. — Keith Wilson — (Rock) — Free

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 8 p.m. — SkynFolks w/ Laura Vinson — (Lynyrd Skynyrd Tribute) — Paid

The Alleyway | 8-11 p.m. — Serendipity — (Acoustic) — Free

Rudder & Rose | 10 p.m. — Orange Plush — (Pop) — Free

OCTOBER 25

The Serve Pickleball + Kitchen | 10 a.m. — Acoustic Solutions — (Jazz) — Free

Cain Center for the Arts | 3 p.m. — NC Youth Orchestra — (Classical) — Paid

OCTOBER 29

Peninsula Prime | 6 p.m. — John Sullivan — (Acoustic) — Free

OCTOBER 30

Harp & Crown | 7-10 p.m. — Union Groove — (Rock) — Free

Royal Bliss | 7-10 p.m. — Stereo Waves — (Rock) — Free

Cain Center for the Arts | 7:30 p.m. — John Schneider — (Country) — Paid

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 8 p.m. — Landslide — (Fleetwood Mac Tribute) — Paid

OCTOBER 31

Primal Brewery | 5 p.m. — Confetti Cannon — (Rock) — Free

Lost Worlds Brewing | 6 p.m. — Reece Brendle — (Country) — Free

★ **Boatyard LKN** | 7 p.m. — Brightside w/ Krak'd Vinyl – Halloween Party — ('90s Rock) — Paid

Torrence & Knox | 7 p.m. — Sully & Friends — (Rock) — Paid

Shhh... Harp & Crown Owners Launch New Speakeasy

BY JON SHOW

The Alleyway, a new cocktail lounge from the owners of Harp & Crown, is set to officially open this month in the space next door, bringing specialty cocktails, jazz and a 1920s-inspired atmosphere to the heart of Cornelius.

Mary and Pat Maiorino, owners of Harp & Crown, have spent the past 16 months transforming the space across the alley into a bar designed to feel distinctly different from the area's sports and live-music establishments.

"It's about bringing us back to the older times," Mary Maiorino said.

The Alleyway by Harp & Crown will be open from 5 p.m. to midnight Tuesday through Saturday when it launches, although Maiorino said the schedule could change. It will be open for private events on weekends.

The 75-seat concept centers on specialty cocktails rather than draft beer or sports. The bar will have about 20 signature drinks, a few incorporating a Celtic theme including the Dublin Express, Celtic Breeze and Fake Foolery.

Maiorino said the bar is intended to be a place where people can talk and socialize without televisions dominating the room. There is one TV tucked into the end of the establishment.

"This is about more connection and that chill vibe," she said.

Live music will also be part of the concept, with jazz planned primarily for weekends. The lounge will avoid the rock-band format in exchange for more background atmosphere.

"It's not going to be the loud music," she said. "We want our own flavor."

The Alleyway will also introduce a monthly themed party. The first is planned for October and will have a Roaring '20s theme, with a DJ, dancing and ticketed admission.

The room itself is designed to reinforce the concept. Maiorino painted the walls black to highlight exposed wood beams that were already in the building and added a chandelier and other lighting. Candles throughout the room create an intimate atmosphere at night.

Maiorino also created one of the room's more distinctive features: 1920s-style portraits of Harp & Crown regulars and friends. The couple used artificial intelligence to turn photographs of their customers and friends



Mary and Pat Maiorino | Photo by Jon Show

into period-style portraits, which now cover the walls.

Maiorino handled the decorating herself, drawing on a passion for design, and the name came from the atmosphere she wanted to create.

"It felt like a speakeasy to me," Maiorino said. "I definitely wanted it dark and moody, and I thought the Alleyway was a perfect match."

The Alleyway grew out of an opportunity that emerged shortly after the Maiorinos purchased Harp & Crown, which had been operating for about a decade under previous owners and was sold to the couple in 2024.

Shortly afterward, the space across the entryway became available, and the Maiorinos saw an opportunity to expand their business with a second concept.

"We just thought it was a really great opportunity," Maiorino said. "The patios connect. Let's just utilize this as a type of a cocktail lounge."

The couple moved to Huntersville from Raleigh two years ago to be closer to their daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren. Before entering the restaurant business, Mary was a nurse and Pat spent about 25 years working for Performance Foodservice, working with restaurant owners and kitchens.

Now, after more than a year of work, The Alleyway is ready to open its doors — giving the heart of Cornelius a new place to settle in, order a cocktail and stay awhile.

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Warehouse Performing Arts Returns to Cornelius Roots

BY JON SHOW

Seventy seats. Five rows. A stage so close the actors can hear you breathe. Warehouse Performing Arts Center is back in Cornelius, and it's betting that small and intimate is exactly what Lake Norman has been missing.

After a stretch spent producing shows in Charlotte, the nonprofit theater company has returned to its longtime home on Westmoreland Road — and its leaders say the move feels less like a relaunch than a homecoming.

The organization got its start around 2009 as a low-key gathering spot for poetry readings, small performances and community talks, evolving over the following decade into a full production company staging five to six shows a year.

It closed when the pandemic hit, just short of its 10th anniversary, and spent 2022 through 2024 producing as a traveling company, staging shows at venues in Charlotte, including the Booth Playhouse.

When its original space in Cornelius became available again, the company

jumped at the chance to return.

"We're just really, really thrilled to be back in Cornelius, to be back in Lake Norman," said Marla Brown, the theater's lead producer. "We all live around here and know the area really well, and it's just very satisfying to stand in the lobby and be able to greet people by name."

The building itself got an upgrade during the time away. Crews tore out a dropped ceiling to make room for better lighting and sound equipment, added a proper green room and opened up more space in the lobby.

The audience faces a stage roughly 20 by 25 feet, keeping audiences just a few feet from the actors — an intimacy Brown says is central to what the space offers.

That closeness is part of the draw. Visitors describe the vibe as something between a neighborhood living room and a small comedy club — the kind of place where the person pouring drinks before the show might end up being the most memorable part of the night, and where audience members who arrive alone find it easy to strike up a conver-

sation with strangers.

Brown recalls one show from the theater's earlier run that captured just how close that connection can get. During the final scene, an actor struggled to lift a heavy suitcase and carry it out a door that doubled as the theater's own entrance.

A spectator in the front row got up and opened the door for her — breaking the fourth wall before another spectator could stop him. The cast brought him up for the curtain call afterward.

It's the kind of moment, Brown said, that can only happen when the audience isn't just watching a play, but almost sitting inside it.

Brown, who has a doctorate in theater performance and criticism and teaches as an adjunct at UNC Charlotte, said the theater isn't trying to compete with larger venues in the area, including the Cain Center for the Arts.

"What they do and what we do are two very different things," she said. "But there are so many people up here, and the way we can connect with one another is through these live, local ways of coming together in community spaces."

The company operates without paid staff — administrative work is handled within each production — and is guided by a volunteer board that includes Alan Singerman of the Davidson Film Club and Jessica Zinger of Jessica Zinger Productions.

Brown said the theater is looking to add board members with backgrounds in marketing and publicity, carpentry and building skills, or fundraising and grant writing.

Beyond its own productions, the Warehouse also opens its calendar to outside groups looking for an affordable place to perform, including improv troupes and stand-up comedy shows, generally scheduled around the theater's own rehearsal and performance calendar.

The fall lineup includes "I'm Gonna Marry You Tobey Maguire," running now through Oct. 11. "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," directed by Nan-Lynn Nelson, a former Broadway understudy for Angela Bassett, is scheduled to run Nov. 6-15.

In February, the company will move to the Booth Playhouse in Charlotte for "Constellations," produced in partnership with UNC Charlotte, before returning to Cornelius in March for "All My Sons."

The improv group 704Play is scheduled to perform at the venue on Oct. 17 as part of the theater's guest programming, which also recently included a parent-themed stand-up comedy show.

Rather than announcing a full season a year in advance, Warehouse plans in roughly four-month blocks — fall, winter into spring, and a lighter summer stretch — allowing the company to add shows as rights become available or opportunities arise.

Brown said the theater hopes to reach both newcomers to the Lake Norman area who are used to a local theater scene from wherever they moved from and longtime residents and retirees looking for something new to try.

"There is a hunger for the local professional brand of theater, where you have trained people who are crafting," she said. "Rather than have a youth (production), we want to try to program creativity targeted at adults who may want to capture something they wish they had done earlier."

Tickets for special events run around \$10; tickets for full productions average about \$20.

• *More information on tickets and the full schedule is available at the theater's website.*



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Stories with the most comments are marked with a fire emoji. Major spelling and punctuation errors were corrected.

West Catawba Tree Trimming Tied to Widening

What we heard at a recent meeting was that the (West) Catawba project is the oldest one on the books for NCDOT. It was at one time defunded, then rescheduled. As for the tree removal, that all has to occur long before, in order for utilities to be moved. You can see similar results along Sam Furr.

—Don Wilber

Let's use the right word here. Destroy. Trim isn't what's happening. They are destroying a beautiful avenue and making a four-lane freeway that will turn (West) Catawba into a race track. No foresight, no thought, just pure destruction in the name of progress.

—Richard Lloyd-Roberts

It's 5:30 and (West) Catawba Avenue is backed up all the way to Jetton. Not because of Catawba but because 73 needs to be widened!

—Julia Baker

Opinion: Why Cornelius Changed Toll Vote

Agree with this opinion. But my question remains. Where is the detailed explanation of how planning alone costs \$60 million?

—Bucky Dornster

Wegmans Buying Land in Cornelius

Nobody does it better than Wegmans.

—Tom Shay

Pretty soon, there will be one grocery store in town per family!

—Doug Evans

Can't come fast enough!

—James Reile

I have written to Trader Joe's many times, only to be told this area "doesn't fit their demographics." Well, bring it on Wegmans. We are a perfect fit.

—Deb Coppa

Trader Joe's please.

—Melody Fuhr

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Signs, signs, everywhere is signs

BY JON SHOW

I've always viewed people who claim to see "signs" as quacks. In my mind, the only people who see signs are the ones looking for something to make them feel better, or to offload the responsibility of making a decision like a normal adult.

My first exposure to someone referencing signs was my fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Knecht.

She was a bit of a hippie, and one day she stood in front of our class to tell us she was buying a new house, and had come to the decision after taking a walk and spotting a flat rock that was the same shape as the pond on the property she was now buying.

Even at 10, I was a bit pragmatic, so it seemed absurd to me.

I raised my hand and asked her for clarification. Were there any other existing conditions she considered, such as, I don't know, the price, location, size, neighborhood, etc.?

"No, it was just the rock," she said.

Who makes a decision based on the shape of a rock? Also, aren't all rocks roughly the shape of a pond?

In that moment, I decided signs were junk science.

Sign stealing

One year ago, we lost my dad. I wrote at the time that he'd left a hole in my soul that I wasn't sure would ever heal.

A year later, I'm doubtful. I don't feel any better about it sitting here today than I did when I wrote his obituary.

The month after he died, I told you about a rainbow trout I caught days after his death in a stream where rainbows don't live. When I published it, I received a torrent of messages declaring it a sign from above.

"I am a FIRM believer in signs and I would say this is a huge one," wrote a friend, who included a rainbow emoji.

I'm so dumb the whole rainbow/heaven thing escaped me entirely.

Regardless, I dismissed the messages. Signs were for quacks, for people reaching out into the universe to try to find something to make them feel better.

I'm not so sure anymore.

There might have been a time in my life when I would have been embarrassed to admit it, but lately, I've seen more signs than I care to explain away.

Birthday wishes

On the day of what would have been



his 84th birthday in August, I sat at my desk on a Friday morning while planning to head to the mountains to fish.

Why fish? Some people go to therapy to deal with their feelings. Some people take walks, smoke cigarettes or do whatever else makes them feel better. When I need to, I stand in a river until the hope I feel when fishing washes over me and I'm ready to go back home.

While wrapping up some work at my desk, a small American goldfinch plopped itself on the windowsill next to me.

I've sat at this desk every day for 12 years. I've seen birds fly straight into the window dozens of times. I've seen birds sit on the rocking chair and look out at the world.

I've never seen one fly onto the windowsill and stare at me like that goldfinch. I mean, the damn thing sat there and looked at me and did not break eye contact for a full minute.

My dad loved birds. He was never an expert by any stretch, but he always kept bird books next to his chair and earmarked each page when he spotted something he'd never seen.

His favorites were always the ones with lots of color. The only one he loved seeing more than a bright red cardinal was a yellow goldfinch.

And of all the fish I've caught over the years, the one he loved seeing most of all was a colored-up southern brook trout.

Take me to the river

I finished my work and headed for the Blue Ridge Parkway to a spot I usually fish on my birthday.

On that day, I had no ulterior motive for fishing, but my dad was on my mind. Sometimes it's hard to get him out of there.

I pulled up in my truck, grabbed my gear and headed for the creek.

From the get-go, my casting was terrible. The kind of casting that only comes from a polluted mind. A mind that's out there seeking something instead of patiently waiting for something to happen.

I hooked a couple of wild brown trout on an elk hair caddis but kept changing flies for reasons that made no sense. You don't change flies when you're catching fish.

About an hour in, my phone dinged. I took it out of my pocket to find a text from my mom that read: "55 years ago today I was getting ready to go fishing with my boyfriend."

That's right, in addition to his birthday, it was also their anniversary. He always joked that he got married on his

birthday so he'd never forget the date. They honeymooned in a fishing shack because they were broke.

I took a deep breath, and for the first time that day, my legs stopped wobbling, my breath slowed and my mind went clear.

I looked into my fly box, tied on a little white mayfly and threw a cast at the edge of a seam just upriver.

It was the perfect cast, followed by a small splash, a tight line and the perfect wild brook trout, landed in a net that I made this summer using my dad's 40-year-old tools.

I took a picture and sent it to my mom: "Probably not the kind of hooking up you did on your honeymoon, but I caught him a birthday brookie." The brook trout were always his favorites.

And then I sat down and cried in the river for the second time in my life.

Was the brook trout I caught in a net made with his tools a sign? Was the bird a sign? Was the rainbow I caught last September a sign?

My dad and grandfather used to take whiskey "beeps" out of Beep juice glasses. Was it a sign that I randomly found four of the 50-year-old cups on eBay last winter when I had been checking annually for 25 years?

I don't know.

But they all made me feel better, and maybe there's nothing wrong with that. Perhaps that's the whole point. Like I always say, I'm not too quick on the uptake.

I guess sometimes there's nothing wrong with looking out into the universe and hoping to see something that makes you feel good.

Maybe I've just learned to appreciate it rather than judge it.

Maybe Mrs. Knecht wasn't so wrong after all.

Jon Show lives in Robbins Park with his wife, who he calls "The Mother of Dragons." Their 17-year-old son is "Future Man" and their 14-year-old daughter is "The Blonde Bomber." Their dog is actually named Lightning.



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