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|  | |  | | --- | | I know some folks may be down and out, even depressed, at this moment in time.  Some are depressed about the election outcome; others are rightfully saddened about Helene and all the folks who have been displaced.  Others might be worried about the world situation, Ukraine, the Middle East, the Chinese Taiwan situation, or events around the globe that indicate a continuing shift in the climate.  But, at this Thanksgiving season there are also things we can be grateful for, especially in Highlands and the surrounding areas.  These points of gratitude give me pause for hope as we move forward.  I was first stunned by Helene's impact as we faced the devastating aftermath.  But I was also uplifted by how people across Western Carolina and, for that matter, the entire nation responded to our neighbors in need.  Even in a contentious election season, folks parked their political differences and reached out to help one another.  In Highlands, the churches and nonprofits immediately mobilized to respond to so many needs.  These groups continue to provide support to victims of Hurricane Helene.  Our caring for one another is a ray of optimism as we face challenges in the coming year and future.  When it gets down to the bottom line, we respond and help those in need regardless of who they are or what they believe.  While Highlands received significant storm damage from Helene, I am grateful to the town workers who immediately responded to the emergency.  Neither I nor the town manager had to ask town employees to work longer than normal or go that extra mile, they responded automatically in making sure the town was back in business without delay.  I am also thankful for the businesses that stepped forward to provide any assistance they could provide. While business activity was significantly cut back after the hurricane, our shops, hotels, and restaurants were able to open soon after the storm.  I hope Highlands will have the normal levels of visitors and second homeowners back in town during the end-of-the-year holiday season.  I am also glad that several infrastructure projects will be underway in the near term.  The initial dredging of  Mirror Lake is within days of beginning.  The Dog Mountain water project is also on the verge of getting underway, with the water plant upgrades right behind.  The conversion of the old fire station to the new ABC store is just around the corner, so look for the new store to open sometime in December.  I am also grateful that Highlands converted to full time staffing at the new fire station.  This past week we had a structure fire on  Upper Lake Road.  The full-time firefighters were on the scene within minutes and were able to save the home.  Now if Santa Claus can deliver a present to Highlands of NC 106 being opened by Christmas, that would be wonderful.  I have my fingers crossed.  I'm hopefully optimistic.  I hope we all have a wonderful and safe Thanksgiving.  The holiday will be capped off with the town lighting on Saturday night at Founders Park. | |