

# Economy showed improvement in 2018

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**RUTHERFORDTON** — Rutherford County's economy in 2018 continued to show improvement, with new companies moving in and historic low unemployment rates being recorded.

"The dropping unemployment rate in Rutherford County is one of the big highlights for 2018," said County Manager Steve Gar-

rison. "The unemployment rate reached as low as 3.9 percent in September, which is the lowest it has been since December of 1998."

The year began with the announcement in January, of the establishment of Cardinal Tissue in Spindale. Vince Reece, a former executive with Clearwater Paper Company in Shelby formed the new company which

is primarily a "converter" in the tissue paper industry. The company takes large rolls of paper, and converts the paper into finished consumer paper products such as bath tissue and paper towels.

Reece said he hopes to eventually have 50-100 full time employees.

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## A look at Lake Lure in 2018

FROM STAFF REPORTS

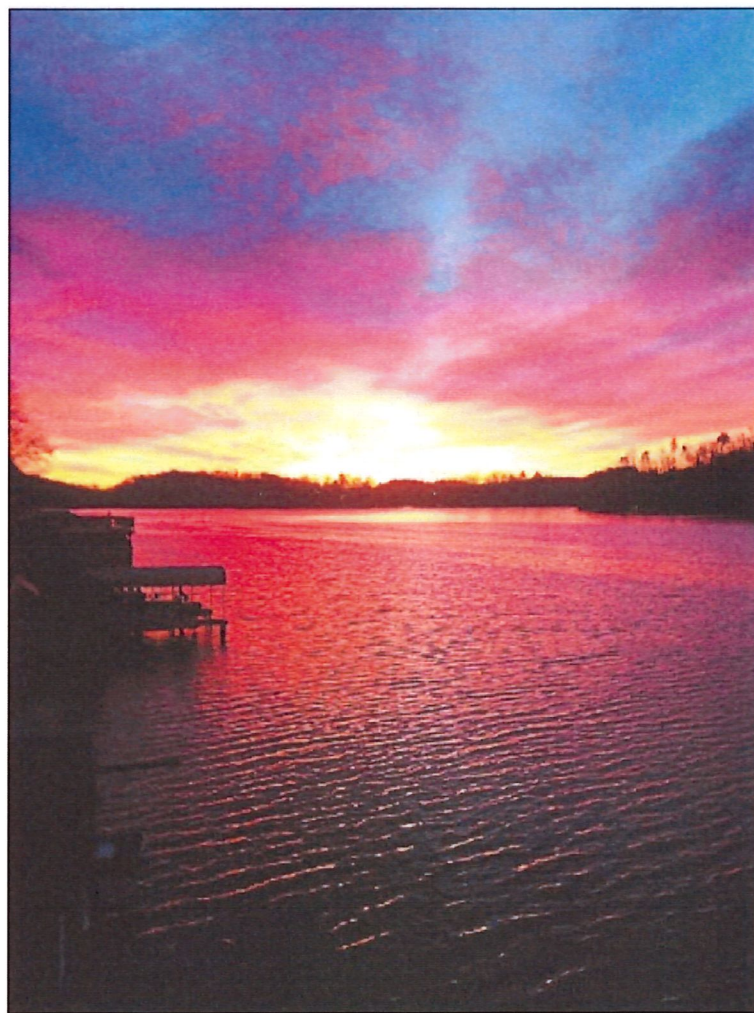
**LAKE LURE** — In 2018, Lake Lure made progress on infrastructure projects, created a master plan for Morse Park, survived the impacts of multiple large storms and filled numerous town positions. As 2019 begins, Mayor Kevin Cooley is expecting "another extraordinary year for our town."

"We appreciate all our citizens, those who visit our town and the awesome beauty that surrounds us in Lake Lure every day," Cooley added.

### WEATHERING THE STORMS

Last year was a challenging one for Lake Lure. The town declared four states of emergency in 2018 to deal with storm recovery. Record rainfall caused mudslides and flooding that closed roads and required measures to manage lake levels and protect the dam.

A major winter storm dumped a foot of sleet and snow on Hickory Nut Gorge, making roads impassable and bringing down trees and utility lines. This delayed plowing until road blockages could be cleared. Power was knocked



Contributed photo

As 2019 begins, Lake Lure Mayor Kevin Cooley is expecting "another extraordinary year for our town."

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## Daily Courier welcomes new editor

FROM STAFF REPORTS

**FOREST CITY** — The Daily Courier welcomes a new editor to its staff this week.

Ritchie Starnes has relocated to Rutherford County from Albamarle for the position. He comes to the paper from The Stanly News & Press, where he served as news editor for it and its multiple niche publications.

"I am pleased he accepted this important role as editor for our publication," said Daily Courier Publisher Lori Spurling. "I am very excited to see what Ritchie has to offer our community and our newspaper, but I'm also excited for Ritchie to see what we offer here. Rutherford County is a wonderful place to be and it's a great time to be here."

Starnes has worked in newspapers for about 20 years — including internships. He's been a regular award recipient of the NC Press Association for, among other subjects, editorials, feature writing, serious columns, political reporting and news coverage.

But Starnes's career began in investigation. He graduated twice from the University of North Carolina Charlotte. The first time, in 1985, it was with a Bachelor of Science in criminal justice.

After that, Starnes worked as an investigator specializing in insurance fraud for more than 15 years, but realized that he wanted to do something "more social conscious" that had "a greater value" to society.

"Between a background in investigations and a fondness for writing, I decided to combine the two skill-sets and pursue a career as an investigative journalist," Starnes said.

This prompted him to return to UNC-Charlotte, where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts in communication studies with a minor in journalism in 2001. His first reporting job was in Monroe at The Enquirer Journal — owned by Paxton Media Group, which also owns The Daily Courier.

Since then, Starnes has helped launch a weekly newspaper in Union County and



Ritchie Starnes

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## Police in Spindale, California come together to recover stolen watch

rent crusade for human rights for all people ... Dr. King, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, urged the peaceful coexistence of all humankind ... Dr. King's philosophy was a concept of service and he believed that a person's worth should not be measured by color, culture, or class, but rather by his or her commitment to creating a better life for all."

Also during the meeting, council approved a resolution

appointing Douglas Sneets to the town's Planning Board as an alternate member. His term will expire on June 30, 2021.

Council also approved a resolution to authorize the town's planning board to act in dual capacity as the Board of Adjustment for the calendar year 2019.

Also at the meeting:

- Council approved a resolution declaring a town owned 2004 Ford F250 as surplus property.

on Dec. 20, 2010 and a curbside collections breakdown for the month of December. Community Development Director Stephanie Rzonca also told council of the monthly winter farmers market that will take place on Saturday, Jan. 19, from 9 a.m.-noon at Rutherfordon Town Hall, as well as the annual Rutherford Town Revitalization Casino Night event, that will be held on March 9 from 7-11 p.m. at One13.

attractive than those in 2018, which were marred by rain and winter weather.

To start the new year, hundreds of dogs, two llamas and a goat joined their human companions on various hikes. Participants ranged in age from newborn to 95 years young. Cliffs of the Neuse State Park set a record for their park's first day hike program with 300 participants.

Many traditional events continued, including the First Day 5-K at Haw River, the Polar Plunge at Hanging Rock and the Two State, One Hike partnership between Crowders Mountain State Park in N.C. and Kings Mountain State Park in South Carolina.

"I was thrilled to

for people of all ages, and I look forward to millions more people enjoying healthy outdoor recreation activities at our beautiful state parks throughout the year."

Nationally, First Day Hikes is promoted by America's State Parks and the National Association of State Park Directors, with more than 400 hikes scheduled in state parks across the country. In North Carolina, the tradition began at Eno River State Park more than 40 years ago. All N.C. state parks have offered first day hikes since 2012.

A complete list of First Day Hikes in North Carolina can be found at <https://www.ncparks.gov/first-day-hikes>.

## N.C. leaders celebrate 200 years of Supreme Court

BY GARY D. ROBERTSON  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — North Carolina's top leaders praised the state Supreme Court on its bicentennial for its endurance amid legal and societal changes and as the place where

citizens can seek justice under the law.

The state's highest court held a special session Monday in its downtown Raleigh courtroom to observe the court's 200th anniversary. In 1818, the General Assembly cre-

ated the court, which then met the first time in early January 1819.

The court's seven justices sat while Gov. Roy Cooper, Lt. Gov. Dan Forest and others addressed the panel and celebrated its history.

Current Chief Justice Mark Martin said neither the past success nor the future survival of the court can be taken for granted and urged listeners to uphold the state constitution as "the bedrock of all our liberties."

## 2018

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

out in the majority of homes and businesses for days. Following storms, the town dredged the lake to remove silt. Cooley said a new dredging contractor performed "exceptionally well."

Altogether, Cooley said Lake Lure "successfully weathered these events, learned from them and recovered well with the support of our citizens and our dedicated staff."

### INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

During 2018, the Town of Lake Lure took steps forward on critical infrastructure projects including repair and rehabilitation of the dam and hydro-electric generating station. The dam was built in 1925-26 with the goal of creating the lake as the centerpiece of the community. The design included a strategy to maintain a consistent lake level to secure lakeshore property values and establish Lake Lure as a prime recreation destination. Another aspect of the original design was the addition of a hydro-electric plant. This allows the town to

(NCDEQ) Dam Safety Office requirements and to facilitate final design of any requisite repairs or improvements. Schnabel engineers supported the town's emergency response team during two major storm events in 2018, providing guidance on lake-level management and flood gate control to protect the dam from damage, minimizing downriver flooding, whenever possible.

The town added an additional dam operator to strengthen staff capability and depth and to more efficiently operate the dam and maximize benefits of the hydro-electric plant.

Lake Lure also began work on a project to replace the existing in-lake gravity sewage collection system. This land-based, low-pressure sewage collection system protects the environment. This project — required by NCDEQ — will replace the sewage treatment plant with a modular-designed treatment plant. The town continues to work with Brown Consulting as wastewater engineers for this project. Cooley said that NCDEQ is reviewing the digital engineering report to find the most cost-effective solution to replace the cur-



Contributed Photo

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structure needs under consideration in the creation of the town's most recent budget. The new budget includes a tax increase to support continued operations and fund major capital improvement and enhancement projects.

"The town identified and pursued multiple opportunities to enhance supplemental income from the operation and use of town assets," said Cooley. "Better operational management of the hydro-electric station, focused on optimizing power generation, has resulted in the nearly doubling of power output/income. A new concession agreement was negotiated for

cession royalties paid to the town by the concessionaire."

### PARKS AND RECREATION

Lake Lure added a new park and other recreational facilities in 2018 and will hire a full-time coordinator to oversee these assets in 2019. The town created a master plan for Morse Park and the marina-beach and town center areas.

### STAFF CHANGES

In 2018, Lake Lure promoted and hired personnel to fill numerous open positions, including key, senior-level positions of town manager, fire chief, town

we are thankful for this exceptional team that helped us manage the challenges we faced this year," said Cooley.

### PLUNGING INTO 2019

The town traditionally kicks off each New Year's Day with the Lake Lure Polar Plunge. The plunge had record numbers this year with 140 participants and more than 600 attendees. Folks dressed up in creative costumes and ran into the frigid waters of the lake to support local emergency services.

As Cooley looks toward the future, he says Lake Lure is committed to critical infrastructure renewal and replacement projects:

dam rehabilitation, sewage collection and treatment system replacement, and lake dredging.

The town hopes to renovate the commercial strip center, recruit additional businesses, begin replacing the existing boardwalk connecting the town marina to the beach so it can be incorporated into future designs, and develop a new Boys Camp Road Riverside Park and materials recovery facility. Lake Lure will also commence improvements to Morse Park.

Additionally, the town intends to hire recreational staff, improve cellular and broadband services, work towards an alternate entrance to Chimney Rock State Park and partner with Rumbling Bald Resort to move forward on a "connector road" to provide a quicker route between the resort and the town's commercial corridor and Chimney Rock Village, as well as to the Asheville-Hendersonville metropolitan areas. It would also provide an alternate ingress-egress route between the east and west sides of the Lake and allow faster access by first responders and emergency services.