

THE EXPRESS

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Serving Anson County and the Municipalities of Ansonville, Lilesville, McFarlan, Morven, Peachland, Polkton and Wadesboro.

North Carolina Travelers Without REAL ID or Another Acceptable ID Will Pay \$45 Fee Starting February 1

Airline passengers who show up at the airport without a REAL ID, passport, or another acceptable form of identification after Saturday, January 31, will soon find that freedom is not free—at least not at the TSA checkpoint. Beginning Sunday, February 1, travelers will be required to pay a \$45 identity-verification fee before passing through Transportation Security Administration screening. Consider it a last-minute convenience fee for procrastination.

The fee pays for a modernized alternative identity verification system known as TSA ConfirmID. The good news is the verification lasts for a 10-day travel window, meaning travelers who manage to return home within that period will only pay once. The bad news is that \$45 still costs more than a respectable airport sandwich.

"North Carolina has been issuing REAL IDs for nearly nine years, and more than five million residents - about 58 percent - already have one," said North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles Commissioner Paul Tine. "Our offices are making it easier than ever: every driver license office now accepts walk-ins from open to close, or until daily capacity is reached, and appointments can be booked up to seven days in advance." In other words, the DMV is ready for you, emotionally and otherwise.

Acceptable forms of identification include REAL ID driver licenses or state ID cards, U.S. passports and passport cards, and DHS trusted traveler cards such as Global Entry, NEXUS, SENTRI, and FAST. A full list of acceptable IDs can be found at: tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/identification

which is worth checking before discovering this information at 6 a.m. in the security line.

North Carolina travelers without acceptable identification are encouraged to visit the TSA ConfirmID program fee site and pay the \$45 fee prior to travel on or after February 1. Passengers should bring a printed or electronic copy of the receipt, along with another form of ID, and present it to the Transportation Security Officer. Screenshots are helpful. Shrugging is not.

In North Carolina, about 90 percent of passengers already pass through airport checkpoints using a REAL ID or another acceptable form of identification. TSA expects wait times to increase for passengers without one when ConfirmID goes into effect, meaning extra time will be needed for reflection, regret, and scrolling on your phone.

To find out if you need a REAL ID and to generate a customized document checklist, visit ncrealid.gov.

Remember, your first North Carolina REAL ID cannot be obtained online - it must be issued in person at a driver license office. To find a DMV office near you, visit ncdmv.gov. Getting your REAL ID now is still cheaper than learning this lesson at the airport.

Community Giveaway this Saturday

Divine Unity House of Restoration Ministries and the Faith-Based Center of Hope will host a Community Giveaway this Saturday, January 24, beginning at 11:00 a.m. at the Divine Unity H.O.R.M. Fellowship Hall, located at 3760 N.C. Highway 109 South in Wadesboro. The event is open to the public and designed to serve individuals and families across the community.

The giveaway will feature free clothing, food, and games for all ages, with organizers encouraging everyone to come early and enjoy the activities while supplies last. The event is intended to be welcoming, family-friendly, and supportive, offering both practical assistance and a chance for neighbors to gather together.

Transportation will be available for anyone in need of a ride, with special consideration for elderly residents and others who may have difficulty traveling to the event on their own. Community members needing transportation are encouraged to call ahead to make arrangements.

For transportation or additional information, contact Overseer Sylvia McLendon at 704-695-2592.

SECU Partnership Helps South Piedmont Students Stay on Track and Build Financial Confidence

Balancing classes, work, and finances is one of the biggest challenges facing college students today. Through a partnership between South Piedmont Community College and State Employees' Credit Union, students are receiving meaningful support through scholarships, financial education, and resources designed to promote success both during college and beyond.

With support from SECU, South Piedmont students have access to scholarships that help reduce educational costs and ease financial stress. The People Helping People Scholarship assists students pursuing associate degrees, while the Bridge to Career Scholarship supports those working toward certificates and workforce credentials. Together, these opportunities help students remain enrolled, focus on their studies, and move closer to achieving their career goals.

"SECU's support truly makes a difference for our students," said Josh Gebbia, Financial Aid Advisor at South Piedmont Community College. "Through scholarships like People Helping People and Bridge to Career, students are able to focus on their education instead of worrying about financial obstacles. These opportunities not only help students complete their programs but also set them up for long-term success in their careers and financial futures."

Beyond scholarships, SECU partners with the college to offer financial literacy workshops that provide students with practical, real-world skills. Workshop topics include budgeting, saving, understanding credit, and planning for the future—tools students can use immediately and continue to rely on long after graduation.

The partnership also extends benefits to SPCC employees, who have access to SECU membership and financial services as part of the college's employee benefits offerings.

By working together, South Piedmont Community College and State Employees' Credit Union are helping students build financial confidence, stay on track academically, and prepare for life after college—strengthening not only individual futures, but the communities they will go on to serve.

Information on upcoming SECU events can be found at events.spcc.edu.

Friends Of Anson County Animal Shelter Shares Update On Temporary Intake Restrictions

Compassion, transparency, and community support during required shelter renovations

Friends of Anson County Animal Shelter, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is reaching out to residents of Anson County to share an important update regarding current animal intake limitations. The organization emphasizes that this communication is part of an ongoing commitment to transparency, compassion, and the well-being of both animals and the community.

Over the past several months, the animal shelter has been transitioning into new management under the nonprofit. During this period, the shelter has also been placed on restricted intake due to state-mandated renovations required for licensure. These renovations, which began in November, involve critical repairs to kennel areas to ensure proper health and safety standards for animals, staff, and the public. They are not cosmetic upgrades, but necessary improvements required by the state.

At this time, two of the shelter's three kennel wings are unavailable due to construction, leaving the shelter at maximum capacity for dogs. As a result, the shelter currently has no safe space to house additional dogs, making it impossible to accept routine owner surrenders, strays, or animals picked up by the public.

Intake is now being handled strictly on a case-by-case basis, with priority given to dogs facing urgent circumstances. These include animals suffering from abuse or neglect, those with immediate medical needs such as starvation or acute injury, and dogs that present a safety concern due to aggressive behavior. Each of these cases is carefully reviewed by Animal Control or shelter staff to determine whether intake is possible under current conditions.

Shelter officials acknowledge the hardship this situation creates and express sincere apologies to residents affected by the restrictions. Renovation work has taken longer than originally expected, but efforts continue daily to complete the required repairs as quickly and effectively as possible. The most recent estimated completion date for renovations is March 1, with updates to be shared should that timeline change.

In the meantime, Friends of Anson County Animal Shelter is offering community support resources to residents with dogs in need, including access to food, dog houses, straw, and wood chips.

Residents who encounter an injured, abused, neglected, emaciated, or seriously ill dog are urged to call 911 immediately. For all other animal-related concerns, Animal Control can be reached directly at 704-994-2738.

The organization stresses that its mission remains unchanged: to serve the animals of Anson County while also supporting the safety and well-being of its residents. Updates will be shared through the newspaper, What's Up in Anson, and the shelter's social media platforms as soon as renovations are complete and open intake can safely resume.

Friends of Anson County Animal Shelter thanks the community for its patience, understanding, and cooperation during this challenging time, and looks forward to continuing its work to improve the lives of animals throughout the county.

Christine Morton, President, Friends of the Anson County Animal Shelter

Anson County's November Unemployment Rate

Anson County's unemployment rate for November was 4.9%.

Anson County's total labor force in November was 8,940, with 8,505 employed and 435 unemployed.

When compared to the same month last year, unemployment rates (not seasonally adjusted) increased in 89 counties in November 2025, decreased in eight, and remained unchanged in three.

Fourteen metro areas experienced rate increases over the year and one decreased. October 2025 data are unavailable due to the lapse in appropriations.

Edgecombe County had the highest unemployment rate at 6.3 percent while Currituck County had the lowest at 3.3 percent. Among the metro areas, Rocky Mount had the highest rate at 5.7 percent while Raleigh had the lowest at 3.6 percent. The not seasonally adjusted statewide rate was 4.1 percent.

Since November 2024, the number of workers employed statewide (not seasonally adjusted) decreased 531 to 5,072,337, while those unemployed increased 22,644 to 218,867.

NC DHHS Launches Measles Dashboard

New online tool tracks cases and outbreaks statewide

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Public Health has launched a new Measles Dashboard to provide timely, transparent information on measles cases and outbreaks across the state. The dashboard is designed to give residents, healthcare providers, and community leaders easy access to current data in one central location.

The online dashboard includes up-to-date case counts and outbreak information and will be refreshed twice each week to reflect the latest reports. State health officials say the regular updates will help the public stay informed and support ongoing disease monitoring and response efforts.

The Measles Dashboard can be viewed online at www.dph.ncdhs.gov/measles.

NC Task Force Advances Efforts to Expand Affordable Child Care

Governor Josh Stein announced the release of the 2025 year-end report from the North Carolina Task Force on Child Care and Early Education, outlining new steps to increase access to affordable, high-quality child care across the state.

Led by bipartisan co-chairs Rachel Hunt and Jim Burgin, the task force developed six recommendations and identified opportunities to move those ideas toward implementation in communities statewide.

"Too many families in our state can't afford to work because child care is expensive and in short supply," Stein said. He noted that expanding child care access benefits families, children, and employers alike by supporting workforce participation and early childhood development.

Hunt said rising costs have made child care one of the most difficult expenses for working families to manage. She emphasized the task force's focus on practical, statewide solutions and urged lawmakers to treat child care as essential infrastructure for NC's economy.

The task force was established by Governor Stein through Executive Order No. 10 in March 2025 and spent the year examining child care finance and funding, workforce compensation and supports, access for public-sector and military families, needs in disaster-affected communities, and emerging trends in child care supply. Meetings also highlighted successful local innovations and public-private partnerships already expanding access in parts of the state.

A preliminary report released in June 2025 introduced six focus areas, including establishing a statewide subsidy reimbursement rate floor, exploring non-salary benefits and subsidized care for child care professionals, strengthening partnerships with public education institutions, linking existing workforce support programs, and considering the creation of a child care endowment. The year-end report builds on those recommendations with concrete opportunities for action.

In the coming year, task force work groups will continue developing action plans and exploring ways to leverage existing funding, engage private-sector employers, and expand programs such as the North Carolina Tri-Share Child Care Pilot Program. The task force will also encourage the General Assembly to make meaningful investments in child care and early education during the current legislative session.

The full December 2025 report is available online, and task force meetings are open to the public and streamed through the North Carolina Department of Commerce's YouTube channel.

Chair Exercise Classes At The Library

The Hampton B. Allen Library is hosting chair exercise classes every Thursday, proving once and for all that fitness does not always require standing up. Class begins at 10:00 a.m. in the library's Pritchett Room, where participants can stretch, move, and stay active - all while keeping their chair close by for moral support.

The classes are geared for seniors, whether you're a seasoned exerciser or just testing the waters (from a seated position, of course). Everyone is welcome. For questions or additional information, call 704-694-5177.

School Board Meeting Jan. 26

Public invited to attend or tune in online

The Board of Education will hold their regular monthly meeting on Monday, January 26 in the Administrative Board Room, located at 320 Camden Road in Wadesboro. Closed Session will begin immediately after the opening of the meeting at 5:00 p.m. for the purpose of discussing matters related to personnel and property pursuant to NCGS 143.318.11(a)(6) and NCGS 143.318.11(a)(5).

Open Session for the public will begin at 6:00 p.m.

If the public wishes to sign up for public comment, they can sign up in-person. A sign-up sheet will be available 30 minutes before the meeting begins for any individual or group to indicate their desire to address the board. Public comment will be held during the Open Session portion of the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

The meeting will be live streamed on the Anson County Schools' YouTube channel for the public to view. To find the channel you can search YouTube for "Anson County Schools."

Bluegrass Music Jam Thursday

The Hampton B. Allen Library will host a bluegrass acoustic music jam on Thursday, January 22, from 6:30 until 8:30 p.m. in the Little Theater, where fiddles will be tuned, banjos will be tested, and someone will inevitably insist they were "in tune a minute ago." Musicians, singers, and spectators are all welcome, whether they arrive with a polished sound or a hopeful smile.

Jam sessions are open to all ages and all skill levels, which means seasoned pickers will share the stage with brave beginners who may still be negotiating peace treaties with their instruments. Wrong notes are tolerated, creative timing is expected, and enthusiasm is strongly encouraged.

Children age 12 and under must be accompanied by an adult, preferably one who can clap on beat or at least pretend convincingly.

For more information, contact the library at 704-694-5177, and consider bringing your instrument, your sense of humor, or both.

Class of 1971 Reunion Meeting

Laughter, memories and possibly reading glasses expected

The Bowman Senior High School Class of 1971 will gather on Saturday, January 24, at 1:00 p.m. for a reunion planning meeting at Ladybug Restaurant, where classmates will come together to make final plans for their big reunion scheduled for September 2026.

This important meeting will cover details large and small, from dates and locations to the finer points of how long everyone can stand before needing a chair. Organizers promise lively discussion, fond memories, and at least one story that begins with "Do you remember when..."

All classmates are encouraged to attend, especially those who swore they would "definitely help plan next time." The meeting offers a chance to reconnect, share a few laughs, and make sure the Class of 1971 reunion is worth the wait - and the walk down memory lane.