



# TOWNtalk

NEWSLETTER FOR EMPLOYEES OF THE TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL  
VOLUME 18 ISSUE 3 • DECEMBER 2021

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## On the Front Burner



A new year is quickly approaching. Again, just as we all were when 2020 was turning to 2021, I am hopeful that 2022 will give us more relief from the trying two years we've endured.

There has been hopeful progress, though, that we can't forget and that I believe gives us hope for a better tomorrow.

Three vaccines—one of which, Pfizer, has been fully approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)—are not only available to everyone older than four

years of age, but available at no cost. Data show that these vaccines are very effective against the coronavirus, at the very least preventing the life-threatening impacts.

Social guidelines to help prevent spread of the virus are becoming more natural. It's not quite as inconvenient to put on a mask when we're around others. It's still uncomfortable at times, but it's a small price to pay in the interest of everyone's health and safety.

And the economy didn't see the major fall that was feared. Locally, our sales tax revenue exceeded what was forecast. We prepared for the worst. As we're still not out of the pandemic, it's good to know that we're in a place that we can continue responding to the needs of our community, protecting its future, financially and otherwise.

There's still work to be done, and I'm grateful for each and every one of

*(continued on p. 3)*



## In the Spotlight



If you've been to Chapel Hill Public Housing on Caldwell Street, you've probably seen **Andrea "Drea" Mebane**. She is the face of the front office. Drea assists families with resources and/or services for their housing needs.

Her B.A. in Human Sciences in Child Development and Family Relations surely enhances her ability to serve the Public Housing community with professionalism and understanding. She says, "Giving back to those who don't have should be the norm." Her work helps increase the department's effectiveness and efficiency for responding to HUD deadlines, meeting tenant requests for information, and tracking the department's expenditures.

In the Public Housing Administrative Division, Drea is "surrounded by some awe-inspiring women who promote individuality, high levels of success,

*(continued on p. 5)*



Ray Gornto and a crew from Public Works installed snowflake decorations on Franklin Street. The decorations will make downtown Chapel Hill more festive until they are removed on Jan. 3.

## Longest-Serving Town Employee Retires

Chapel Hill Police Records Supervisor Flora Parrish retired this month, capping a remarkable career filled with selfless service to the community she's known and loved since birth.

When Flora joined the Chapel Hill Police Department on October 1, 1969, as a steno typist, she had a big desk in a small room at 100 West Rosemary Street. She would sit down to a typewriter and a calendar. There were plenty of parking tickets in drawers near a cash register and the property where today's Police Headquarters sits had only recently been annexed to the Town.

A lot has changed since then.

"This has been my life for 52 years. It is my extended family," Flora said as she reflected on the emotional meaning of the past five decades. "It has been here for me through marriage, death, childbirth, and health challenges."

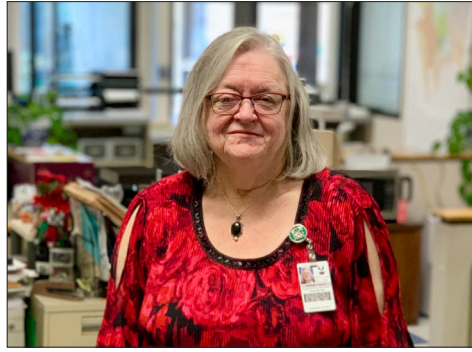
Flora met her late husband, Robert, at the department – where he was a dispatcher at the time.

"We dated for a month, then became engaged, and married within six months," she said. They were married 42 years until he passed.

"The phones ringing have never bothered me," she said as she thought about the biggest adjustments she anticipates in retirement. "I like talking with the public, so I am going to miss that."

Police Chief Chris Blue said countless community members have come to appreciate Flora as much as the Department has.

"Most of them ask for her by name and prefer to deal with her based on their



many decades of exemplary interactions with her," Chief Blue said. "Flora Parrish is, simply put, cut from different cloth. The loyalty, dedication, and work ethic that she has brought to her job each day is rarely seen in the modern workplace."

Records Technician Valerie Balloue admires Flora's commitment to the department even through the highs and lows of life.

"She managed to nurture relationships that span generations – from taxi and tow-truck drivers to attorneys and judges," Balloue said. "I jokingly call her my almanac because she can give the history of downtown Chapel Hill and the names of previous employees within a blink of an eye."

Flora said a one-word lesson from her mother motivated her interactions with community members at the records window each day all these years: kindness. Flora said she's worked hard to put herself in the shoes of the people she's helping.

Retirement is "bittersweet" for Flora. She loved coming to work every day.

"I am happy to have met some amazing people during my time here. I've made some wonderful friendships. They've always had my back," Flora said. "That is what I will treasure forever."



**Jeffrey Sullivan** (above, Transit) helps a new Transit rider at the Jingle Bell Express event on Dec. 17. Jingle Bell Express gives residents a chance to try out Chapel Hill Transit buses with seasonal treats at either end. **Chris Lucas** (below, Transit) gets in the holiday spirit with the Jingle Bell Express.



## Town Staff Recognized by Local Home Builders

On Dec. 9, Building and Development Services staff received a Presidential Service Award from the Home Builders Association of Durham, Orange, and Chatham County's (HBADOC).

Building and Development Services staff have been working closely with this organization to improve communication

and the ways in which they do business, including permitting, inspections, and code enforcement. A recent example of this strong partnership is the HBADOC's call for and support in implementing the Town's new permitting software, which helps improve the customer experience while also keeping track of permit status, inspection

schedules, and other key milestones as building projects are completed.

**Tom DiBenedetto** (Building and Development Services) received the award on behalf of the staff. He said, "We have heard what is important to our community, and we are responding accordingly."



# Briefs

## Kimberly Bonitto

is the new Administrative Coordinator for Technology Solutions. She brings more than 20 years of administrative, accounting, and benefits experience.



Kimberly prides herself on setting goals and achieving them in a timely way. Her attention to detail, enthusiasm towards technology, and drive for excellence in her work is reflected in every conversation and every task completed.

**Daniel Carter** (Transit) has been promoted to Fleet Supervisor. Daniel has more than 15 years of experience in the field. He also has formal training in Automotive and Diesel Technology, as well as certifications from the National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) and the Emergency Vehicle Technician Certification Commission (EVT).

**Ricky Flick** (Public Works) has been promoted to Lead Construction Worker for the Streets division.

The Public Works Department has recently hired **Reginald Mebane** (streets division), **James Pryor** (construction division), and **Thomas Walker** (construction division).

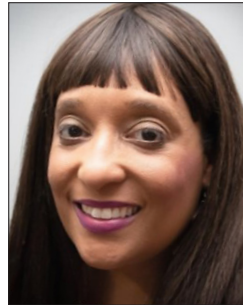
**Patricia Grayson-Phillips** (Trish) is the new Administrative Assistant for HRD and the Manager's Office. She has more than 30 years experience in office management and customer service.



Trish loves helping people, always tries to have a smile on her face, knows no stranger, and looks forward to working with all the Town's employee and community members to provide everyone with excellent customer service.

Trish enjoys spending time with her family, grandchildren, and her 13-year-old golden retriever, Charlie.

**Star Reams** (HRD) is our new Benefits Administrator. She has 25 years of experience in higher education, local and state government, and financial

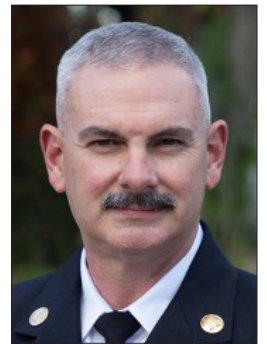


services. Star has a Bachelor of Business Administration and M.S. in Human Resource Management from Strayer University. Star lives with her husband and daughter in Hurdle Mills. Her hobbies include baking, traveling, and genealogical research.

**Greg Reger** (Business Management), has been hired as BMD's Data and Analytics Coordinator. He will be leading townwide data and analytics initiatives. Originally from Kansas, Greg got his Master of Public Administration from Syracuse University and bachelor's in Business from Lake Forest College.

Greg is enthusiastic about building a culture of data-informed decision making and unlocking an organization's potential using continuous improvement, change management, and analytics. He is passionate about good government and sustainability.

**Chris Wells** (Fire) is our new Assistant Chief of Life Safety and Fire Marshal. He will manage fire code enforcement and fire investigations. He will help develop and implement



Community Risk Reduction programs, and he will be a key part of fire and life safety educational outreach in the community.

Chris is a Marine Corps veteran of the Iraq War. He is a lifelong Tar Heel fan and says the Chapel Hill community is close to his heart.

## Congratulations to **Travis Parker**

(Transit-top) on successfully completing the 2021 Transportation Mid-Manager Program and **Nick Pittman** (Transit-bottom) on successfully completing the 2021 Transportation Senior Executive Program. Both programs are leadership-development seminars facilitated by the Eno Center for Transportation and require a substantial investment in time and effort to complete, following a competitive selection process.



## ON THE FRONT BURNER

(continued from p. 1)

you who have contributed to the cause. It hasn't been easy work, but there is a reason Chapel Hill is a well-known community. It's because of its people—you. You make this community run. Keep up the great work in the remaining days of 2021. Take time to unplug and spend time with your loved ones. I look forward to working with you in 2022 and seeing all the wonderful things we can accomplish.

## Shout Out to Town Staff for Making Commute Choices Conference the Best in 30 Years!

Special thanks to Town staff for attending and offering support to the 2021 Go Chapel Hill Commute Choices Conference!

Bergen Watterson kicked off the conference as well as explaining her own story of how cycling offers freedom, better health, and savings for her and her family.

Judy Johnson brought information on the rich history of Chapel Hill's work leading NC in commute choice work.

John Richardson brought climate change information to more than 100 attendees, helping each to understand how they can fit into the bigger picture of carbon emission reduction.

Jeffrey Sullivan brought excellent information on the quick pivots during COVID times that Chapel Hill Transit had made, as well as what current schedules/routes are like.

Sarah Poulton and Mike Wright shared info on riding bicycles to and from work and how e-bikes can make a difference.

Jordan Powell's presentation was a complete big-picture view of the positive impact Vision Zero can have on our community.

Colleen Willger thanked our Veterans for their service to community and country and encouraged them to



continue being involved in the Vets On the Move program.

Town Manager Maurice Jones brought Town greetings to attendees and encouraged everyone to continue the hard work both professionally and personally that they do in their commute choice work.

Mayor Pam Hemminger congratulated attendees on 30 years of commute choice work and brought recognitions and the Awards for Excellence in Service.

Jim Huegerich was on the team that developed the Vets On the Move program and offered excellent encouragement to become involved as a Veteran or to assist!

Faith Brodie, also part of the program team, brought words of love, faith and understanding for doing the right thing to help one another in all things.



## Town Employee Receives Dogwood Award

Check out Officer Christopher Lane with Chief Chris Blue! Officer Lane is among the newest recipients of the State Attorney General's Dogwood Awards. These awards honor North Carolinians who work to keep people safe, healthy, and happy in their communities.

Officer Lane's award recognizes him as one of the first graduates of the N.C. Criminal Justice Fellows Program. The program provides forgivable educational loans for high school seniors and graduates who agree to enter a criminal justice profession in North Carolina.

We are glad he decided to join the Guardians of the Hill!

## Take the Racial Equity Challenge!

For 21 days starting on Jan. 3, we invite you to do one action daily to deepen your understanding of power, privilege, oppression, and racial equity.

The 21-Day Challenge will provide our community with daily, curated readings/podcasts/videos to deepen our understanding of racism and white supremacy and build our community together; there are options to accommodate those with busy schedules. We'll be able to track our work with an individual tracking log, provide ideas for action, and engage with each other through discussion forums and live, virtual meetings.

Sign up to get access to tools and discussion forum, along with emails to guide you along the way. [Register by Dec. 31](#) and email Shenekia Weeks at [sweeks@townofchapelhill.org](mailto:sweeks@townofchapelhill.org) to be added to our Teams Channel for weekly

discussions. Track your daily participation with [this log](#).

Please feel free to share the link with friends and colleagues who might be interested.





## The Guardians of the Hill Make the Holidays Brighter for Local Families

The Guardians of the Hill had a blast shopping with students from Ephesus Road Elementary on Dec. 1. Lt. Nate Chambers is proud to help organize 'Shop with a Cop.' It is one of his favorite tasks each year.

Students had fun picking out everything from clothes to toys. The Optimist Club of Chapel Hill provided the gift cards, which help brighten the holiday season for these students and their families.

The Guardians couldn't have done this without help from UNC Police, Carrboro Police, the Orange County Sheriff's Office, the North Carolina State Highway Patrol and Hillsborough's Walmart.



Guardians of the Hill are giving back to the community! Chapel Hill Police officers set up an Angel Tree benefiting the Me Fine Foundation. They decorated the tree with tags that list items for children who are in hospitals across our state.

Those children and their families will receive everything from toys and clothes to gift cards for food and gas – all thanks to our thoughtful Guardians. This is the department's third year hosting a tree for the Me Fine Foundation.

## Chapel Hill First Responders Receive Top Awards

The Police and Fire Departments have selected the recipients of Officer of the Year and Firefighter of the Year awards – Officer **Kyle Stuart** and Fire Captain **Patrick Spencer**. Their fellow first responders say their work as public servants is admirably upstanding and humble. The Chamber for a Greater Chapel Hill-Carrboro celebrated the pair at a reception saluting community heroes.

### **"Kyle thinks beyond himself."**

Kyle Stuart embodies what it means to be a Guardian of the Hill, according to his fellow officers. "Kyle is a dedicated, hard-working employee, who goes above and beyond his normal daily duties as a patrol officer," said Sergeant Todd Harris, who is Stuart's direct supervisor. "Kyle thinks beyond himself. He helps other officers close out cases and goes out of his way to support our investigations division."

Patrol Captain Johnnie Britt said Stuart is a well-rounded officer who is

always willing to guide new officers.

"Kyle is easy to talk to and lends a helping hand where needed," said Britt. "His approach is what community-based policing is all about. The community members he serves know he is there to support them."

Stuart said he is extremely grateful and honored to be named Officer of the Year.

### **"Pat is driven to do the right thing because it's the right thing."**

Patrick Spencer's fellow firefighters call his work ethic the epitome of leadership. "He always has a positive attitude and consistently goes above and beyond the call of duty," said Fire Equipment Operator Chip Aiken, who has known Spencer for 15 years.

Spencer leads the Department's Hazardous Materials Response training program. Firefighters call his approach to training innovative, real, and effective.

Spencer is the first to tell you he is just doing his part when he is recognized



for reuniting a runaway puppy with her concerned family or acting in the Department's puppet show for children.

"Pat is driven to do the right thing because it's the right thing, even when it's not the most convenient or easiest option," said Captain Heather Robinson, who works closely with Spencer on the puppet show. "Pat is the definition of hard working."

Perhaps most notably, Spencer uses his own time and resources to help firefighters as they receive treatment at the North Carolina Jaycee Burn Center.

Spencer said receiving the award is an honor. "Nothing accomplished in the fire department is accomplished alone."

## **In the Spotlight: Andrea Mebane**

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integrity, and resilience." Working together for the greater good is one of the things that inspires her.

Drea is also inspired by people who

are kind. "Helping others when you don't have to brings such joy," she says. Her involvement with the Town of Chapel Hill food bank distribution is a testament to that.

When Drea isn't filling her role as Office Assistant with Public Housing,

she is fishing! Her drive to and from her top-secret fishing hole in Virginia is such a stress reliever. Any getaway to the beach is relaxing. It's her sanctuary. Drea also loves taking family trips with her grandchildren, Zaiden and Sophia.



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TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

## Water Fitness Class Starts Jan. 5

Wellness@Work and Town Parks & Recreation are excited to announce Water Fitness Classes. Start 2022 off right with water fitness classes!

Join Aquatics Director Tanner Deisch for a high-intensity water workout from 12:15 to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays in January, starting on Jan. 5 at Chapel Hill Community Center Pool.

The class is open to Town employees covered under the Town's insurance. You'll need to be comfortable in the water.

Sign up online: [signupgenius.com/go/9040a4bacac2ca7f58-waterfit](https://signupgenius.com/go/9040a4bacac2ca7f58-waterfit)

## January Lunch & Learn

A Lunch & Learn on the topic of "Whole Health: Taking Care of Body, Mind, and Soul," will be held from 12 to 12:45 p.m. Tuesday, Jan 11. Join us wherever you are through Zoom!

What is Wellness? Dr. Jessica Barnhill, from UNC's Program on Integrative Medicine, will guide us as we explore what wellness is for our body, mind, and spirit and the role of nutrition, sleep, relationships, environment, and work in our whole health.

Please RSVP to Liska Lackey by 5 p.m. Friday, Jan. 7: [llackey@email.unc.edu](mailto:llackey@email.unc.edu) or 919-968-2796. Liska will send you the Zoom link.

## 2021 Wellness Champions Announced!

Every December, the Wellness Committee looks forward to recognizing employees who help us be the healthiest workplace possible by creating a place where people thrive. Going above and beyond, they are our Wellness Champions!

This year's Wellness Champions are:

**Melanie**

**Miller** (CaPA),

has given her time, energy and creative expertise to

Wellness@Work

for more than 10 years. When Melanie's supervisor, Sabrina Oliver, learned of the news, she shared: "Melanie contributes more than most folks would know. Not just in her day job, but in other ways as well. And [her work on the Wellness Committee] is a perfect example."



**Robena**

**Meek** (Parks & Recreation) arranged and led the hugely popular Pumpkin Fest and is already thinking of a fun

and creative activity for the spring. One of Robena's co-workers, Deaver Smith, shares the following: "I have had the pleasure of working with Robena since she joined Parks and Rec. The passion and innovative thinking she brings to creating a wide range of programs for everyone from youth to adults are second to none."

Would you like to be involved with the work of the Wellness Committee? Contact your Wellness Representative or Liska Lackey at [llackey@email.unc.edu](mailto:llackey@email.unc.edu) or 919-967-2796 and we will make it happen!



## Mindfulness for Stress Management

A Virtual Mindfulness Class will start on Feb. 7. It is open to all pre-65 retirees, employees and their families!

Register now – contact Liska Lackey at [llackey@email.unc.edu](mailto:llackey@email.unc.edu) or 919-968-2796.

As we move through these stressful times, learn ways to access your natural capacity for self-care and healing as you bring simple mindfulness practices into your daily life

Mindfulness Practice includes mind-body awareness, meditation practices, gentle yoga and focusing on breath. It is a foundation for stress management: allowing you to slow down, recognize stress reactions, and stay focused and relaxed.

Paula Huffman, a Mindfulness Instructor in UNC's Program on Integrative Medicine and in a variety of programs throughout the state, has offered to lead a four-week Mindfulness Course for Town employees at a cost of \$40 per participant. (The total cost for the course is \$80 but the Town is covering half the cost!).

We need at least five participants to register by Jan. 31.

The class will meet virtually on Zoom from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on Mondays from Feb. 7 to Feb. 28.

To sign up, contact Liska Lackey at [llackey@email.unc.edu](mailto:llackey@email.unc.edu) or 919-968-2796.

Help share the news! Tell your co-workers and family!

# Got News?

Achievements • Weddings • Babies



Send your news to  
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Got photos? Send them too!

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