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The Report Card

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The Report Card issues grades A through F, and incompletes where necessary, to a variety of news items in this space. Got an idea that makes the grade? Send it to DRussell@CITIZEN-TIMES.com.

Reader submission

A to the Town of Woodfin for its new, free spay/neuter program. This is not only the humane solution to animal overpopulation, it's fiscally responsible. It's cheaper to alter animals than it is to shelter and kill their unwanted offspring.

Stewart David, Asheville

Staff grades

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A to the Pavillon nonprofit addiction treatment center for bringing Susie Vanderlip and her Legacy of Hope performance to West Henderson High School. Legacy of Hope is a dramatic one-woman show that combines dance, acting and personal stories to address drinking, drug abuse, depression, suicide, lack of self-esteem, teen pregnancy and violence among other social issues. "It addresses many of the things to which these children are faced with," said Joanne Young, director of the children's program at Pavillon. "This is a program that we hope will educate not only the kids, but the parents as well and give them some understanding of what the kids go through."

B to the news that most of Pack Square should be open to the public again in a week or so if weather does not slow work. Completion of other parts of the park project is still months away, however. It will probably take until the end of May for a fountain near the monument to be completed and the area immediately around it will be fenced off in the meantime, consultant Fred Bonci told the board of the Pack Square Conservancy. The conservancy plans a grand opening for Pack Square toward the end of June. While that's certainly good news, this Pack Square renovation has dragged on and on ... and on.

A to the AVID program, as it celebrates its 10th year in Asheville City Schools. An acronym for Advancement Via Individual Determination, AVID focuses on students who would be the first in their families to attend college, come from groups historically underserved in four-year colleges or have families with low incomes or special circumstances (such as dyslexia, or speaking English as a second language) that might make going to college difficult. Students must have a 2.0-3.5 GPA and average to above-average test scores. "I've decided the single most important thing AVID provides for students is a network ... of people to help you when you fall," said Cece Hue, who was in AVID's second class and is now a senior at UNC Asheville. That network of tutors, teachers, parents and staff members help students prepare for the SATs, fill out financial aid forms, apply for scholarships and complete college applications.

A for everyone involved in the effort to bring back the chestnut trees. Forestry officials and volunteers in Ohio are working to revive the American chestnut tree, the woodland giants that once dominated forests

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across WNC and the eastern United States. The effort is part of a larger one across the country to gradually change the chestnut's genetics, which volunteers hope will to make the tree more resistant to the Asian fungus that wiped out the trees in the 1920s and 1930s. "It may be the biggest ecological restoration ever undertaken in the United States and maybe in the world," said Bryan Burhans, chief executive of the Asheville-based American Chestnut Foundation.

F to John Edwards. The former senator from North Carolina not only had an affair while his wife, Elizabeth, was battling breast cancer, he made a run for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination knowing that his infidelity was a skeleton in the closet. Now it looks like a child was the fruit of that union with Rielle Hunter. Edwards has denied fathering the child. A paternity test will settle the issue. Hunter had previously disallowed DNA testing on baby Frances, who was born in February of 2008. Meanwhile, Edwards continues to live with his wife in their 28,000-square-foot home in Chapel Hill.

A to Colleen Daly, of Asheville, named the South Regional Youth Advocate of the Year by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Daly, 17, was honored at a gala in the nation's capital on May 6, along with a national winner, three other regional winners and a group winner. Daly is working with Project ASSIST and the American Heart Association to advocate for statewide smoke-free air legislation in North Carolina. Her smoke-free advocacy also includes working to pass a smoke-free parks policy in Asheville and speaking at Asheville's minor league baseball stadium to introduce this policy to the public.

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