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# CITIZEN TIMES

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PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

## Lady Gloria Ridge ready for residents

**Sarah Honosky**  
Asheville Citizen Times  
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE – There’s a lot to look forward to in the new apartment.

Plenty of light. Beautiful counter-tops. A balcony, windows and a spacious living room. Everything is “fresh” and “new,” said Lora Downs.

And when asked what it means for her to move into Lady Gloria Ridge Community at the end of the month, Downs said she and her family are “just really excited to be in community with other folks.”

Downs, 43, an Asheville native, is poised to be among the building’s first residents, along with her two children, Kimora, 17, and Prosper, 10.

The 41-unit building, named for Gloria Howard Free, is a permanently affordable housing development on West

Haywood Street, the culmination of years of work by Haywood Street Congregation. It sits just outside downtown, on the north end of the West End Clingman Avenue neighborhood, with a view of the mountains beyond.

Lady Gloria Ridge broke ground in February 2024. Its consecration was in October. Though the building was largely complete, and move-in expected by the end of 2025, there were delays caused “primarily by logistics,” particularly with elevator installation and related inspections, said April Nance, with Haywood Street Congregation.

The building received a Temporary Certificate of Occupancy on Feb. 27 — “temporary” as there is minor exterior work left to be done that does not interfere with occupancy, Nance said via email.

The building’s first tenants are expected by the end of the week. Other

move-ins will be staggered throughout March and April.

“Blessing the ground, marveling at the construction process, and dedicating the building were all wonderful, but nothing will compare to seeing families move into the space and officially call it home,” Nance said.

### ‘We are so ready to move in’

The apartments are a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom units, all affordable — with 35 reserved for housing voucher holders whose income is between 30%-50% of the area median income, and the six other units targeting workforce housing at 60% and 80% AMI.

Asheville’s median income is \$65,188. At 80% AMI, a one-person

See RESIDENTS, Page 6A



Lora Downs, left, with her children Kimora and Prosper.

PROVIDED BY LORA DOWNS

### WORD FROM THE SMOKIES



John Adkins and Charlotte Rollman display their work at their gallery on Glades Road in Gatlinburg, which they opened in November 2022. PROVIDED BY ADKINS-ROLLMAN GALLERY

## Artistic duo creates unique interpretations of scenes

**Holly Kays**  
Special to the Asheville Citizen Times  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Charlotte Rollman swears she used to be shy.

“I did art so that people would like me,” she said, telling the story of how, as a fourth-grader, she once drew money and passed it out to her classmates, who then “really liked me.”

But when John Adkins met the woman who would later become his business partner, shyness was nowhere to be found among his first impressions. One of his earliest memories involving Roll-

man came after finishing a painting along Little River at Metcalf Bottoms during a Tuesday Painters outing. Both Rollman and Adkins are members of the plein air painting group, which Adkins joined following his post-retirement move to Sevierville in 2019. After laying down his brush, Adkins looked around and spotted Rollman sitting in the river, enjoying the cool water.

“I have stories about this one,” Adkins said, nodding toward Rollman from his seat in the light-filled art gallery they now share in Gatlinburg.

Perhaps the most important story began in 2022, when Rollman, now 78,

first approached Adkins about opening the gallery. Adkins, at 73 a lifelong painter who spent his career as a pharmacist, had always wanted to have his work in a gallery, but his first foray hadn’t gone very well. He sold only a handful of paintings each of the three years his paintings were displayed at a market in Knoxville, and when Rollman made her pitch, he didn’t feel ready to try again.

“I said, ‘I’m not really sure I want to do this yet,’” Adkins said. “She said, ‘Well, I’m so-and-so age, and if I’m

See SMOKIES, Page 2A

## Oil sites hit amid Iran war escalations

### Gas prices surge after Iranian gas field attacked

**Michael Loria, Bart Jansen, Cybele Mayes-Osterman and Andrea Riquier**  
USA TODAY

Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth wants billions more from Congress to fund the war with Iran as gas prices hit \$3.90 a gallon nationwide and global oil prices surged amid the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The national average price per gallon a month ago was about \$2.92, according to AAA. By the morning of March 19, gas prices were averaging \$3.90 a gallon nationwide, according to GasBuddy. In some parts of the West Coast, gas is approaching \$6 a gallon. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading around \$113 just before Wall Street opened for the day. Prices jumped after Israel attacked a critical Iranian gas field, sparking retaliatory strikes on refineries and other targets in the Persian Gulf, including Qatar.

President Donald Trump sought to distance the United States from the Israeli strike on the South Pars gas field, saying in a late March 18 social media post that Tel Aviv had “violently lashed out” and the United States “knew nothing about this particular attack ...” But he threatened to destroy the rest of the gas field if Iran continued attacks on its neighbors, many of whom house U.S. military bases.

France’s President Emmanuel Macron said he spoke with Trump and the emir of Qatar to urge a moratorium on hitting civilian facilities, “particularly energy and water supply facilities,” Macron said on social media March 18. “Civilian populations and their essential needs, as well as the security of energy supplies, must be protected from military escalation.”

See IRAN, Page 4A



# MOUNTAINS

## Take a trip to see treasured views along Blue Ridge Parkway

**Sarah Honosky**  
Asheville Citizen Times  
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE - When the Blue Ridge Parkway, known for its stunning mountain views, hidden trails and spring wildflower splendor, was authorized in 1933, no federally funded road project of its scale had ever been attempted.

It was built in phases, starting as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, implemented to combat the devastating impacts of the Great Depression. Asheville fought for the route to pass through the city to invigorate its tourism industry.

It would become the longest road of any type planned as a single unit in the United States. As described in its National Historic Landmark nomination form (a status clinched in December 2024), it is a "winding and undulating route" traversing dynamic scenery and "designed to 'float' over the landscape."

It is also a "long piece of our history," said Rita Larkin, spokesperson for the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation. In 2025, the parkway celebrated its 90th year since construction began.

"It really does just unite the Western North Carolina area," that's part of its beauty, Larkin said: The art, music and recreation of mountain communities along its path.

As the United States gears up to cel-



**Rhododendron bloom beside the Linn Cove Viaduct on the Blue Ridge Parkway as it snakes around the slopes of Grandfather Mountain.**

BILL SANDERS/WSANDERS@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

brate its 250th anniversary this year — and Superintendent Tracy Swartout's recent announcement that all parkway roadways closed by Tropical Storm Helene will open by the end of the year — 2026 is a great time to visit.

The parkway is one of America's most celebrated scenic drives — the highest-elevation and longest continuous route in the Appalachian region,

winding 469 miles through North Carolina and Virginia, linking Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah national parks. It was completed in 1987 with the placement of the Linn Cove Viaduct near Grandfather Mountain.

In 2025 the parkway was the most-visited national park site in the country, according to the NPS, with 16.5 million visitors. The foundation calls it a "vital

catalyst" for regional travel and tourism.

Its trails and overlooks are favored for day hikes and picnics. Just off the winding roads are scenic waterfalls, climbing routes and rock scrambles. It's not uncommon to see black bears and other wildlife meandering through the trees. In the fall, locals and tourists alike gather to watch autumnal colors spread down the slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

### Plan your visit:

● **Best Time:** Spring wildflower blooms start in April, and the showy pink and purple Catawba rhododendron peaking in mid-June. Fall colors typically peak in mid-October.

● **Road status and closures:** [nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/roadclosures.htm](https://nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/roadclosures.htm)

● **Getting there:** The parkway stretches from Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Cherokee. Plan your trip: [blueridgeparkway.org/plan-your-parkway-trip](https://blueridgeparkway.org/plan-your-parkway-trip)

● **Learn more:** [blueridgeparkway.org](https://blueridgeparkway.org) or [nps.gov/blri/index.htm](https://nps.gov/blri/index.htm)

*Sarah Honosky is the city government reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA TODAY Network. News Tips? Email [shonosky@citizen-times.com](mailto:shonosky@citizen-times.com).*

## Smokies

Continued from Page 1A

going to do it, I need to do it now.' So she talked me into it."

He's glad she did. Adkins-Rollman Gallery opened in November 2022 on Glades Road in Gatlinburg, displaying dozens of original paintings inspired by the surrounding Smoky Mountains. Adkins was "shocked," when they sold a combined 94 paintings in their first year, averaging 100 sales annually during their first three years. Nearly all of these paintings were created outdoors—*en plein air*—with the artists immersed in the scene they sought to portray.

Though Rollman and Adkins often set their easels next to each other, painting the same compelling scenes, their differing techniques and artistic interpretations yield wildly divergent results.

"We can be standing next to each other and paint in totally opposite ways," said Rollman. "He looks at things differently than me, which is nice because I'm sort of loud and in your face with color. He's nicer, he's sweeter, he lets you see at a distance."

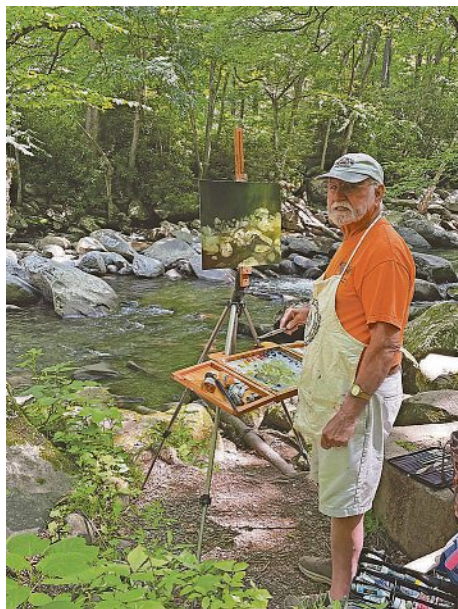
Adkins, who uses oils, starts with the darkest darks, brushing the light colors on top to create detailed, realistic works. Meanwhile, Rollman paints in acrylic, but with an impressionistic style informed by years of watercolor work. She paints color first and draws in details later.

"It's interesting to watch her paint, because I never know what she's doing until I see the result," Adkins said.

"Well, it's interesting for me to see yours," Rollman replied. "I think that's the 'opposites attract.' I knew John would be a good partner because of his love for painting, and since he's been in this gallery, his painting has just blossomed."

For both painters, art has been a lifelong pursuit, but the journey has led them down markedly different paths.

Adkins began studying art as a teenager but spent his career as a pharmacist. Though the Alabama native has continually sought out instructors capable of inspiring and refining his work, during his working years he could never spend as much time with his paints as



**John Adkins uses oil paints to render a water scene in the Great Smoky Mountains.** PHOTOS PROVIDED BY ADKINS-ROLLMAN GALLERY

he would have liked.

"Then I retired," he said, "and now I paint some nearly every day."

For Rollman, however, art was always part of the job description. She began her career as a drawing instructor at Ball State University in Indiana and then spent 12 years working for textile and wallpaper design companies in New York City and Chicago. During this time, she also got serious about painting, with a work-from-home position freeing up time to create paintings that she shared in shows throughout Chicago.

Eventually the company decided that she needed to start reporting to headquarters—so Rollman decided she needed to report to a different job. For three years she juggled a wallpaper design job with a part-time teaching position at Northern Illinois University. Then she earned a full-time role at NIU, where she stayed until her retirement 30 years later.

Rollman discovered plein air painting while at NIU—and so did her students, who she "made go out and paint with me." But the bitterly cold Illinois winters curtailed the season for outdoor painting; in retirement, she decided, she needed to live somewhere she could paint year-round. After finding "heaven on Earth" in the Smokies, she moved to Wears Valley in 2016.



**Charlotte Rollman works with acrylics to bring a flowering bush to life on her canvas.**

Meanwhile, Adkins was developing a plein air passion of his own, stemming from a 1999 workshop he attended at the Nicolai Fechin Institute in Taos, New Mexico. The experience inspired him to help found Plein Air Artists of Alabama in 2006, and he served as the organization's president for ten years.

That term overlapped with a time of extreme and sometimes tragic change in Adkins' life. His wife Ginger died in 2007 following a battle with cancer. He remarried in 2011, and he and his wife Laurie spent their early years of marriage caring for both their parents through the end of life. A 2019 move to the Great Smoky Mountains allowed them to start a new chapter together in a new house.

The move also allowed Adkins to reconnect with the passion he's felt for art throughout his life. Chuckling, he recalls Laurie's disbelief when she first saw his house in Alabama, walls covered with something like 300 paintings. She might have hoped that opening a gallery would help reduce the inventory, but such has not been the case.

"I also had guilt, because I didn't want to leave my daughter with all my piles of paintings," Rollman said. "But it's made us paint more."

For every painting hanging on the gallery's walls, there's at least one more back in storage—and new works creat-

ed all the time.

For both artists, the Smoky Mountain landscape is a source of endless inspiration. The mountains, the seasons, the challenge of perfecting the countless shades of green and the blue-purple of distant mountains—taken together, it's a painter's paradise.

When she paints, Rollman feels not just the beauty of the landscape but also the footprints of those who walked it before her.

"Sometimes when I'm in Tremont I have this sense that the Cherokee have walked this way, they looked at that tree, they saw that stream, and of course in Cades Cove you can feel it everywhere," she said. "I don't have people in my paintings, but I make sure there's a path in the painting where someone could walk."

Both artists say there's a transcendence that occurs when they sit outdoors, rendering the view into oil or acrylic.

"A lot of times before I start to paint a painting I will pray, 'God, guide my hand and help me know what to do,'" Adkins said. "It's amazing to me that I can do any of this. There's the training that I've done and the painting that I've done to get to where I am. But there's also a part of it that is not of me. It's in my soul."

For Rollman, the act of painting itself holds a power she can't explain. It's a lifeforce on its own, sustaining and invigorating her with each brushstroke.

"I don't know how to explain this, but when you're out painting, and you put it all into the painting, it almost reverses time," she said. "I won't say that it happens every time, but there are some times in which I feel so young, painting."

*An expanded version of this story was originally published in the fall 2025 issue of Smokies Life Journal, a twice-yearly magazine that is the primary benefit of joining Smokies Life. To read more stories like this while supporting Great Smoky Mountains National Park, visit [SmokiesLife.org/Membership](https://SmokiesLife.org/Membership) and become a Park Keeper.*

*Holly Kays is the lead writer for the 29,000-member Smokies Life, a non-profit dedicated to supporting the scientific, historical, and interpretive activities of Great Smoky Mountains National Park by providing educational products and services such as this column. Learn more at [SmokiesLife.org](https://SmokiesLife.org), or reach the author at [hollyk@smokieslife.org](mailto:hollyk@smokieslife.org).*

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