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Sunday, Dec. 31, at 11 a.m., to release 2023 with a Burning Bowl Ceremony and a White Stone Ceremony to set intentions for 2024.

Consciously listen to the still, small voice within and claim your highest intentions. As you cross the threshold of this year, allow your greatest expression and fullest possibility to be revealed and lived in your next 525,600 minutes, and you will arrive at the doorstep of your deepest desires. Not only will you be blessed, you will be a blessing to the world. Happiest New Year!

— *The Rev. Suzi Schadle*  
Senior minister  
Center for Spiritual Living Asheville

## Treatment can help menopausal sleep disruptions

Thank you for your recent piece on how to reduce insomnia [“Sleepless in Asheville: Insomniacs Share Strategies for Finding Rest,” Nov. 22, Xpress], because this is such a huge problem, particularly among midlife women. I was especially glad that the article specifically highlighted menopause as a major driver of sleeping problems in women. As a menopause specialist working in health care, I spend a lot of time educating women and providers alike about perimenopausal changes and how hormone changes impact well-being in midlife. There is a lot of misinformation around menopause in health care, and as a result, many women’s health providers remain uneducated about the benefits of hormone replacement therapy.

Many people don’t realize the cost of women not treating these temporary but often debilitating symptoms. The perimenopause transition begins on average seven-10 years before a woman reaches full menopause. The average age that women reach menopause in the U.S. is 51, which means that hormonal shifts begin on average around ages 41-45, and sometimes even earlier. The most common hormonal problems that contribute to disrupted sleep and altered circadian rhythms in midlife women are waning progesterone levels, erratic estrogen levels and sometimes depleted levels of testosterone.

In addition to causing multiple nighttime wake-ups and sometimes increased difficulty falling asleep, early menopause symptoms like anxiety, fatigue and decreased resilience can start years earlier than hot flashes for some women. In addition, as a woman gets closer to her menopause transition, hot flashes and feeling increasingly uncomfortable and wake-

ful when hot at night (“night sweats”) are the most common driver of sleep disruption. Together with hormonal weight gain and increased risk of sleep apnea (as the article also mentions), midlife women really suffer as a result of not sleeping well. Sometimes several nights per week of sleep are affected, over a period of nearly a decade.

Over 80% of women report sleep difficulties during their menopause transition, but only 12% or less are offered hormone replacement therapy, or HRT. Despite what many people have been misled to believe, modern body-identical HRT is safe and affordable, and offers highly effective treatment for hot flashes and sleep disruption with the most long-term benefits (namely, reducing osteoporosis, diabetes and heart disease). Women and providers can get more education about ways to treat menopause symptoms safely and effectively by reading the Menopause Society guidelines at [[avl.mx/d7w](http://avl.mx/d7w)].

— *Jill Gustafson*  
Certified menopause specialist  
and nurse-midwife  
Asheville

## How to improve next year's holiday parade

I noticed while watching this year’s holiday parade that our group was not really known at all to the commentators, and they struggled to talk about who we are. The ones they already knew, they had no problems with, but I don’t think they even mentioned “Warriors of Ash” or knew that the sport we do is called historical European martial arts. They seemed to have this problem with a few other groups, too. I don’t think that’s their fault, but I have an idea to help!

I think sending a Google form out to each group/slot to provide the commentators (for example) a word-limited sentence of who they are and two small bulleted highlights about what they’d most like highlighted for the parade would really help the commentators and the people watching understand who they are seeing better.

I’d never expect anyone to know everything about almost 100 different floats, so I think this idea could help everyone involved.

Thank you kindly for listening and your consideration.

— *Krys Earles*  
Fairview

## Rain came at right time for wildfires

The recent wildfires in Western North Carolina and East Tennessee have all caused tremendous damage

## If I Must Die

If I must die,  
you must live  
to tell my story  
to sell my things  
to buy a piece of cloth  
and some strings,  
(make it white with a long tail)  
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza  
while looking heaven in the eye  
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—  
and bid no one farewell  
not even to his flesh  
not even to himself—  
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up  
above  
and thinks for a moment an angel is there  
bringing back love  
If I must die  
let it bring hope  
let it be a tale.

by Refaat Alareer

Teacher & writer killed by Israeli bomb on Dec. 6

**FREE PALESTINE!**



## STOP THE GENOCIDE! CEASEFIRE NOW!

