Written by Steve Frank
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Blowing Rock Police report four arrests thanks to an alert employee of a Tanger Outlet store. The arrests were made Tuesday evening in connection with a shoplifting ring operating in the area. Around 6:30 pm Tuesday, Sunglass Hut employee, Sara Dillard, reported to police several suspicious people at Tanger Outlets on Valley Blvd. Dillard had previous worked at a store in the Hickory area, and she believed that she recognized a man at her store that had been involved in shoplifting activity in Hickory. Dillard was able to give a description of the suspects and their vehicle, allowing Blowing Rock Police officers to find the gold colored Honda Accord in the Tanger Parking lot. Officers Matt Royal and Deyton Turpin found that one of the suspects in the car was wanted for a probation violation. Gaining consent to search the vehicle, officers found over $800 in stolen merchandise from seven different stores at Tanger. Two suspects were arrested at the vehicle, while Officer Zach Warren located a third suspect leaving the Wilco, and a fourth suspect at Tanger with goods concealed on his person. The four were charged with several counts of Larceny each. They are; Randal Scott Jordan Jr., 27, of Mooresville, Charles Todd Ritchie, 44, from Hickory, Michael Lee Duncan Jr., 40, of Newton, Matthew Walker Farmer, 31, from Conover. Goods stolen ranged from key chains to clothes to shoes, while staff were not aware that anything had been stolen until asked by officers to identify merchandise. Some reported talking to the suspects at their stores. Blowing Rock Officer also recovered merchandise from other stores outside of the Blowing Rock area. It is believed that the group has been operating an organized shoplifting ring in North Carolina. The investigation is continuing. All four suspects were held at the Watauga County Jail on secured bonds.