

Cafeteria worker moonlights as comedian and puppeteer

BY T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

John Pearson doesn't have any kids of his own, but he feels like every child is his, and he has taken it upon himself to help shape and guide each child that he encounters.

Pearson took that mission to another level several years ago when he began building from scratch his own educational live variety show aimed at getting little ones to stay on the straight and narrow and avoid pitfalls such as drugs and violence.

Using colorful clothing, silly hats, puppets, a guitar and an assortment of other props, Pearson has entertained and enlightened children from here to Albemarle.

Last week and earlier this week he staged his act at a place with which he is quite familiar. Pearson works full-time in the cafeteria at Hall-Woodward Elementary School, so when he arrived at classrooms in one of his bright get-ups to entertain children, the students were already familiar with the tall man with a big smile.

"I wanted to show kids at an early age to say no to drugs," Pearson said, explaining why he got into the business of entertaining kids. "I think since kids have young minds, a puppet will be more effective than an adult. It will



John Pearson uses a string puppet to get the attention of his young audience.

also get their attention." Pearson, a "fifty-something" Vietnam Army veteran, relies heavily on puppets in his show. Last week during a performance before English-

as-a-Second-Language kindergartners at Hall-Woodward (a performance that had to be translated by the teacher of the class), Pearson used several puppets to drive home the point that drugs, in all cases, are bad. He had the kids repeat "Say no to drugs" during the 20-minute act.

"(Drugs) will make you lose your reputation. They could make you lose your life," Pearson said.

A devoted member of First Waightown Baptist Church, Pearson found his first puppet at a yard sale. He has added to his collection steadily over the years.

Pearson brought one of his puppets to work one day a few weeks ago.

"I bought the puppet to the cafeteria one day and held it up and every kid in there started pointing, and one of the teachers said I should entertain the students, so here I am," he said.

Pearson has also taken his act to hospitals and prisons. He performs his Christian comedy routine for his more mature audiences.

Although Pearson enjoys his work in the cafeteria at Hall-Woodward, he dreams of one day striking out on his own and doing his comedy and children's act full time.

"That is my dream," he said. "I love to entertain."



Youngsters watch as John Pearson performs with his props.

NOTICE MINORITY AND WOMEN-OWNED FIRMS

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is seeking minority and women-owned firms (M/WBE) to bid on upcoming highway projects throughout the State. The Locations of the projects are:

Project No.	County/Route	Type	Location	Metric/English	GOALS BY PERCENT		
					DBE	WBE	WBE
6.111019R	Pasquotank	Shoulder reconstruction, drainage, milling & resurfacing	US-17 from south end of Elizabeth City Bypass to the Bridge over Knobb's Creek	English	5%	3%	
8.1200902	Lenoir	Median Guardrail	US-70 from NC-903 to east of NC-93	English	1%		
8.1222002	Greene, Pitt, Wilson	Median Guardrail	US-264 from NC-58 in Wilson County to US-13 in Pitt County	English	1%		
8.12311303	Brunswick	Grading, drainage, paving & structure	Bridge over Royal Oak Swamp & approaches on NC-211	English	5%		
8.1421001	Bladen	Grading, drainage, paving & structure	Bridge over Colly Creek & approaches on NC-11	English	6%		
5.4311240	Columbus, Bladen	Shoulder reconstruction, milling & resurfacing	Various sections of NC-410 & 22 sections of secondary roads	English	8%	4%	
5.4621236	Robeson	Shoulder reconstruction, milling & resurfacing	1 section of NC-130, NC-41 & NC-71. 2 sections of NC-211 & US-301 and 21 sections of secondary roads	English	8%	4%	
7.4421184	Cumberland, Harnett	Shoulder widening, milling, resurfacing & pvt. markings	NC-24 from NC-87 to Moore County, NC-55 from Erwin N. city limit to Coats So. city limit & 94 sections of secondary Rds.	English	8%	4%	
6.501008R	Orange	Fiberscreen concrete repair, resurfacing & guardrail	US-70 from SR-1562 (Palmer Grove Rd) to Durham county line	English	5%	3%	
7.4711275	Alamance	Shoulder reconstruction, milling & resurfacing	NC-119 from NC-49 to Caswell Co., NC-62 from US-70 west to SR-1537 & 16 sections of secondary roads.	English	8%	4%	
7.6721276	Alamance, Caswell, Orange	Shoulder reconstruction, milling & resurfacing	NC-49 & 86 in Caswell & Orange Co. NC-86 from NC-49 to SR-1508 (Hawkins Rd) & 12 sections of secondary roads	English	8%	4%	
7.4811273	Caswell, Rockingham	Resurfacing	US-29 SBL from north of SR-1341 in Caswell Co. to SR-1767 in Rockingham Co & 7 sections of secondary roads	English	7%	4%	
7.5111274	Rockingham	Shoulder reconstruction, milling & resurfacing	US-158/NC-14 from SR-1985 to SR-2823, US-311 from east of Madison City limit to US-220 bus & 8 sections of secondary roads	English	7%	4%	
8.1522202	Chatham & Randolph	Median cable guiderail & guardrail	US-421 from SR-2210 in Chatham County to SR-2434 in Randolph County	English	10%		
8.1600704	Davidson	Widening, grading, drainage & paving	NC-8 from SR-1115 (Wrenn Rd) to south of SR-1126 (Tranham Drive)	Metric	9%		
8.2604103	Davidson	Grading, drainage, paving & structure	Bridge over Hamby's Creek & approaches on SR-2775	English	7%		
6.661006R	Cabarrus	Shoulder reconstruction, milling resurfacing & guardrail	US-52 from SR-2775 to Rowan County & NC-73 from Coddle Creek bridge to SR-1451 (Odell School Road)	English	5%	3%	
6.681007R	Stanly	Milling, resurfacing & pavement markings	NC-73 from NCL of Albemarle to Cabarrus County line and US-52 from NC-49 to Cabarrus County line	English	5%	3%	
7.6811245	Stanly	Shoulder reconstruction, resurfacing, ditching, milling & pvt. markings	Various sections of NC-731, NC-24/27-73 & NC-200 and 7 sections of secondary roads	English	7%	4%	
6.761009R	Wilkes	Shoulder reconstruction, milling & resurfacing	NC-18/NC-268 from West of NC-18 to west of SR-1001	English	5%	3%	
7.8011319	Cleveland	Shoulder reconstruction & resurfacing	2 sections of NC-150, 2 sections of NC-226, 1 section of NC-10 & 10 sections of secondary roads	English	7%	4%	
7.8211318	Iredell	Shoulder reconstruction & resurfacing	US-21 from north of I-77 bridge to NC-150, US-64 from US-21 to I-40 exit ramp & 12 sections of secondary roads	English	7%	4%	
7.8311321	Lincoln	Shoulder reconstruction, milling, & resurfacing	US-321 business from NC-150 to Gaston County & 10 sections of secondary roads	English	7%	4%	
8.2860903	Madison	Grading, drainage, paving & structure	Bridge over Shelton Laurel Creek and approaches on SR-1316	English	4%		
7.9121116	Cherokee, Clay, Graham	Shoulder reconstruction & resurfacing	US-129 from SR-1147 to Swain County and 8 sections of secondary roads	English	5%	3%	
7.9711117	Macon	Shoulder reconstruction & resurfacing	US-64 from bridge 91 to east of SR-1448 & 2 sections of secondary roads	English	5%	3%	

*** MONDAY, November 18, MIDNIGHT ***

North Raleigh Hilton - 3415 Wake Forest Road - Raleigh, N.C.

LETTING DATE: November 19, 2002

Prime contractors will be available to receive quotes for trucking, sub-contracting and materials. M/WBE's needing more information and/or technical assistance may come to Room 522 to meet with representatives from the Bennington Corp., NCDOT's Supportive Provider. (919)832-6027

NCDOT Office of Civil Rights & Business Development 1-800-522-0453

Certification of highway contracting firms: Richard Chrisawn
 Certification of supply/service/engineering firms: Robert Mathes
 Comments or concerns: Delano Rackard: Director



Republicans

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Democrats, they would have held victory parties on election night.

"I spent 95 percent of my time working in the black community," Davenport said. "What is funny is that I got more votes in precincts that I never showed up in."

The numbers clearly show that white Democrats were more willing to embrace a Republican - even if that Republican happens to be black. District A is overwhelmingly Democratic, with 36,803 registered Democrats in a district of 53,935 voters. The district is also mostly African-American. More than 77,000 voters in the district are black.

Although born and raised in the heart of East Winston, Davenport shone mainly in precincts where white voters outnumber blacks. At East Forsyth High School, for example, Davenport got the best of his Democratic opponents, receiving 740 of the 1,926 votes cast at the precinct.

To Davenport, the pattern shows that white Democrats are more willing to look at a candidate rather than at party affiliation.

"Our community is devoid on debates of the issues," he said, "because we have sold our vote, lock, stock and barrel to one party."

Robinson also did better in precincts that had the least number of African-American voters. For example, at the mostly Democratic Parkway United Church precinct, where there are nine times more white voters than black, Robinson got almost twice as many votes as the Democratic victor, Earline Parmon.

Robinson believes the fact that he was able to give Parmon a good run in a district that is about 80 percent Democratic is victory in itself. He ran 15 and a half points above Elizabeth Dole in the district, a fact of which he is especially proud.

When asked what the result would have been if he were a Democrat and he and Parmon went head to head in a primary, Robinson did not mince words.

"There would be no question, she would have been crushed."

Robinson said he has long advocated for the Forsyth County Republican Party to launch a major public relations campaign aimed at the county's black residents. He has suggested that local party officials speak to an African-American civic or social group every month.

The local Republican Party did little for Robinson's and Davenport's campaigns. The two say that with the disdain that many blacks have about their party, there was really nothing local party officials could have done to help them.

"There is a negative opinion of Republicans held by many African-American voters," Robinson said. "To the extent that these voters are in the district



Vernon Robinson, clockwise from right, chats with Michael Steele, lieutenant-governor-elect of Maryland, and Ken Raymond last year at a black Republicans forum in Greensboro.

you are running in, you have to carry that baggage."

Donald Mac-Thompson, assistant professor of political science at Winston-Salem State University and associate researcher for the university's Center for Community Safety, disagrees that it was Davenport's and Robinson's party affiliation that kept most blacks from voting for them. Mac-Thompson says recent statistics show that black voters are willing to look at issues and choose candidates based on their platforms and not their parties.

He pointed to Maryland, an overwhelmingly Democratic state, where the ticket of a black Republican candidate for lieutenant governor and a white Republican candidate for governor garnered much black support on their way to victory. Michael Steele will become the state's first black lieutenant governor.

"I don't think that (Robinson and Davenport) pushed strong agendas to capture the attention of African-American voters," Mac-Thompson said. "They didn't come up with any political issues that were convincing. It is not because of their political party at all."

Mac-Thompson does concede that blacks still overwhelmingly throw their support behind Democrats, but he sees that changing. Blacks are branching out, he said, not only by switching over to the Republican Party, but also by becoming unaffiliated voters.

Mac-Thompson said Republicans have also calmed their rhetoric in recent years, making the party kinder and gentler and less offensive to black voters.

Elizabeth Dole, for example, showed up at a rally at Salem College three days before the election with three prominent blacks at her side: Rod Paige, secretary of the U.S. Department of Education; James Cheek, president emeritus of Howard University; and Algeania Freeman, president of Livingstone College. Quizzically, the three supporters made up the only black presence in a crowd of several hundred.

"The Republicans are moving to what is the middle so they can capture minority (votes)...They will continue to

push to get the black vote," Mac-Thompson said.

If the black political pendulum is swinging more to the right, Davenport said he has not noticed. He says that blacks still too often put all of their eggs in one basket by voting straight party.

He believes he was further crippled when the Ministers Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity distributed fliers a few days before the election encouraging black voters to vote straight Democratic. Seemingly, Davenport - who was a Democrat at one time but changed parties because he says the party started embracing issues like gay marriages - was hurt by the fliers.

For instance at the Carver High School precinct, the precinct closest to Davenport's Butterfield Drive home, 272 voters out of 575 cast straight Democratic Party ballots.

"There is absolutely no way that you can overcome that," Davenport said.

The Rev. Carlton Eversley, one of several dozen pastors whose names were attached to the flier, defends the move. The Ministers Conference is usually a nonpartisan group, but ministers were moved by the negative attack ads Robinson ran against Parmon, Eversley said.

While Eversley admits that Davenport - who is more of a moderate Republican while Robinson is unabashedly conservative - may have been hurt by the flier, he is not making apologies. He said Davenport had to pay for the actions of his fellow party member.

"Black Republicans are held, very logically it seems to me, to a double standard," Eversley said. Davenport, who also lost a bid for alderman last year (he ran unaffiliated in that race), said he will run for office again. But he is not sure for what. He is also uncertain of which district he will be living in and what his party affiliation will be.

"The bottom line is that if the community is not going to grow, I change zip codes or I change parties," Davenport said. "I am not a black male that is in prison. I own my own business. I am dedicated to the community, and folks still want vote for me."