



Photos by Layla Farmer

Attorney General Roy Cooper, right, presents an award to Cleveland Hunt on Tuesday.

Two are honored for protecting young lives

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Cleveland Hunt will never forget the day the call came in. "9-1-1 received a call; they had found an abandoned baby," related the Nash County firefighter. The child, a boy, was only two days old - stuffed in a Cheetos container and discarded in a dumpster in Rocky Mount, he says.

The death of the nameless infant resonated with Hunt and many others in the firehouse. With more than 30 years on the job, Hunt has seen it all. Yet he was shaken by the senselessness of the tragedy.

"I was (touched) to see a child like that just abandoned," he commented. "We actually adopted the child back through Nash County and, with the local support, we actually gave the child a burial. We named it John Nash because it's Nash County."

It didn't have to happen: A Safe Surrender Law was passed by the NC General Assembly in 2001. The law states that a child may be anonymously surrendered to any responsible adult with no questions asked.

The law stipulates that the child must be less than a week old and unharmed.

Baby Nash's mother didn't appear to know she had options. Hunt wanted to make sure other mothers did.

"I said I want to take this law and educate the public; I want to put out signs at all the fire departments to let people know that the fire and rescue stations are a safe haven," he said. "We educate the public on putting fire alarms in the house, we tell moms how to put car seats in cars ... it's our job to educate the public about the Safe Haven Law."

Hunt raised over \$1800 for the production of the signs, which are now posted in every fire station in Nash County.

Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina took notice.

The statewide nonprofit honored Hunt for his efforts at its Awards Luncheon. The luncheon was part of the "Investing in Healthy Families" conference held in the Twin City Quarter March 17 & 18. More than 50 workshops were offered at the annual gathering, which was sponsored by the North Carolina Division of Social Services.

North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper made the trip to present the awards to Hunt and Blue Ribbon Parent Award Winner Beth Taylor at the March 18 luncheon, which was held at the Embassy Suites hotel.

"I want to say thank you to so many people out there who know the pain of child abuse and neglect and who are working everyday ... to make a real difference in the lives of children," Cooper stated. "It excites me what you're doing



Beth Taylor

out there to try to protect kids."

Taylor, a resident of Old Fort. She was honored for her involvement in FAST

(Families and Schools Together) and the Circle of Parents, a parental support group.

A Springs Global employee, she convinced the company's president to help both organizations last year. At her urging, the blanket manufacturer donated 400 blankets to impoverished local families.

"Actually being able to help - that's been awesome," said the soft spoken Taylor.

She is a longtime member of FAST who volunteers as a parent partner. She joined the group in 2000, hoping for a better way to discipline her son. Though honored by the award, Taylor says she has already reaped the benefits of her involvement.

"If you're abused as a child, you don't want to put your child through that so you've got to break that cycle," she commented, her eyes tearing up. "This program has helped me break that cycle."

Bikers

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life.

"It seemed like hours," she said of the time that transpired as she waited to hear if her son had survived. "They said his heart was so weak it couldn't beat on its own."

His kidney function has since plummeted as well, leaving Neal and his family hoping for not one, but two miracles.

"Even though I feel like sometimes I am going to fall on my face, I just have to remind myself that it's in God's hands," Myers commented. "I feel optimistic that everything's going to turn out (all right)."

Since December, Neal's days have been spent at home, in the hospital, or somewhere in between. The heart failure contributes to a constant nausea that has left him unable to eat on many occasions. Other symptoms have caused him to be hospitalized twice this year. He has dropped more than 30 pounds.

To add insult to injury, the bills keep piling up. Neal is insured and on disability. Yet the cost of his medications and doctor's visits, coupled with the gas it takes to get to the transplant specialist in Chapel Hill, continue to mount.

"It's always continual," Myers said with a sigh. "I just tell (the creditors) they can't get blood out of a turnip. I just have to pay them what I can and that's that."

Recognizing the challenge that Lisa and Robert Myers are up against, friends are pitching in. Carolina Cruisers Motorcycle Club - which the Myers helped found - is hosting a special fundraiser for Neal.

"Our club is mainly to serve our community," declared Cruisers President Donnell Warren. "We're trying to help people when we can."

The club will host its Poker Run Benefit Ride April 19, traveling more than 160 miles on Neal's behalf. Registration fees garnered from participating riders will go towards Neal's expenses, Warren says. The group hopes to raise \$1,500 for the cause, he added.

The trip will be peppered with stops along the way,



Photo by Layla Farmer

Carolina Cruisers Donnell Warren, From left, Don Ellis and John Cunningham, with Warren's four-year-old grandson.

where riders will draw cards from a deck. The riders with the highest hand and the lowest hand will win prizes. All riders will return to their original starting point for fellowship and a meal provided by the Cruisers.

The Carolina Cruisers are accustomed to giving. They help out several times a year at various community events, including the Boston Round Up and the Peace Toys for War Toys program at the William C. Sims Center.

But this time, its personal. "We know a lot of bike

guys who (would) like to do something like this - like to ride and like to help this family," Warren remarked. "We wanted to do something for somebody, so we figured we needed to start with our club first."

For more information about the Poker Run Benefit Ride, contact Warren at (336) 413-0212. Donations to the Neal fund can be sent to John Cunningham, 49 Arita Circle, Winston-Salem, 27105. Make checks payable to Carolina Cruisers M/C.

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