

Good gift,
bad gift



20-point
comeback!



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THE CHRONICLE

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Fighting to remain open

Job of historic visually impaired person in jeopardy

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

IFB Solutions (formerly Industries for the Blind) is currently taking court action to protect its contract to provide eyeglasses to veterans.

IFB Optical has had a contract with Veterans Affairs for 16 years. It currently fills eyeglass prescriptions to 38 VA hospitals and serves more than 240,000 veterans annu-

ally. IFB got the contract as an AbilityOne organization that provides employment to people who are blind or visually impaired.

PDS Consultants, a veteran-owned New Jersey company, filed a suit in August over its consideration in the AbilityOne program, asking for an injunction on VA optical contracts. According to IFB, this would essentially shutdown their optical laboratory.

"We're participating in a vigorous defense with the Department of Veterans Affairs, who of course, feels that they are properly awarding contracts," said IFB COO Dan Kelly.

IFB Optical has 88 employees, including 45 who are

blind and seven veterans. These employees include Damarrious Bowens, who recently became one of only three visually impaired people in the country to earn American Board of Opticianry (ABO) certification.

Bowens has been an employee at IFB for five years. He's worked in different departments doing many different jobs before joining customer service in IFB Optical. He currently reviews incoming orders to ensure their accuracy using technology to greatly magnify the words on customer paperwork and his screen.

Bowens studied for hours a day for three months for the certification test, which he passed on the first try. He's

See IFB on A2

THE SOUNDS OF CHRISTMAS



Photo by Todd Luck

Rockin' around City Hall's Christmas tree

Salem College's Director of Choral Activities Sonja Sepulveda leads the SuperTonics in singing "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" at Winston-Salem City Hall on Monday, Dec. 12. It was one of several songs the pop a cappella student group sang. The holiday music series at City Hall, 101 N. Main St., continues today with singing by choruses from East Forsyth High School at 11:30 a.m. today and Reagan High School tomorrow at 12:30 p.m.

Blue backs independent redistricting commission

BY CASH MICHAELS
FOR THE CHRONICLE

Saying that "people need relief from this ... runaway government as soon as possible," state Sen. Dan Blue (D-Wake), the Senate minority leader, says he's in favor of establishing an independent redistricting commission by 2020.

That's so that the partisan advantage that the party in power always seeks in redrawing the voting districts is removed, and as North Carolina begins to have more competitive elections for both the state legislature and Congress.

"And it needs to be in such a way that the people representing all of us are elected in a constitutional manner," Blue maintained.

Currently, because Republicans won a majority of seats in the state House and Senate in 2010, they were able to draw the redistricting maps for the legislature and Congress, which were suppose to govern elections for the balance of the decade until 2020.

However, earlier this year, the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the 2011 redistricting maps were unconstitutional because Republicans "staked and packed" African-Americans into just a few voting districts, denying them their right to influence elections in other districts. This is otherwise known as racial gerrymandering.

"You have to believe that somewhere [the Republican legislative leadership] got in their mind that anything is fair as long as it keeps them in power," Blue said. Earlier this week, Blue held a press conference at the start of the special session for disaster relief, warning the GOP not to even consider adding two more seats to the NC Supreme Court just to offset the election victory of Democrat Justice-elect Mike Morgan. This action had been heavily rumored.

The federal appeals court allowed the gerrymandered legislative maps to be used for the 2016 general elections, but just recently ordered that state lawmakers, when they return for the long session in January, must redraw the voting districts constitutionally by March 2017, and then once they're approved by the appellate court, hold special election primaries either at the end of August 2017, or the beginning of September, and then special legislative elections in November 2017.

See Redistricting on A6



Blue

Rodney Ellis' legacy will live on at Philo-Hill

School board votes unanimously to rename classroom in his honor

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Soon a classroom at Philo-Hill Middle School will be renamed to honor the life and legacy of Rodney Ellis.

Ellis, who passed away earlier this year after a brief illness, began his teaching career in 1999 as an eighth-grade language arts teacher at Atkins Middle School (now



Ellis

Winston-Salem Preparatory Academy).

After serving as the president of the Forsyth County Association of Educators (FCAE), Ellis was elected to the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) president in 2012. During his tenure as NCAE president and as a teacher, Ellis made it his mission to inspire

See Legacy on A2

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