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THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

THE WEEK OF MARCH 13, 1997

VOLUME 22 NO. 26

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Spending would prioritize schools' overhaul

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Supt. Eric Smith wants to fund a major shift in priorities and practice with an additional \$18.5 million in local spending for the 93,000-student system next year.

"This system does not need touch-up and polish," Smith said in his 1997-98 budget introduction. "What it requires is a major reformation to promote, solid, academic achievement."

The 13.2 percent increase in funding includes \$7.6 million to open two new schools, a 2,600-student enrollment increase,

mandatory pay increases and inflation. Another \$2.3 million would be redirected into new areas.

But \$10.9 million in new funding would be used for eight major initiatives to meet Smith's Framework for Academic Success.

The superintendent has set several specific goals by the year 2001, including reducing the racial, socioeconomic and gender disparities in achievement to no more than 10 percent. For example, white students achievement benchmarks are about twice those of African American students.

Other goals including raising

Scholastic Achievement Test scores 23 points to the national average of 1,013, increasing the percentage of third-graders reading at grade level to 85 percent, up from 61 percent and increasing the number of students taking advanced placement and International Baccalaureate courses from 27 percent to 33 percent.

The school system's budget



Smith

would total \$516 million, up from \$478 million this year. Most of the money would be funded by state and federal governments, \$332.4 million and \$19 million, respectively. Local spending would total \$158.5 million, up from \$140 million.

The added spending is critical, Smith said.

"Charlotte-Mecklenburg has a long distance to go in increasing achievement levels," he said. "This system is in trouble when it comes to achievement levels."

Hilton L'Orange, the system's assistant superintendent and financial officer, pointed out that per-pupil spending in the

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Where an additional \$18.5 million would go:

- 2 new schools, mandatory pay raises and inflation (\$7.6M)
- 8 major initiatives (\$10.9M)



SOURCE/CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS

GRAPHIC/W. MICHAEL HARRIS

Simms headed to L.A.

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Bill Simms, one of Charlotte's high profile business leaders, is headed back to Los Angeles to accept a major promotion.

Simms, president of TransAmerica Life's Risk Management Products and Services Group, has been named to head the newly-created Insurance Products Division. He will oversee sales and marketing of TransAmerica Life insurance products in the United States and Asia.

He will manage 1,200 employees — up from 350 in Charlotte — and supervise new product and market development.

"I am extremely pleased to have a chance to have an additional impact on my company," Simms said Wednesday. "It is going to be challenging, but it's what you strive for in your career."

Simms admitted he and his wife, Johanna, and 10-month-old daughter, Julianna, will miss Charlotte.

"My wife and I are extremely sad," Simms said. "We love this city. We have tremendous friends here. We are going to miss it. It is a different lifestyle...a family-oriented environment."

Simms said he will be return

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A second chance



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Phyllis Martin (far right) has a second chance at building a productive life in the Cummings Avenue area, which is undergoing a revitalization effort by attracting carefully-screened residents. With Martin are Fighting Back Cluster One coordinator Donnie Martin and Tonja Adams of the Mecklenburg Structured Day probation program.

Revitalizing Cummings Ave.

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Phyllis Martin feels like she's got a second chance these days.

Martin and her 13-year-old son have just moved into her new apartment and she is working regularly. She has also completed a major step in

her court-ordered probation on a drug sales conviction.

"I was really at the point of a nervous breakdown," said the Lumberton, N.C., native who moved to Charlotte 10 years ago. "I didn't know where to go. I did not have a job. Once you go through the court system, nobody wants to take a chance on you."

Donnie Moore, Fighting Back's Cluster One coordinator, took a chance on Martin. He thinks she's just the kind of person who can help revitalize the Cummings Avenue area, one of the city's most troubled.

Moore and Tonja Adams of the Mecklenburg County

Structured Day probation program think they have hit on a way to revitalize a community and lives.

Moore said he is sure that Martin and others like her can, with the proper assistance and support, be valuable and contributing members of a revitalized Cummings Avenue area.

"People with substance abuse problems don't want to

See NEIGHBOR on page 2A

Woodard to chair board

First black woman to head city's civil service panel

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Valerie Woodard, a Public Defender's office investigator, has been elected chair of the Civil Service Board, which reviews disciplinary actions within the police and fire departments.

Woodard, a second vice president of the N.C. NAACP, is the first African American woman to head the board. Former Charlotte police officer Rudy Torrence was the first African American to chair the board.

Election of a new chair was necessary following the removal of former chair William Kennedy after city officials learned he no longer lived in Mecklenburg County.

Woodard noted the changes in the board, which now includes three minorities.

University Park Baptist Church pastor Claude Alexander is also on the board

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Housekeeper doesn't think twice about good deed



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Tania Myers found and returned a wallet containing \$1,300 last week at the Arena Inn on Independence Boulevard. Her act of honesty resulted in a \$300 reward and a party in her honor Saturday.

By Kaia Zawadi
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Honesty is still the best policy, and Tania Myers has been rewarded for it.

Myers, a housekeeper at the Arena Inn on Independence Boulevard, was doing her daily routine of cleaning rooms. When she stripped a bed to change the sheets, a wallet landed at the foot of the bed.

"Oh my God," she said. Myers looked inside and found that there was an awfully large amount of dollar bills.

"I immediately took the wallet down to the front desk and gave it to the person working," she said. We sat down and counted it." A total of \$1,300 was counted and the wallet was safely

locked away for the owner, Jim MacCallum of Charlotte, to claim.

Myers will be honored at a private party at the Tropical Room on Saturday. "We will present her with a plaque," MacCallum said. "I don't think she could be rewarded enough."

MacCallum, owner of Charlotte Sash and Door and Golden Window, was returning from an out-of-town trip when he stopped by the hotel to take a shower before a home-improvement exhibit at the Merchandise Mart.

"I noticed that my wallet was missing after I parked my car to attend the show," MacCallum said.

MacCallum reported the wallet missing to the front desk. At

that time, no one knew of its whereabouts. When Myers returned it, MacCallum was contacted by manager Tom Kalyn to pick it up. "It must have fallen out when I changed my clothes," MacCallum said. "I thought 'oh well, it's gone.'"

The thought of keeping \$1,300 is very tempting for most people, but Myers felt differently.

"I knew that there was a lot of money when I found it," she said. "That's why I didn't count it then. I didn't know what purpose that money was to be used for, but it must have been important. Jim planned to deposit the money in the bank that afternoon. I would not have been able to live with myself if I

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