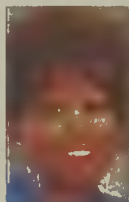


Budget shortfall splits debate into 2 camps

Cut services or raise taxes, fees

Continued from page 1A

pace increases. Mitchell believes the stakes are highest for low-income residents who are most likely to need the county's help.



Woodard

"What they're doing is gutting county services," he said. "I'm disgusted. They're passing it on to those who can least afford it."

Samuelson, who is running for an at-large seat this year, said the county should look carefully at cutting costs without slicing services. As property values — and the accompanying tax bill — rise, the county should take steps to keep Mecklenburg affordable.

"It's not just a Republican philosophy," she said. "It's a matter of middle class families moving to Cabarrus or Union County."

The county's standard of living will suffer without maintenance of current services, Mitchell argues. Keeping the status quo will require a tax hike sooner or later.

"If they keep going this way, it'll take between a 5-7 cent tax hike just to maintain

what we have," he said.

"We've gotten accustomed to living in Charlotte and Mecklenburg where people expect a standard (of living) but we're doing the moonwalk on this one," Woodard said. "We're going backward."

Either way, the county will have to make the bottom line work. Samuelson contends it can be done without hurting lower-income people.

"I'm not saying yank services from the lowest of the low," she said. "I'm not looking to be a cold, heartless Republican and hurt people. I'm saying let's look at other areas."

Although Republicans hold a 5-4 advantage, Democrats are hoping to sway one vote over to their column. The most likely candidate is Chairman Tom Cox, who is leaving the board in

November and has demonstrated a willingness to buck his fellow conservatives.

"If they're willing to come back with a budget that will continue to dismantle county services, I can't support it," Mitchell said. "Tom will have to be the one to rescue county government because the rest of them aren't going to do it. I've told him he doesn't want his legacy to be the chairman who let Mecklenburg County go down."



Mitchell

COMMUNITY NOTES

Precinct meeting at East Stonewall

Garden Park/Northwood Park/Northwood Hills neighborhood Association will sponsor a precinct meeting at East Stonewall AME Zion Church, 1729 Griens Grove Road at 7 p.m. today.

For information, call Mary Gill at (704) 394-5928.

Mecklenburg Department of Social Services will sponsor a foster/adoptive parent rally Saturday from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. at Southview Recreation Center, 1720 Vilma St.

Rally sponsors from Youth and Family Services want to give potential adoptive and

foster families the opportunity to learn about children awaiting adoption and foster care. The rally will include speakers, games, entertainment and food.

Loving Care Adult Day Care and Health Center is hosting a black-tie fundraiser April 24 at 7917-D Moores Chapel Road.

The black-tie gala starts at 8 p.m. and includes free food and live entertainment with Middle Class Band. Admission is \$10 and setups will be sold. For information, call (704) 391-2776.

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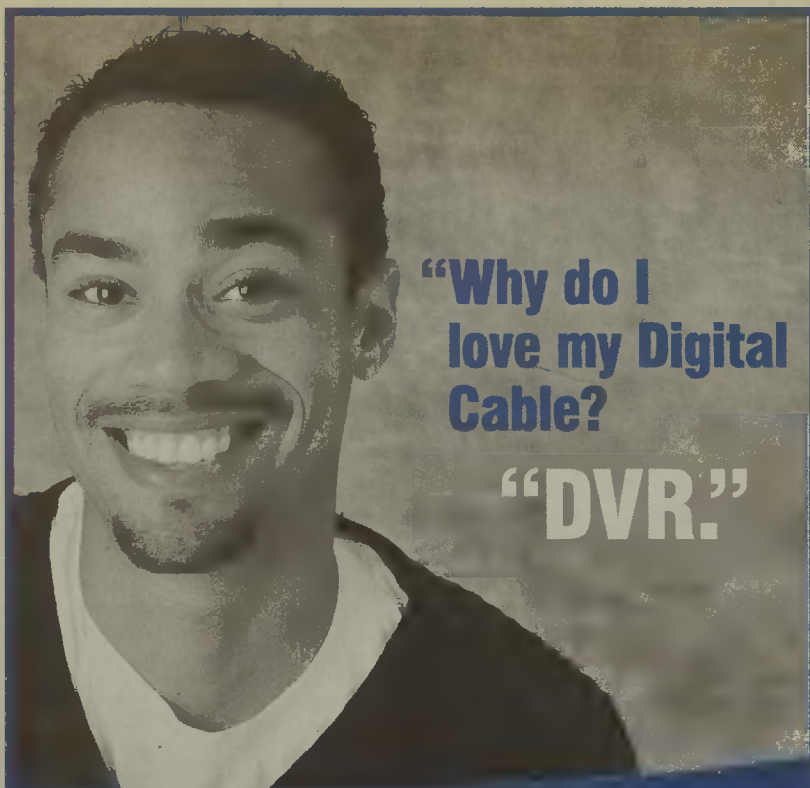
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