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BILL STUDENC PHOTO

The Marshall depot awaits word of its fate — a wrecking ball or renovation into a museum of Western North Carolina railroad history.

Marshall Still Trying To Salvage Old Depot

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

The town of Marshall is negotiating with Southern Railway officials over the future of the historic train depot.

Those talks come after the N.C. Utilities Commission's refusal earlier this year to enter the dispute between Marshall and the railroad company.

Marshall Mayor Anita Ward is corresponding with Southern Railway officials in an attempt to convince them to allow the depot, at least 45 years old, to remain in its current location.

The company was on the verge of destroying the depot last year when a group of Marshall area residents organized to try to save the structure.

Marshall officials would like to turn the depot, closed in May 1986, into a museum illustrating the impact of the railroads on Western North Carolina.

The railroad has said it would sell the building to the town, but only if it is moved to another loca-

tion. Railway officials say the depot's proximity to both the railroad tracks and U.S. 25-70 represents a safety hazard and potential lawsuits.

But Marshall officials say they cannot afford the expense of moving the building, and members of the Friends of the Marshall Depot group say that moving the building would lessen its historical significance.

The town asked the N.C. Utilities Commission to enter the dispute, and commission members came to Marshall in December for a public hearing on the issue.

The commission has since found that, because the Marshall depot is no longer serving the public convenience, the commission has no jurisdiction over the building.

"Because the facility is no longer serving a public purpose, the examiner is of the opinion, and so finds and concludes, that the commission has no authority to regulate its disposition," the commission ruled.

But, in a section of its ruling entitled "Further Comments," the commission also stated: "The evidence presented at the hearing showed that there is public interest in the town of Marshall in preserving the depot . . . Because of the interest shown at the hearing in preserving the building, the examiner hopes that some satisfactory resolution of this issue can be found."

Marshall's mayor is also hoping for a satisfactory resolution, and she says there is a good chance that negotiations with the railroad company may prove successful.

Ward said she has discussed with Southern Railway officials the possibility of the company deeding the building to the town, and leasing the property to the town on an annual basis for a small, token amount.

Attorneys for the railroad have drawn up an agreement, which is now being examined by real estate and insurance experts.

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Security Is Tight At Chandler Retrieal

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

ASHEVILLE - Security measures were extremely tight in Buncombe County Courthouse as the retrial of Andrew "Junior" Chandler, the 29-year-old Marshall man charged with sexually molesting seven Madison County children, began this week.

Several deputies with the Buncombe County Sheriff's Department stood guard outside the lone door to the fifth-floor courtroom as four of the seven children, aged 2 to 5 at the time of the alleged assault, took the witness stand Tuesday.

No spectators were allowed in the courtroom during the children's testimony, as was the case in Chandler's first trial — which ended in a mistrial Feb. 2, when a Madison County jury was unable to reach a unanimous verdict. The children's testimony was continuing at presstime Wednesday.

But, unlike Chandler's first trial, the various factions involved in the emotion-filled case have been kept

away from each other. Superior Court Judge Douglas Albright sequestered the prosecution's witnesses, keeping them away from courtroom spectators and defense witnesses.

Several members of Chandler's family — although not as many as attended the trial in Marshall — have traveled to Asheville for the retrial. Albright ordered the family members to remain on a separate floor of the courthouse while the children testified Tuesday and Wednesday.

Deputies, armed with metal detectors, searched all spectators before allowing them into the courtroom during Monday's jury selection proceedings. The searching of spectators should continue throughout the course of the trial.

The security precautions are apparently the result of rumors of weapons being brought into Madison County Courthouse during Chandler's first trial. Parents of some of the alleged victims also reported receiving threats during that trial.

Superior Court Judge James A.



Andrew 'Junior' Chandler . . . on trial again

Beatty Jr. cited the security problems as a major reason for ordering Chandler's retrial moved to Buncombe County. Prosecutors, in requesting the change of venue, also

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Ponder: Madison Should Withdraw From District

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Democratic patriarch Zeno Ponder admits he'd like Madison County to secede from the judicial district where he has been charged with conspiring to profit unlawfully from inside information obtained when he sat on the N.C. Board of Transportation.

But Ponder says his latest conspiracy indictment has nothing to do with recent discussion that Madison County should pull out of the 24th Judicial District and join with Buncombe County.

Ponder says the proposal is merely a matter of geography.

"To me, it just makes a whole lot of sense," he said. "If you have a civil or criminal matter, it would be a heck of a lot easier to go on a four-lane highway to Asheville than a winding, narrow, mountain road to Boone (the

'I'm not in favor of adding any additional counties to our district.'

Robert W. Fisher

Buncombe County District Attorney

main office of the 24th Judicial District). If anybody questions that, they ought to try to drive to Boone."

Ponder has previously contended that 24th Judicial District Attorney J. Thomas Rusher, a Republican, submitted a bill of indictment to a Madison County grand jury in an attempt to oust a powerful Democratic rival.

That grand jury indicted Ponder on a charge of conspiring to profit illegally by secretly purchasing land in the path of a proposed road linking Marshall to the communities of Trust and Spring Creek. Ponder is accused

of using inside information available to him through his position on the state Board of Transportation and setting up a secret trust fund to buy some 300 acres of land in 1982.

The recent emergence of talk about Madison County seceding from Rusher's district has led to some speculation that Ponder's indictment may be behind the move. Ponder calls that speculation unfounded.

The proposal first surfaced last month when Madison County Democrats gathered for annual precinct meetings.

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Tobacco Growers Optimistic As '87 Season Draws Near

By ADAM SEESSEL
The News and Observer

The 1987 growing season is upon North Carolina tobacco farmers, and they're facing it with high spirits.

"There's more optimism than there has been in probably six to seven years," said T. Carlton Blalock, executive director of the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina. "They feel we've turned the corner. They're optimistic in the direction in which we're going."

Blalock and others said the leaf growers, most of whom will finish putting their seedlings in the ground

this month, were optimistic for two reasons: A good water supply and a revamped tobacco program that proved last year it was a money-maker.

The outlook for other field crops is mixed, however, and many growers remain troubled by high interest rates, low crop prices and declining land values.

Leaf growers have been blessed this year with plentiful rains and occasional snows, in stark contrast to the early stages of last year, the beginning of the infamous 1986 drought.

"The best thing is, those ponds are

ready," said W.K. Collins, a specialist in charge of crop science for the N.C. Agricultural Extension Service.

It's been so wet, in fact, that potato and cabbage planting has been delayed slightly, although agriculture officials say the hold-up probably will not have serious consequences.

In addition to the wet weather, leaf growers are confident the new federal price support program will put more money in their pockets.

Under the new program, the government guarantees farmers a

lower price than in the past, but also charges farmers less to run the program — and most farmers saw their net income increase under the program in 1986.

"For the past two years, there's been so much concern about the stability of the tobacco program that growers have really been sort of down in the dumps," said Gerald F. Peedin, the extension service's tobacco specialist. "Now we have what we think's a workable program, so they're eager to go."

Peanut and cotton farmers, both of which have solid federal support pro-

grams, also seem upbeat, experts said. But other growers are not. Corn and soybean prices, for example, continue to look unfavorable for growers because of the crops' chronic oversupply.

"Those that grow only tobacco, corn and soybeans are saying that my tobacco is the only thing I can count on to feed my family," Peedin said.

An oversupply of pesticides and other supplies will keep production costs down this year, but many farmers remain caught in a web of large debts, low income, declining

land values and scarce credit.

"So many still have their backs to the wall," Collins said.

That dampens the mood of many of the state's growers — even some of those who have a profitable 1987 to look forward to, Collins said.

"It's kind of like fighting in a war — they're a lot of soldiers that have fallen," he said. "There's been so many people that have dropped off the scene, and it's on the farmers' minds."

Weaverville Business Deals In Sight, Sound

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

If your communication skills are lacking or if the thought of going in front of a camera leaves you paralyzed with terror, help may have arrived in the Weaverville area.

Mountain Bear Productions and its sister company, Personal Communications Development, has opened an Union Chapel Road to assist individuals, small groups, advertising and broadcasting companies with the recording of commercials, narration, lectures and personal projects.

Based back in the hills, Mountain Bear Productions and Personal Communications Development is designed to give the most inexperienced person a private, comfortable, in-studio and video personal communication skills and career. Ken Mays

Mays moved to the Weaverville area from Tampa, Fla., where he did everything from stand-up comedy to radio to creative consultant work in broadcasting.

The Mays family came to Weaverville last spring to put a long-term plan into motion. The plan includes using Mountain Bear as a creative base for the people of the area, as well as for outside advertising agencies and businesses.

The Personal Communications Development program is a video-based one-on-one course teaching the art of effective communication from a philosophy of human enrichment, Mays said.

According to Mays, just about anyone can benefit from the course. Those who work with his clients to re-



ANNE KITCHELL PHOTO

Ken Mays of Mountain Bear Productions sits behind the board of the recording studio in the Weaverville communications company.

Steen, Capps Disagree Over Special Meetings

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Commissioner Reese Steen served notice Friday that he will no longer attend special daytime meetings of the Madison County Board of Commissioners called at the last minute.

Steen told Robert Capps — who, as chairman of the board of commissioners, is responsible for calling meetings — that the large number of special meetings has disrupted his dentistry practice in Mars Hill.

Capps, on the other hand, has scheduled meetings around his work schedule at Capps Funeral Home in Mars Hill, Steen said.

"Reese Steen has a business, too," he said.

Capps said that he was not purposely trying to disrupt Steen's work schedule.

Steen's comments came as the result of frequent special meetings, held during the day, during the past few months.

Steen said he was the only commissioner present during a recent meeting scheduled with state officials to discuss the county's landfill problems. A meeting of the county commissioners with employees of the Madison County Emergency Management Service was canceled so that Capps could attend "an important meeting," Steen said.

"That important meeting turned out to be a little league baseball meeting," he said. "I don't think that your little league baseball meetings should take precedence over my landfill and my family."

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