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Rusher Refuses Audit Probe

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

District Attorney J. Thomas Rusher has refused to investigate Madison County's past financial practices, saying there is not enough evidence of criminal activity to warrant his office's involvement.

Rusher, after conferring last week with the N.C. Local Government Commission and the N.C. Attorney General's Office, announced Tuesday that the Madison County Board of Commissioners should resolve itself any problems revealed by a controversial audit report.

Rusher, district attorney for the 24th Judicial District, also reiterated his policy of allowing governmental bodies to decide if an investigation of public officials is justified.

"It is my opinion that, short of circumstances clearly suggesting a violation of criminal law or short of a specific request that there be a criminal investigation, then I must leave these matters to be solved by the Madison County Board of Commissioners," Rusher said in a prepared statement.

That means unless the current commissioners specifically ask for a criminal investigation, allegations of the possible misappropriation of county funds will not be investigated.

Madison County commissioners learned Jan. 12 that the number of financial transactions involving county funds increased noticeably during

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BILL STUDENC PHOTO

Jerry Gunter of the Revere community asks Madison County commissioners to investigate the Department of Social Services.

Chandler Supporters Want Investigation Of Social Services

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Members of the Revere community asked the Madison County Board of Commissioners Monday night for a thorough investigation of the county's Department of Social Services.

The request is apparently the result of the recent conviction of Andrew "Junior" Chandler, a 29-year-old resident of the Revere area, on 12 child sexual molestation charges.

Charges against Chandler and his later conviction were due, in large part, to an investigation by the Department of Social Services of complaints from the parents of abused Madison County children.

Jerry Gunter, the Revere man who spoke with the commissioners Mon-

day night, is also behind a petition drive calling for a re-investigation of the 1986 child sexual abuse case.

"I'm speaking for most of the people in this courtroom," said Gunter, a cousin of Chandler's wife, Debra Lynn Chandler. "I want to introduce the board to allegations concerning the Department of Social Services. I don't want to go into details about the problems, but we want the board to look into the problems."

The majority of the nearly 100 people at Monday's meeting were from the Revere community. Many of those residents will be speaking privately about their concerns with commissioners, Gunter said.

"We are calling for a general, thorough investigation of the depart-

ment, how it's been run and its employees," he said.

"The people here tonight, and a lot of them who didn't make it tonight, believe that one of the county's most critical departments should be checked into. We think it's time to take action and we ask the board to look into these problems and make the necessary corrections. That's about all I have to say," he said.

The courtroom broke out into thunderous applause after Gunter's comments.

The commissioners said nothing about the call for an investigation, and proceeded with the next item on their agenda. That prompted Gunter to rise and ask for an assurance that

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School Daze

Board Of Education Faces Snow Day Problems; Teachers May Have To Work 1 Saturday

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

The Madison County Boards of Education learned Monday it may be in violation of the state mandatory requirement governing the 180-school day year -- a problem which could cost the county school system nearly \$150,000.

During the regular school board meeting Monday night, Superinten-

dent Bobby Edwards told board members he had received information from the state Board of Education's budget director outlining the hazardous weather policy.

The policy states that a school unit must have missed 15 days, plus made an effort to make up the lost days, before the state board will consider a waiver of the mandatory number of class days.

Madison County schools were closed 12 days due to bad weather during the current school year. The previous school board agreed to waive one day, while the new board waived one day and requested the state board to waive one day. Board members said they believed this would be in compliance with the law.

But the state hazardous weather policy requires each school unit to

make an effort to compensate for lost class time by using Saturdays or vacation time.

According to Edwards, Madison County teachers have two mandated work days left on the calendar, but without a waiver from the state Board of Education, students would also have to have one more day of classes.

If the county board does not adhere

to the state requirement of 180 days (less two days allowed to local school boards), the county stands to lose state funds amounting to nearly \$150,000 in salaries and operational costs, Edwards said.

The school board should have either called students back early from Easter vacation or should have made an effort to hold classes on

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Mars Hill Board Warned Of Hazard

By JUDY PITILLO
News Record Correspondent

The Mars Hill Board of Aldermen learned Monday night that propane gas tanks in the downtown area could be a disaster waiting to happen.

Bill Zink, assistant fire chief with the Mars Hill Volunteer Fire Department, warned town officials of the potential hazard posed by several propane tanks located in the alley behind Main Street.

"Propane tanks of this size can be hurled a half a mile," Zink said during a presentation concerning the water supply necessary to provide adequate fire protection to the town.

"What we are worried about is the big fire, and it is coming," he said.

Using a videotape of a propane gas leak that occurred at the Magnavox Corp. plant in Skyland, Zink said that the amount of water needed to simply disperse the highly explosive vapors of a 500-gallon propane tank required 800 gallons of water per minute for four hours, or a total of 192,000 gallons of water during that four-hour

period.

A similar problem exists with the propane tanks in Mars Hill, Zink said.

Mars Hill Fire Chief Eddie Fox told the board that he has determined the propane tanks to be a hazard, and has proposed that downtown businesses which have propane tanks consolidate into one large tank.

The large tank would then be buried in the ground, and separate meters provided for each business, Fox said.

The buildings are old, the pipelines in poor condition and the alley too narrow, he said. In addition, there is also a hedge located nearby, and that also constitutes a fire hazard, he said.

The propane tank hazard highlights the general problem the town has in meeting requirements of the Insurance Services Office, Zink said.

The Insurance Services Office establishes the rates for fire insurance, and this ISO rate is re-evaluated every 15 years, he said.

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This way to Hot Springs, scene of this weekend's homecoming festivities.

Hot Springs Gears For Homecoming

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

If you're not planning on attending the Hot Springs Homecoming Celebration this weekend, you'll miss out on what may well be the most fun available in this part of the state.

Traditional mountain music, clogging and crafts, free rafting trips on the French Broad River, hot air balloon rides and enough food to make you forget all about your diet are just some of the attractions at the festivities.

Karen Bloomquist, Miss North Carolina, will be on hand. So will U.S. Congressman James McClure Clarke and George Olsen of the U.S. Forest Service.

Hot Springs is shifting into high gear to welcome folks from all over to what homecoming organizers believe will become an annual event.

"Since we got the idea for the homecoming, the committee has met over 20 times to organize and pool ideas," said homecoming.

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Madison, Haywood Proposal Dropped

By RICHARD SHUMATE
The Mountaineer

Democratic leaders in Madison County want to secede from their judicial district, but a suggestion that they join Haywood County's district has been dropped after drawing strong opposition.

The idea of putting Madison, Haywood, Yancey and Jackson counties in a new judicial district was first suggested by state Sen. Dennis Winner, D-Buncombe, at a meeting last week with Sen. Charles Hipps, D-Waynesville, and Sen. R.P. "Bo" Thomas, D-Hendersonville.

Hipps and Thomas represent Haywood County in the Senate, and Winner represents Madison and Yancey.

But Winner said Friday that because of their strong opposition to the idea, he has decided not to pursue it.

"I ditched it," he said, adding that he will not pursue any other plans for taking Madison County out of its present district.

"I think we've discussed every option, and there's no consensus," Winner said, who characterized what he discussed with Hipps and Thomas as "ideas" rather than formal proposals or suggestions. "As far as I'm concerned, that's the end of it."

Thomas said, at Tuesday's meeting, Winner also suggested an alternate plan, which would have taken Madison and Yancey away from their current district and added them to the 28th District, which now consists of McDowell, Rutherford, Polk, Henderson and Transylvania counties.

Hipps and Thomas, who also represent several of those counties, rejected that proposal as well. Thomas said that would have made the 28th District too large and required hiring of additional staff.

The Madison County Democratic Party recently adopted a resolution calling for Madison's withdrawal from the 28th Judicial District, which currently includes Madison, Yancey,

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5 Million Steps

Men Walk Trail On Its Anniversary

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

One of Western North Carolina's most treasured attractions is the Appalachian Trail. Stretching 2,150 miles from Georgia to Maine, the trail follows the route of the early settlers and migrating Indian tribes, passing through the town of Hot Springs.

To commemorate the golden anniversary of the trail, two hikers will spend five months walking the entire length of the mountains terrain in an effort to promote the trail.

Daniel Wingfoot of Conyers, Ga.,

and Ken Thompson of Huron, Ohio, arrived at The Inn in Hot Springs Saturday afternoon one month after leaving their starting point in Spring Mountain, Ga. The two expect to complete the hike Sept. 12.

When asked about their experiences on the trail, Wingfoot said he noted the sense of community among hikers.

"We've both had to adapt to what you find out there," said Wingfoot. "Hiking the trail is an experience. Everyday you meet different people

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More Sex Abuse Charges Are Filed

A 25-year-old Marshall man has been charged with sexually molesting three children, aged 4, 5 and 6, including one girl involved in a previous child sexual abuse case.

The Madison County Sheriff's Department has charged Ricky Chandler of Skyway Drive, Marshall, with three counts of first-degree sexual offense and three counts of taking indecent liberties with a minor.

Chandler was held Tuesday on \$150,000 bond following a bond hearing in Madison County District Court.

He has been charged with sexually abusing the children between June

20-22 last year, according to authorities.

One of those girls is one of seven Marshall Day Care Center students involved in the recently completed trial of Andrew "Junior" Chandler, 29, a former van driver with the Madison County Transportation Authority.

Junior Chandler was convicted of 12 child abuse charges and received two consecutive life terms in prison, plus 21 additional years.

A charge of first-degree sexual offense carries a life sentence.

Jim Baker, assistant district at-

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North Buncombe To Host Prison

From Staff Reports

A year of controversy came to an end Tuesday when the Council of State approved a 309-acre tract in North Buncombe County as the site for a replacement for crumbling Craggy Prison.

After postponing the decision for nearly a month, the council, in an 8-2 vote, accepted the recommendation of the State Budget Office and selected land owned by Asheville developer W.C. Johnson and located in a horseshoe bend of the French Broad River.

That decision came despite intense opposition to the site from nearby residents of the North Buncombe area. Landowners complained that the location of a prison near their neighborhood would decrease property values in the area.

But state officials said they ran into opposition at almost every other site they looked at -- including land in Madison County and a tract near Weaver-

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Kenneth Thompson, Ken Thompson, and Daniel Wingfoot, Daniel Wingfoot of Conyers, Ga.,