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Interstate Project Discussed

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

A group of Western North Carolina officials traveled to Johnson City, Tenn., last week to discuss the possibility of converting U.S. 23 through Madison County into an interstate highway.

Although there are currently no plans - or funds - to widen U.S. 23 from Mars Hill to the North Carolina-Tennessee line, some local officials say they feel an interstate highway would boost Madison County's economy.

"This road could be a real bonanza to Madison County," said Madison Commissioner Reese Steen, one of a group of county officials and business leaders to attend last week's meeting at the Johnson City Country Club. "We're kind of at the end of the world out here."

Steen, Russell Blevins of the Mars Hill Planning Board, Jerry Plemmons of French Broad Electrical Membership Corp., Marshall businessman Lawrence Ponder and Weaverville Town Manager Charles Horne were among some 45 representatives from Tennessee and North Carolina who met last Wednesday to discuss the proposed interstate.



BILL STUDENC PHOTO

U.S. 23 at the North Carolina-Tennessee line is a narrow, winding mountain road.

Tennessee already has plans in the works for the improvement of U.S. 23 on its side of the state line. Legislators there last year appropriated \$97 million to widen a 15-mile stretch of two-lane highway between Johnson City and Sams Gap at the state line. That work is scheduled to be complete by 1992.

North Carolina, on the other hand, has no immediate plans for the widening of a 10-mile section of U.S. 23 from Mars Hill to Sams Gap. The state Transportation Improvement Program, outlining North Carolina's road projects for the next 10 years, includes no money for the widening of

U.S. 23, although it does call for a study of the proposed improvements.

H.F. Robinson, chancellor emeritus at Western Carolina University, said that motorists traveling the highway in 1992 would have a four-lane road in Tennessee and a winding, two-lane mountain road in North Carolina. That, Robinson said, would be embarrassing to North Carolina.

North Carolina officials at last week's meeting agreed that the improvement of U.S. 23 - and its potential designation as an interstate -

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Auditor To Examine '86-'87 Record Books

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Madison County commissioners will wait for a complete audit of the 1986-87 fiscal year before they decide what to do about the possible mishandling of county funds by former officials.

Upon the advice of county attorney Larry Leake, the Madison County Board of Commissioners agreed Monday to ask its auditing firm to specifically address questions raised by a partial audit of county finances earlier this year.

That partial audit, completed by Gregg & Lasher, PA, of Asheville, outlined a number of "questionable" transactions during the final months of office of the former Madison County Board of Commissioners.

Roger Gregg, who gave the current commissioners a report Jan. 12, fell short of saying whether the partial audit indicated any illegal activity on the part of former commissioners or their employees.

Current commissioners have now instructed the auditors to make that determination a part of their complete audit of county books from July 1 1986 through June 30 of this year.

"I recommend that we ask these

auditors to address specifically the questions which Mr. Gregg raised in his interim audit," Leake said. "It seems to me these auditors are best-equipped and best-adept to address the questions raised by the interim audit."

Leake's recommendation to the board came after a discussion earlier Monday with 24th Judicial District J. Thomas Rusher, who has said the

partial audit contains insufficient evidence to warrant a criminal investigation.

Although Rusher is willing to meet with the commissioners to discuss his decision, Leake said that it would be best to await the results of the 1986-87 fiscal year audit, which will begin this summer. The board agreed.

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County To Go After Back Taxes

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

The Madison County Board of Commissioners, in response to criticism that more than a half million dollars in back taxes should be collected before property taxes are raised, agreed Monday to step up collection efforts.

The board agreed to "strongly suggest" that all county workers who

owe back taxes pay up, and also agreed to ask the Madison County Board of Education to take similar steps to collect back taxes owed by school system employees.

That decision came in response to a warning by Betty Wild, former Marshall mayor and unsuccessful candidate for county tax collector last

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Hot Springs Officials Question Handling Of Charges

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

Hot Springs officials are starting to ask questions about the way recent criminal charges were brought against their town's police chief.

Town officials say they want to know why 24th Judicial District Attorney J. Thomas Rusher did not investigate charges filed recently against Police Chief Terry Lee Getman.

Following the Hot Springs Board of Aldermen meeting Monday night, Mayor Kenny Ramsey and Alderman

Don E. Franklin expressed concern that allegations regarding Getman's use of excess force - resulting in four criminal charges - have been mishandled.

"There should be an investigation by the DA. To me, that would be a normal procedure," Ramsey said. "In any other situation, the DA is called, but this time they just went in and pressed charges."

Town officials' concern stems from two separate incidents involving Getman. Getman was charged last month with using a deadly weapon to

assault and inflict serious injury upon James C. Leister during an April 30 arrest.

That charge came less than a week after two Madison teen-agers - Michael Miller and Randy Riddle - charged that Getman had threatened and assaulted them in a traffic arrest in May. He faces one count of assault and two counts of communicating threats.

Town officials say they don't believe Getman has done anything wrong.

"We feel he's innocent of all

charges and we stand behind him 100 percent," said Ramsey.

"It's like this is an opening for anyone who's pulled over to press charges," he said. "Our police officers will think twice before writing tickets because people will think they can walk in the magistrate's office and law the officer."

Rusher agreed and said he, too, was concerned that he had not been called to investigate the allegations.

"There is no policy regarding charges against law enforcement officers. The magistrate is given

authority and when he deems appropriate, will issue warrants," Rusher said.

"I feel the ends of justice could best be served if magistrates would voluntarily notify the DAs in cases involving police and law officers," he said.

Rusher also voiced concern that the current lack of policy afforded anyone an opportunity for vindictiveness.

"I would have preferred to have been allowed to investigate these charges, but I can not require it," he said.

Hot Springs officials see another problem with the current lack of policy in the way it transforms into a loss of taxpayers' dollars.

The cost of defending Getman will come in the wake of a bill presented to the town of Hot Springs by attorney Larry Leake for more than \$4,000 in legal fees from a case involving former Police Chief John Barrett.

Barrett was charged with using excessive force when arresting Christopher Scott Daniels last year. A

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School Board Members Address Education Issues

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

The newest members of the Madison County Board of Education fielded questions from concerned residents during a panel discussion last week sponsored by the League of Women Voters.

School board Chairman Jim Baker and newly elected board members Jimmy Dean Hensley and Mike Jenkins met with the group to discuss

issues concerning goals and personnel, the Basic Education Plan, community involvement, discipline and job opportunities and special skills.

The board's two Democratic members were not at the meeting - Gerald Young was absent due to a prior commitment and Franklin Anderson was ill.

All of the Republican board members agreed that their primary objective is to get the community in-

involved in the schools.

Acting moderator Dr. Larry Stern of Mars Hill College asked each member to outline what he felt to be the major issues concerning the county school system.

"Our objective is community awareness," Baker said. "We've changed our meeting time from day to night, and we want to see an increase in parental involvement by establishing parent-teacher organizations."

When asked what qualifications the board felt necessary in new personnel, Baker said teachers should be specializing more.

"There are no new teaching positions available, but the next four years will show an increase," he said. "We need to attract the kind of teachers we want to apply and show them we can be competitive."

School officials said they felt at a disadvantage because they have had to spend most of their time since taking office dealing with next year's budget.

"We had five weeks until the budget was due, with the deadlines and so little time, we've done little else," Baker said.

which high schools serve as incubators for small businesses.

Under the program, students actually establish and operate a business as a class project. Upon completion of the course, those students can continue the operation of the business in the community, boosting the local economy and giving the students a job opportunity in the county.

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RANDY COX PHOTOS

Above, North Buncombe seniors await their big moment. Below, valedictorian Kellie Honeycutt has a few words for her classmates.

Program To Keep Graduates In County

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Madison High School may participate next year in a pilot program designed to keep young people from leaving the county by helping them set up a business that will give them a job after graduation.

The Madison County Board of Education unanimously agreed Monday night to participate in the Rural School-Based Enterprise Program, in

4 Arrested On Marijuana Charges

From Staff Reports

The Madison County Sheriff's Department, in its second drug bust within a week, has confiscated nearly \$50,000 worth of marijuana and arrested four county residents.

Last Wednesday officials say they found 47 pounds of marijuana in two vans parked in wet woods near a home in the Pine Tree section of

Madison County, between Big Pine and Little Pine.

Some of the plants were found growing in tall weeds near the road, officials said.

Shaylil Godrick Brown has estimated the street value of the marijuana at \$50,000.

The four suspects are identified as and have names and addresses in The Oak, all of the Pine Tree section

Brown said.

The arrests are part of the department's on-going drug investigation, he said.

The arrests come after three Mars Hill residents were arrested last week and charged with manufacturing and possession of \$75,000 worth of marijuana.

The department's investigation is continuing, and more arrests are expected, Brown said.

209 Bid Farewell To North Buncombe

From Staff Reports

The skies looked threatening Sunday afternoon, but the rain held off long enough for 209 North Buncombe High School seniors to receive their diplomas.

In addition to those diplomas, symbolizing the completion of a 12-year tour of duty in the public school system, members of the class of 1987 will have a little something extra to remember about their graduation day.

With faculty's commencement ceremony at Boone Stadium in Boone, the school's graduation class at North Buncombe to complete its

high school career at the current high school campus.

Beginning in August, North Buncombe students will begin attending classes in brand new school facilities, still under construction.

Principal Ivan Randolph and Kenneth Wescott Hall, president of the senior class, presented diplomas to the graduates.

The ceremony began with a presentation by the North Buncombe High School Band, followed by the presentation of colors by the school's ROTC unit.

The school's graduation class at North Buncombe to complete its