

Weaverville Hires New Police, Fire Chiefs

Buncombe County Investigator To Wear Municipal Badge

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Effective Dec. 21, the town of Weaverville will once again have a chief of police.

The town last week announced the hiring of Gary Carl Benthin, a criminal investigator with the Buncombe County Sheriff's Department, as the man to pin on the badge of Weaverville police chief.

Benthin, 36, will fill a vacancy created nearly four months ago when former Police Chief Darrell Rathburn was fired from the position Aug. 28. After a never-completed grievance hearing, Rathburn was allowed to resign from the police force.

The town has been without an official police chief ever since. Sgt. J.D. Ray, appointed acting chief, resigned suddenly in September, citing "personal reasons." Weaverville Town Manager Charles Horne has been fulfilling the job's administrative functions during the search for a replacement for Rathburn.

A total of 22 candidates applied for the job. Horne selected the top six candidates, who were then interviewed last month by a specially assembled advisory of law enforcement experts.

That panel -- consisting of Capt. Mike Berry of the Asheville Police Department, Bob Casler of the N.C. Attorney General's Office and David Warren, director of criminology at Asheville-

Buncombe Technical College -- selected Benthin. Members of the Weaverville Town Council met with the panel last Monday in a special meeting at Weaverville Town Hall to hear the reasons why Benthin was picked over the other candidates.

"The council wanted to hear each panel member's views on the selection process," Horne said.

Town officials agreed with the selection, and Horne offered the job to Benthin late last Wednesday.

Benthin has given two-weeks notice to the Buncombe County Sheriff's Department and will begin working in Weaverville Dec. 21.

Benthin, a native of Miami, Fla., has been employed with the Buncombe County Sheriff's Department for the past eight years.

Prior to his employment in Buncombe County, he worked for the Dade County (Fla.) Public Safety Department for three years as a patrolman.

He graduated in 1973 from Florida State University with a degree in psychology with minors in criminology and public relations.

Benthin is currently working toward a master's degree in public affairs through Western Carolina University, and expects to complete his studies in six to eight months.

-Continued on back page



Gary Benthin



John Penley

Volunteer Chief Is Latest Name On Town Payroll

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Wanted: Fire chief for the town of Weaverville. Experience necessary. Apply at Weaverville Town Hall.

Weaverville officials say increased growth and development in and around the town has made it necessary for them to add the position of full-time fire chief to the town payroll.

That's why the town recently accepted applications for the position.

But town officials were surprised when only one man applied for the job -- John Penley, who has served as volunteer fire chief for the past two months.

"We've only got one application so far," Town Manager Charles Horne said last month. "But I'll be surprised if we don't get some more because it certainly is an opportunity."

Surprise. Penley, who just recently took over the position held by his father for five years, was the only person to apply for the job.

And, effective Monday, Penley's volunteer status came to an end as he started working on the clock for the town of Weaverville.

Although town officials say the Weaverville Fire Department has been operating just fine with a volunteer chief, they also say rapid residential and business development have made

a paid chief a necessity.

"A natural flow in the terms of the growth of the community is to have a paid chief of the fire department," Horne said. "The growth that is occurring makes it a lot more difficult to get the things that need to be done completed."

By hiring a fire chief now, the town hopes to be ready for the continued development that is expected in Weaverville and the surrounding area.

"We are trying to plan for that growth now, rather than react to it when it gets here. And part of that is to provide fire protection and fire prevention," Horne said.

"I'm not taking anything away from our volunteers. They have done an excellent job," he said. "But they don't have enough time to commit to the job as the council feels it needs."

Eventually, the town may move toward a paid fire department. But volunteer fire fighters need not turn in their turnout gear anytime soon.

"Right now, we're trying to accomplish our mission using our volunteers and a minimum number of paid people," Horne said.

Earlier this year, the town's volunteer firefighters were not in favor of hiring a paid, full-time fire chief. The volunteers in June signed a letter stating their opposition to the idea.

But since that time, the volunteer firemen have had a change of heart, said Horne and Penley.

-Continued on back page

County To Consider Referendum To Change Partisan School Board

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Madison County officials may let the voters decide whether members of the Madison County Board of Education should be selected in a non-partisan election.

The county commissioners have instructed county attorney Larry Leake to investigate the proper way to set up a countywide referendum on the question of a non-partisan school board.

"I'd like to ask Larry to check into

a referendum on the issue of non-partisan school board," Commissioner Reese Steen said during Monday's meeting.

"I think the three of us (commissioners) during the campaign made statements that we should let the people decide certain things by a referendum," Steen said. "We weren't talking necessarily about a non-partisan school board, but I think we should look into this."

Steen asked Leake to find out the proper way to call for and set up a

referendum.

"We need to see how the people of Madison County feel about having a non-partisan school board," Steen said.

The board's instructions to Leake came eight months after commissioners made a pledge to work together to "de-politicize" the Madison County school system.

The commissioners in March agreed to look into ways to remove politics from the county school

-Continued on back page

King Holiday, 12 Snow Days Added To School Year Calendar

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

New state regulations have forced Madison County school officials to revise its 1987-88 school calendar, adding 12 snow make-up days and a Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

The additions will not mean any major changes in the days on which students attend school -- unless winter weather forces the Madison County Board of Education to use the snow days it has set aside.

The calendar is designed to provide

180 days of instruction for Madison County students.

The school board, during its monthly meeting Monday night, unanimously agreed to adopt a revised calendar as recommended by the school system's staff.

In that calendar, April 6 -- an annual leave day that had already set aside for Easter break -- has now been designated as Martin Luther King Day.

The school board has also placed 10 optional teacher workdays at the end

of the calendar. Those days can be used, however, at any time during the school year if bad weather forces the cancellation of classes.

When drawing up the calendar earlier this year, school officials had not known whether the observance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday was a legal holiday. The State Personnel Commission ruled in October that the day should be included as a holiday for state employees -- including teachers.

-Continued on back page

Tilson Hands Mayorship To Godwin

By MARGARET A. STUDENC
Staff Reporter

The town of Mars Hill has a new board of aldermen as of Monday night's swearing-in of the newly elected officials.

Outgoing Mayor Owen Tilson's last official act was to administer the oath of office to Joseph Godwin as the new mayor of Mars Hill.

"You are the mayor," said Tilson, turning over the meeting to Godwin. Godwin welcomed the citizens attending the meeting. "I would like to express welcome to each of you for being here," he said.

"I would like very much for the next two years to see all those chairs taken," he said.

Aldermen John Chandler, Alvin Slagle and Clayton Willis were then sworn in by the new mayor in alphabetical order.

Godwin thanked the former mayor and aldermen for the work done in the preceding years.

"I would like to show my appreciation to the former mayor and aldermen. They have done work, spent time and given energy to the job," said Godwin.

After the mayor read from a writ-

ten statement which he presented for the town's records, he asked for nominations for vice mayor.

Slagle nominated Chandler -- the only incumbent alderman returning to the town board for another term -- as the vice mayor. Willis promptly

seconded the nomination, and Chandler was elected unanimously as vice mayor.

"The duties of the vice mayor are to act in the mayor's place if he is unable to perform his duties," said Godwin.



Santa Visits

Santa Claus came to Weaverville this past weekend for the town's second annual Christmas parade. Santa and other parade participants tossed candy to younger parade-goers (right), who waited with open arms.



BILL STUDENC PHOTOS

Hot Springs Board Takes Office

By EMMA LOU WAMBLES
News Record Correspondent

The new Hot Springs Board of Aldermen took office Monday night as two new aldermen joined incumbent Mayor Kenny Ramsey and Alderman Wesley Staudt.

Hot Springs town clerk Lillian Whitten administered the oath of office to Ramsey, and then Ramsey in turn swore in Staudt, Bill Whitten and Ruth Smith as aldermen.

The first official act of the new board was to unanimously agree to retain the present town personnel and to keep Larry Leake as town attorney.

The board agreed that Cheryl Anderson should remain as town treasurer.

The board selected Whitten, who received the largest number of votes in November's municipal election, as vice mayor.

The newly elected Hot Springs officials then got their first taste of controversy, as the board accepted the resignation of police officer Rick Rice.

The resignation, tendered because of "long hours and low pay," was retroactive to Nov. 1, said Ramsey.

Hot Springs resident Bill Champion expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of Rice and called for more thorough background checks on applicants for police officer.

"An individual should be worthy of wearing a badge," Champion said.

"That position should be above reproach."

Police Chief Terry Lee Getman told Champion that Rice had been certified through the Madison County Sheriff's Department, and not through the town of Hot Springs.

Town officials said that they would continue to follow a strict policy of conducting background checks on applicants for the police department.

The resignation of Rice leaves only Getman currently on the Hot Springs Police Department. The town board agreed to obtain the services of a deputy with the Madison County Sheriff's Department to relieve Getman periodically until two applicants can be properly certified.

Town Seeks College's Help In Solving Sewer Problem

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Mars Hill officials agreed Tuesday to scale down plans to repair leaky sewer lines on the Mars Hill College campus and to provide sewer service to 31 residents of an in-town trailer park.

That decision came after the newly elected Mars Hill Board of Aldermen, meeting Tuesday in a continuation of Monday's regular board meeting, re-evaluated the town's plans to spend more than \$175,000 on a sewer project on the college campus.

Mars Hill has been under fire from state officials because its sewage treatment plant has been at times

operating at above its capacity.

Town officials have traced the problem to storm water runoff from gutters and roof drains on buildings on the college campus.

"When it rains, all that surface water gets into the sewer lines, and we're treating it at the treatment plant," said Darby Boone, Mars Hill town manager.

But, rather than spend all of its available \$175,000 to replace lines at the college, the town could spend a smaller amount on campus and use the rest of the money to address other sewer treatment problems in town.