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Board Hires Company To Study Hospital

The future of Duplin County's financially troubled hospital will be determined by the county commissioners this summer following a consulting firm's study of the hospital's financial condition.

By a 4-1 vote Thursday night, the commissioners hired Price Waterhouse, a Raleigh accounting firm, to make the study at a cost of not more than \$20,000.

Commissioner Allen Nethercutt voted no, continued his opposition to hiring a consultant. Commissioners W.J. Costin, Calvin Turner, Dovey Penney and D.J. Fussell voted for the plan.

The hospital board last month asked the county for \$1 million to upgrade equipment and facilities.

Faced with increasing demands on county tax funds to keep the hospital operating

under current conditions, the board appointed a committee to recommend consulting firms. The county owns the hospital, which was built with funds authorized in a 1951 county referendum. It is operated by trustees appointed by the commissioners.

Operating costs have exceeded patient revenue in recent years. Hospital officials have blamed much of the problem on limitations to how much Medicaid and Medicare can pay for medical expenses. They also cite the tendency of Duplin County patients to use hospitals outside the county.

The accounting firm will begin the study May 1 and expects to complete its work in about six weeks.

The commissioners agreed the study should determine:

— The reason so few Duplin residents use the local hospital when they need

treatment.

— The quality of the hospital's staff and equipment.

— The level of medical care that can be financially supported in Duplin County's rural setting.

— The amount of money that must be invested in the hospital immediately and over the next five years, if it remains publicly operated.

— If the county should continue operating the hospital as a public facility or if it would be better to lease it to a private hospital firm.

— If adequate medical care could be provided county residents if the hospital were leased.

— What the county's obligation to provide hospital care for indigents would be if the hospital is leased.

— If a privately operated hospital could reduce the level of care if profits turn out to be lower than ex-

pected.

— What changes are needed, if any, to bring outstanding patient accounts up to date.

— If hospital purchases are made at the most economical level.

Meanwhile, the board approved the transfer of \$95,000 in reserve funds to the hospital to enable it to pay bills on time to avoid late payment penalties.

Members of the committee reviewing consultants were N.R. Mattocks of Rose Hill, Elbert Davis of Route 2, Mount Olive, J.P. Smith of Magnolia, and Commissioners Costin and Turner.

Industry Bond Sale Approved By Duplin Commissioners

The Duplin County Board of Commissioners tentatively approved a request from J.P. Stevens Co for the sale of \$1 million in tax-free bonds to retrofit the company's Carter Plant in Wallace when they met last week.

The company estimates the total cost of the retrofitting at \$6 million. When the plant returns to full operation, it will employ about 500 people.

The approval is one of several steps necessary for the sale of such bonds. The

request now will go to the N.C. Department of Commerce for review. If the department approves the proposal, it will come back to the county board for final approval.

Companies seek as much financing as possible through tax-exempt bonds because they carry lower interest rates than conventional bonds, said William H. McBride of Raleigh, a bond lawyer.

McBride said Stevens is seeking authority for the sale

of tax-exempt bonds in three other counties.

The company is retrofitting the Carter plant, one of two it operates in Wallace, to make cotton and polyester materials for leisure and outdoor wear. The plant previously made a knitted fabric for lingerie and some automobile upholstery.

The retrofitting is expected to be completed late this summer.

In other action, the county commissioners called a special meeting to be held in

the commissioners' room of the courthouse to discuss hiring a hospital financial consultant.

A request for the county to supply radio pagers to state forest commission employees so they can be called when off duty will be taken up during budget sessions.

Commissioner D.J. Fussell opposed the move, saying, "This is just something else the state's passing down. If we're foolish enough to take it up, all we've got to tax is that man with the house and tractor."

Hearing Held Monday On Broiler Bankruptcy

Officials of Watson Seafood and Poultry were to appear for a voluntary bankruptcy and reorganization hearing Monday in federal bankruptcy court in Raleigh before Judge A. Thomas Small.

Lawyers for the financially strapped Rose Hill broiler chicken firm filed for reorganization under Chapter 11 of the federal bankruptcy code in bankruptcy court for Eastern North Carolina in Wilson Thursday.

Under Chapter 11, liquidation of a company is not required, but a payment schedule to retire debts may be set up under court supervision. If a plan is approved,

creditors are required to halt any collection efforts outside the bankruptcy court for the life of the plan.

The company's operations were taken over by Coastal Production Credit Association of Kenansville on April 8 under a voluntary liquidation plan agreed to by creditors.

The company had debts totaling \$5.6 million, \$2.5 million of which was owed to the PCA. The voluntary liquidation plan was precipitated by the seizure of the company's income by Cape Fear Feed Products Co. of Greensboro. That action left Watson with no money to pay its growers or buy feed for

the nearly 2 million broiler chicks being grown out by its 125 contract growers.

PCA attorney Richard Burrows of Wallace said Friday that PCA is paying for the feed to supply the growers at a rate of about \$50,000 a day. He said the PCA will pay growers for matured flocks picked up for processing.

Burrows said he doesn't know what the ultimate effect of the Watson action will be on the PCA. He said he has not seen Watson's plan for handling its debts, which it can file up to 120 days after asking for Chapter 11 protection.

"Our interest in this is the same as the growers' — to raise and sell the broiler chickens in an orderly manner," Burrows said.

Company president Ebrun Watson Jr. could not be reached for comment Friday.

Burrows said that nothing will change until Monday. "We're feeding chickens and paying wages to the workers."

The company has been growing out about 285,000 broilers a week. The production has provided employment for one shift — about 200 workers — at the Rose Hill Poultry Corp. processing plant in Rose Hill.

Company's Fiscal Ills Threaten Poultry Jobs In Duplin Area

Coastal Production Credit Association of Kenansville will pay broiler growers the past-due \$135,000 owed them by Watson Seafood and Poultry Co. of Rose Hill, the PCA's lawyer said last week.

A group of growers is attempting to raise capital to acquire the failing company.

The PCA took over Watson to begin liquidating its assets. The company has debts totaling \$5.6 million, \$2.5 million of which is owed the PCA.

Cape Fear Feed Products Co. of Greensboro attached Watson's accounts receivable leaving the company with no money to pay growers or buy feed.

Liquidation of the company and loss of its production of 285,000 broilers a week could mean an economic loss of \$15 million to

\$20 million a year to Duplin and Pender County residents and businesses.

Watson Seafood and Poultry Co. employs 120 workers. Indirectly, it provides jobs to another 220 employees of Rose Hill Poultry, a processing firm that handles the production of its 125 contract growers.

The PCA is attempting to sell the firm, but PCA president Roy Houston said it has received no acceptable offers.

The PCA guaranteed that farmers who had chickens in their poultry houses would receive feed and be paid for growing out the birds. Houston delivered that promise in a statement Friday.

At that time, however, it could not guarantee the unpaid growers they would receive their money. The company owes about

\$135,000 to farmers for matured flocks it had picked up for processing in the three weeks before the PCA takeover.

Last week on Monday, Richard Burrows, lawyer for the PCA, told 175 angry poultry growers meeting in Kenansville that PCA will pay these growers.

Meanwhile, a group of broiler growers headed by Rabon Maready of Beulaville is attempting to raise money and prepare a financial plan to revive the failed company. The company has production contracts with 120 Duplin and Pender County broiler growers, who depend to a large extent on income from broilers for their livelihood.

The grower group must raise at least \$600,000 within the next few days to keep the company in operation.

Broilers are grown out by growers under contracts with program operators, such as the Watson firm, which owns the birds and supplies feed and medicine for them. The growers supply the poultry houses, most utilities and labor. They are paid according to the number of birds they raise.

Another snag was cleared last week when Maready agreed to release the 85,000 broilers in his chicken houses that were ready for the processor Saturday. At that time he refused to let the birds go, fearing he wouldn't be paid for them.

Burrows said that forced cancellation of one shift at the processing plant, meaning a loss of about \$8,000 in wages to workers and creating market supply problems.



VOLUNTEERS CHECK BLOOD PRESSURE DURING HEALTH FAIR - Goshen Medical Center in Faison hosted the WRAL Health Fair April 20. The medical center was one of 29 host sites for the fair during Health Fair Week, April 16-23. The fair was designed to alert individuals to possible medical problems. Along with members of the

Goshen Medical Center staff were volunteers from area rescue squads, Duplin General Hospital, Duplin-Sampson Area Mental Health. Pictured above, left to right, Faison Rescue Squad EMT Clement Shine works checking blood pressure during the health fair.

315 People Attend Health Fair At Goshen Medical Center

By Emily Killete

Next, please. Volunteers and members of the Goshen Medical Center staff screened more than 315 people during the six-hour Health Fair at the medical center in Faison April 20.

The health fair was sponsored by WRAL in Raleigh, the National Health Screening Council and approximately 20 patrons from the Goshen Medical Center area. Coordinating the health fair was Eleanor Ezzell, health educator at Goshen Medical Center.

"The health fair benefits a lot of people," Clement Shine, a Faison resident and town rescue squad EMT said. "People should feel free to use a project like the Health Fair. It could help them find something (illness) they didn't know they had. But, one of the greatest things is the number of people who attend the Health Fair and get a chance to see Goshen Medical Center." Shine was a Health Fair volunteer checking blood pressure. According to Shine, many Duplin rescue squads furnished volunteers to work in the Health Fair.

"We are responsible for our own health," Florence Warren of Faison said. "Everyone with the opportunity to attend a health fair should take advantage of the clinic. Do it for yourself — for your health. The Health Fair is one of the greatest things that has happened to the Faison community." People attending the Health Fair were given the opportunity to participate in screenings for height and weight, blood pressure, anemia, visual acuity, oral cancer, sickle-cell anemia,

colorectal cancer and pulmonary functions. An optional blood chemistry exam, which screens for diabetes, kidney and liver disease, gout, triglycerides, iron, cholesterol and others, was available for an \$8 fee.

"The whole idea is to reach small communities," Ezzell, coordinator, said. "We will continue the Health Fair by following up on the evaluations and preliminary tests given during the fair. None of the tests performed at the fair are conclusive, but we have taken the results

and made referrals for examinations by other agencies." Goshen Medical Center was one of 29 host sites for the WRAL Health Fair in North Carolina during the week of April 16-23. The free clinics are WRAL's contribution to Health Fair Week, April 16-23. Mrs. Ezzell pointed out the health fair clinics are not a replacement for the individual's regular check-up and Goshen Medical Center received no profit by serving as a host site.

Working at the Health Fair

with the staff of Goshen Medical Center and volunteers from area rescue squads were members of the Duplin General Hospital staff and representatives from the North Carolina Division of Sickle Cell Association, Biomedical Laboratories from Raleigh and North Carolina Division of the Lung Association. The Health Fair is based on a model provided by the National Health Screening Council. It is one of 77 such health fair projects across the nation.



STRESS AND RELAXATION INFORMATION PART OF HEALTH FAIR. A Health Fair was held April 20 at Goshen Medical Center in Faison as part of Health Fair Week April 16-23. A variety of free health screenings were available along with information on cancer, nutrition and stress and

relaxation techniques. The six-hour Health Fair registered 315 participants. Pictured above, left to right, Letress Hammonds, a member of the Duplin-Sampson Area Mental Health staff discusses relaxation techniques with Florence Warren of Faison.

Driver Sentenced For Wreck

Marshall Hardison, 32, of Fayetteville, formerly of Wilmington, pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of careless and reckless driving Thursday in Duplin County Superior Court in Kenansville in connection with an automobile-motorcycle accident 14 years ago that killed motorcyclist John Steven Cavanaugh.

Hardison was sentenced by Judge David Reid of Greenville to six months in jail, suspended for two years on condition he pay restitu-

tion of \$750 to Melba Cavanaugh of Wallace. He also was ordered not to operate a motor vehicle with alcohol on his breath for a year and agree to submit to a breath analysis at any time.

In a plea bargaining session the charges against Hardison were reduced from manslaughter and exceeding the safe speed limit.

Hardison was charged by State Highway Patrol trooper R.N. Johnson after the accident at 12:45 a.m. March 29, 1969, on U.S. 117 between Teachey and Rose Hill.

The 14-year delay came about because Hardison, in the army at the time of the accident, was transferred to Germany before his court appearance was scheduled.

When he didn't appear in court an order for his arrest was issued June 12, 1969, and sent to the New Hanover County Sheriff's Department. Hardison at that time listed his address as 228 Englewood Drive in Wilmington.

New Hanover officers returned the order to the Duplin court June 21, 1969,

saying Hardison was with the army in Germany.

This was the last action in the case until the victim's brother, Morris Cavanaugh of Magnolia, inquired about its disposition in January 1983. A Duplin County grand jury brought new indictments against Hardison Jan. 24.

Assistant District Attorney Dewey Hudson said the statute of limitations does not apply when an order of arrest has been issued and the subject has not been apprehended.