



Waccamaw Helpers Attend Retreat

Ten students from Grades 4 and 5 at Waccamaw Elementary School were selected to attend a Peer Helper retreat at the Baptist Assembly at Fort Caswell Oct. 14-15. As a part of the Safe Schools grant, students received training in listening and group leadership skills and will act as friends and helpers for other students. Pictured (from left, front) are chaperone Normal Solona, bilingual assistant Marlene Campos, Rubicelia Romero, Liliana Campos, Mary Ann Seagle, (back) Shaunte L. Monroe, Samantha Bland, Marvelia Rivera, Christy Reaves, Jessica Lowery, Breann Ward and Sue Seagle, PTO president.

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Candidates Dominate Public Hearing On Financing New School At Leland

BY SUSAN USHER

School board candidates dominated a sparsely-attended public hearing held Monday night by the school board on a plan to pay for a new school in Leland by borrowing on the private market against projected sales tax revenues.

Earlier this year the school board "reluctantly" agreed to the county commissioners' decision to use certificates of participation, said school board member Bill Fairley, as the board answered candidates' questions not only about the Leland project but about school construction needs and plans in general. The other option considered was to delay building of this school and seek a bond issue at a future date for multiple projects in the schools' long-range building plan.

The certificates are a financing tool that allows the county to borrow money for construction projects without obtaining voter approval and without guaranteeing their repayment on the basis of the county's ability to levy property taxes.

The notes are issued to private investors or financial institutions in a fashion similar to a mortgage or deed of trust, with the county is required to hold title to the property until the notes are repaid. Until then the county will lease the school and its site back to the school board to operate.

"We do not agree this is the way we want to go for one school," said Chairman Donna Baxter. "But they need a school at Leland desperately."

The new school is needed to meet current and anticipated growth in the Leland area, relieving overcrowding in existing schools and allowing Leland Middle School to become a true middle school serving grades six through eight only. Administrators believe overcrowding is contributing to the recent air quality problems at Lincoln Primary, which has been remodeled to serve more students than it was designed to house.

At its next meeting, the school board is expected to deed the property to the county and to review fi-

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nal plans for the project presented by architects Boney & Associates. The school's design was based on Supply Elementary School as one means of cutting costs.

The county plans to repay the certificates of participation over five years with the school system's share of state sales tax revenues, rather than by county property tax dollars. The school board asked the county to use the shortest term possible, to save on interest and because half-cent sales tax revenues are only guaranteed by the legislature for the next eight years, said board member Yvonne Bright, the only incumbent seeking re-election.

State law requires a board of education to own its school sites. But special legislation adopted by the N.C. General Assembly this summer allowed Brunswick County to join a growing number of counties that have chosen to use certificates of participation to finance school construction.

The school bought the River Road (N.C. 133) site for the school last spring from the State Ports Authority for \$128,000.

School board Chairman Donna Baxter said the groundbreaking ceremony for the new school will be held in November, before the current board leaves office.

Construction bids are expected to be received in November, after the school board deeds the property to the county. Construction is expected to begin after the first of the year and to be completed by late 1995.

Joe Carter, wife of school board candidate Clara Carter, said he was worried that tying down half-cent sales tax for this one project would limit the availability of funds to

meet future needs.

Fairley reminded Carter that in recent years Brunswick County has invested no local dollars in school construction, saving up state half-cent sales tax revenues for each project.

"Needs didn't dictate what was bought, but how much state money

was available," he said. "I hope you who are running for office understand we're not going to be able to continue on like this."

Citing needs for a western district elementary school, pre-kindergarten centers and high school improvements, Fairley said, "our judgment is that the county will have to spend a lot of money for school construction over the next 10 years."

The new school is budgeted at about \$5.7 million, but Superintendent Ralph Johnston said Monday he was told at a state superintendents' meeting that the cost of school construction is increasing.

"It's not a good time to be building schools," he said. "We're keeping our fingers crossed on that."

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