

## A deadly habit

Shaquita Williams

How many times have you walked into the bathroom and turned and walked out because of the outrageous odor and mess of cigarettes? Everyday, three thousands teens start smoking and approximately one thousand of those will die early because of smoke-related diseases. The number of teens that smoke now has increased 40.8% in North Carolina in the last 6 years. 36% of North Carolina high school students are smokers.

The federal law has always restricted smoking in school, but smoking was permitted directly outside of the school doors. On Monday, October 10, 2002, the Nash-Rocky Mount Board of Education forbade smoking on school grounds to everyone, including parents and visitors. Although you're sitting outside at a football game, you're still on school grounds and smoking (of any kind) is not allowed.

If you were caught smoking at Edwards Junior High, you were forced to serve a detention and then face a week in the Student Assistant Program a.k.a. rehab. Here at Rocky Mount Senior High, if you're caught smoking on school campus you're faced with two days in detention. Is this punishment too harsh or not nearly harsh enough?

Many seniors here are saying that since they're of legal age to buy cigarettes then they should be able to smoke anywhere they please. Minors here who smoke are arguing that it's not illegal for them to smoke—it's only illegal for them to buy the cigarettes. So if their parents buy

them and approves of them, then they should have the right to smoke here if they want to. Many non-smokers disagree fully with both of these arguments, while others couldn't care less. Some non-smokers complain on the daily basis about our bathrooms smelling like smoke and ashes being left all over the toilets, while others say that if it'll keep them sane let them have a smoke or two between periods.

Of the adults who smoke daily, ninety percent began smoking before the age of twenty. The average age individuals start smoking is between the ages of thirteen and fourteen. The earlier a person starts to smoke, the harder it will be to quit later, and the more likely that they will die prematurely. Statistics say that more than half of the high school seniors who smoke have made one serious, but failed, attempt to quit. How much harder will it be to quit twenty years from now when they're dying from a disease caused by smoking?

Thirty-three North Carolinians die every day from diseases caused by cigarette smoking; that is more than 12,000 deaths each year, and represents one in five deaths in our state. Smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in our state. Are you sure you want to follow that small crowd and die before you have the opportunity to see whose going to run this next generation?

Disclaimer: This article is the sole opinion of the writer and does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of The Gryphon or Rocky Mount Senior High.

## Unemployment on the rise

Kareem Gantt

The economic slowdown in the United States is being felt all over North Carolina, and especially in Rocky Mount. Rocky Mount has the largest percentage of people unemployed in North Carolina, at about ten percent. You would think the unemployment rate would be higher in the larger cities like Charlotte, Greensboro, or Raleigh, but is the highest here.

Adding insult to injury, the job growth is slower here than in any other metropolitan area in the state. With hardly any job growth and unemployment at the highest it has been in two years, many high school students are turning to cities outside of Rocky Mount to go to college, or find better job markets. In order to try to lure jobs to the area and beef up the city's image, the Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce has adopted a new slogan, changing from "The City on the Rise" to a more attractive slogan, "Remarkable Rocky Mount."

But, out of the negatives are a few positives. A new Home Depot is expected to come to Rocky Mount this year, and as soon as the new flood maps are released for Nash County, the owners of Tarrytown Mall will start tearing down the desolated mall.

## A sad day in the neighborhood

Ryan Chamberlain

Fred Rogers, also known as Mr. Rogers, the man responsible for the children's television show "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," passed away early on the morning of February 27th at his home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Rogers was diagnosed with stomach cancer around the holidays. Many at Rocky Mount Senior High probably remember growing up and watching his show. Born in Latrobe, Pennsylvania he had an early start in television that became a great source of enjoyment for many generations. He was 74.

For over 30 years from 1968 to 2000, Rogers produced the show to teach children to love themselves and to love others. He composed his own songs for the show and started each one in a comfortable living room setting with him singing his most remembered song "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," while putting on his cherished sneakers and cardigan. His trademark sweaters were made by his mother and he took a great deal of care with them. He also performed his own puppetry for the show, giving us loveable characters such as X the Owl, King Friday XIII and Daniel Striped Tiger.

Rogers' long career in television has affected millions of children over the years, teaching them all the simple rules of life, as well as comforting them in times of confusion, such as during the Persian Gulf War and the September 11th attacks. His work and gentle demeanor will certainly be missed by us all. From his understanding of children to his thoughtful television show, and on to the many things he did to make growing up understandable and simple for millions of children, Fred Rogers will always be remembered as a man whose primary cause in life was for the betterment of children everywhere.

## Senior Traditions

Brooke Smith, with contributions by Mandy Smith

*It seems like senior traditions have been violated every year. Has it finally gone too far? One senior speaks out.*

In May, every rising senior looks forward to August, when they will officially become seniors. The last year of high school isn't the only thing that seniors look forward to. Senior traditions are a major part of the excitement as well.

Recently seniors haven't been able to fully enjoy these traditions because the underclassmen are trying to get in on those traditions as well. For instance, seniors make a class t-shirt every year to show their senior pride. Imagine their disappointment at seeing juniors and sophomores wearing class shirts. What do you think people think when they see "kids" with shirts on that read "06"? Are they trying to tell us that they are going to graduate in three years?

The Senior Parade is for the seniors to celebrate the beginning their last year of school. The underclassmen have stepped in on that, too. Why would a student want

*Senior Traditions cont'd*

to ride in the Senior Parade when you're a junior or a sophomore? I would want to wait for my senior year so it could be special. Now, if there is a "senior skip day" everyone else skips also. The juniors have even made a "junior skip day."

These senior traditions are slowly being ruined by the underclassmen. It not only ruining RMSH's traditions but also ruining the excitement for the seniors to come!

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# The Gryphon

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