

# The Progress

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**GETTING IT TOGETHER**—The Ward family—Kim, Mike, little Brienne, and Blair—are putting their lives back together and learning about themselves since last September when train smashed

into their moving van and demolished all their household possessions.

## Household reconstruction

A community's outpouring helps Wards recover from mishap

By SUZETTE RODRIGUEZ

It's been eight months since a train collided with an Allied moving van at a Morrisville railroad crossing and obliterated a family's possessions.

The accident catapulted Mike and Kim Ward, who had been moving from New Jersey to the Preston Forest subdivision in Cary, into the spotlight as a sympathetic community rallied around them.

Since that September 23 morning, the Wards and their two children, Blair, 6, and Brienne 3, have been putting their lives back together—one couch, one appliance, one toy at a time.

And although the sights of the crash are still vivid, the Wards remember most the outpouring of community concern that followed.

"We were amazed that people wanted to help—even two, three, four weeks after the accident. We still marvel at it," the Wards said during a recent interview from their home.

Still, as if it happened yesterday, Kim remembers the call she

received that morning. She and her daughter had gone to their new home early to wait for the movers to arrive.

"Mrs. Ward, we have some bad news....," she remembers the representative from the Allied Corporation in Chicago saying.

The Wards would later learn that the driver of the moving van had attempted to cross a steeply pitched railroad crossing at the intersection of N.C. 54 and Morrisville-Carpenter Road when he got stuck on the tracks, mid-axle.

For several minutes, he tried working the vehicle back and forth to free it. But within minutes a train approached and with no time to stop, plowed through the van.

"When I pictured it in my mind, I thought (the van) had gotten pushed off the road. I was sure a ton of stuff was still there, like pots, pans," Kim recalled.

She phoned Mike, who had taken their son to school, to tell him the news. Ironically, he answered the call while stopped in traffic for the train.

What the couple saw when they arrived at the tracks shocked them. Strewed about were chips from her fine China, swatches of singed clothing, teddy bears with melted fur. Canceled checks swirled about in the air like leaves; tax returns and VISA statements littered the grass.

But among the scene of destruction were a tremendous number of local people—firefighters, police officers both on and off-duty, nearby residents, passersby—who were picking up shoes, pictures, toys and offering other kinds of help.

"No one had to guess who we were. We were standing there as white as sheets," Kim recalled.

The debris collected over the next few days filled five tractor trailers. Allied unloaded it at their depot in Morrisville ten days later and notified the Wards they could begin picking through the piles.

Mike said at first he and Kim plucked out anything that appeared whole, a CD although scratched, a cassette tape although clogged with dirt.

"Looking back on that first day, I

think our hearts needed anything. We just wanted to grasp onto anything that used to be ours," he said.

By the fifth day, the Wards had found enough pictures, though torn, blotted and scratched, to feel they were "getting back some of their hearts."

The Wards could identify among the heaps, splinters of Kim's grandmother's bedroom suit, a piece of wood that appeared carved out of a heavy bookcase, a flattened silver pancake that once had been her grandmother's tea service.

Some things vanished without leaving behind any pieces. Like the video camera that contained a tape of Blair's birthday party and his friends the day before the family moved.

"What meant most was my wedding gown," Kim said. "I wanted my daughter to wear it. I wanted her to have the silver tea service in her house. It's like our lineage stopped on the railroad tracks in Morrisville that day."

Thus began the Wards' journey.

See COMMUNITY'S, page 4

## Crossing upgrade expected to ease local traffic snarls

By Beth Landi

Visitors to New York are familiar with the seemingly choreographed movements of traffic cops as they work to keep thousands of vehicles traveling smoothly through the city.

But these guys have nothing on Morrisville officers Chris Rhew and Oth George Jr.

Since late October the two have regulated rush-hour traffic on Chapel Hill Road (N.C. 54) at its intersections with Morrisville-Carpenter Road and Aviation Parkway. And they will continue to work this beat until a new four-way intersection with traffic signals renders their services obsolete.

While traffic congestion and a dangerously steep railroad grade at Morrisville-Carpenter have long concerned town leaders, the enormous increase in traffic volume in recent years has made changes imperative.

Morrisville Police Chief Bruce Newnam cites a North Carolina State University study that shows a 79 percent increase in traffic flow between 1991 and 1993.

"The study showed an average 36,318 vehicles passed through the Morrisville corporate limits per day in 1991," he says. "That figure was up to 64,900 by 1993."

Accidents are up too, Newnam says. Comparing records from April of last year to April 1995, he says, "the number of accidents we've responded to is up to 15 from six."

"We've had several [accidents] where Morrisville-Carpenter crosses Chapel Hill...a lot of trucks getting stuck on the railroad. But having the officers out directing has cut down on that."

A busy CSX corridor runs parallel to N.C. 54 on the Morrisville-Carpenter side and high-speed Amtrak trains use the tracks several times a day.

Rhew and George, part-time officers with the department, are scheduled to work between 6-9 a.m. and 4:30-6:30 p.m. during the week, Newnam says.

"But that can vary. An accident on I-40, for example, could affect traffic coming through Morrisville. And they'll stay out there until the flow is back to normal."

Weather conditions can also make for longer hours, he says.

The officers work together as a team to keep the traffic moving, Newnam explains. "And they're real good at what they do."

The chief has watched the growth in the area for the past 10 years. He joined the police department as its only employee in 1985. Now there are 17 full-time and part-time staff members serving the department.

Increased traffic — and the problems associated with it — has been one of the primary effects of area growth on Newnam's department. He's looking forward to the new intersection and the relief it's expected to bring.

See CROSSING, page 3



**OFFERING DIRECTIONS**—Oth George, a Town of Morrisville traffic officer, gives a motorist directions to an area business. At first, the officers drew criticism from passing motorists, but now drivers stop to exchange pleasantries.

## Teacher eyes multi-level classes at Morrisville Elementary School

By JUDY CREGAN

After teaching them for two years, Sharon Fornaro said goodbye to her first-grade students in early June. No, she didn't fail the entire class. Instead, it was the completion of a concept called "looping."

Fornaro was instrumental in launching a looping program at Morrisville Year-Round Elementary School. Together, she and her entire kindergarten class made the move into first grade. She'll go back once again and pick up a new kindergarten class for the coming year.

It takes two teachers to initiate the process. One replaces the position vacated by the other, and vice versa. The 42-year-old Fornaro had been interested in starting a looping program for some time, and she eventually discovered a partner in Ruth Ann Hamilton, another K-1 teacher who joined the Morrisville staff last year.

Fornaro has used the last two years to achieve an in-depth understanding of the development of exceptional students from kindergarten through first grade. And now she's hoping that she and Hamilton eventually will teach the first (and probably for a while, the only two) multi-level K-1 classes at Morrisville.

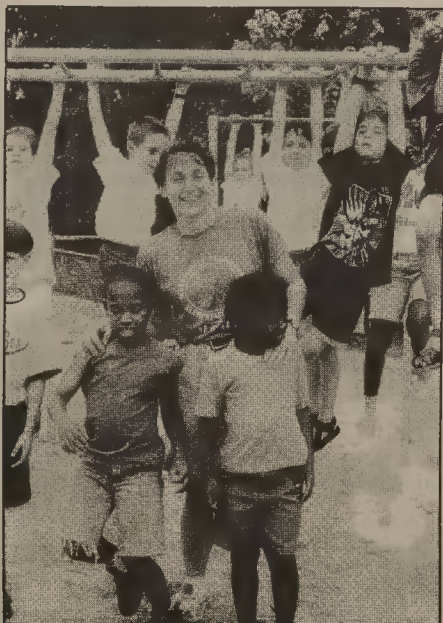
Multi-level education, which Fornaro has been researching for three years, places kindergarten and first-grade students in the same class. The Pennsylvania native says the idea can be daunting to parents at first, but that "it's a program where everyone involved benefits."

The new kindergartners would have older models to watch and learn from every day. And because of this, they would develop more quickly in verbal skills and behavior, Fornaro says.

What about the shier, less socially developed child? At the kindergarten level, the child would have the security of the "buddy system" at work. Whether it be a trip down the hallway or help with tying a shoe, there always will be a "family" of substitute older siblings ready to help, Fornaro points out.

The second year of being in a multi-level classroom can be the most rewarding and dramatic in the development of a slow or shy child. The status of the first grader automatically changes with the entrance of a new group of kindergartners. A socially less developed child, Fornaro says, now has a chance to become a leader, something the child would never have the chance to do in staying with the same age group throughout school. And the

See TEACHER, page 2



**TEACHER OF THE YEAR**—Sharon Fornaro, the Teacher of the Year at Morrisville Year-Round Elementary School, takes time out on the playground with her first-grade class. In the foreground are Jay Robinson, left, and Whitney Farrington.

## Town toughens appearance rules

By BILL KIRKLAND

When Morrisville was a rural community, businesses operated by people on their home sites would spring up from time to time. Goods and equipment dotted the roadsides.

In November of 1985, the town adopted a zoning ordinance creating zoning classifications for commercial businesses and establishing strict requirements for all new businesses. That ordinance, however, did not cover established businesses, five of which continue to survive and operate in residential areas.

The Town Board of Commissioners sent a message this month to the non-conforming businesses still in operation: hide those eyesores.

An addition to the zoning ordinance, adopted at the board's June 12 meeting, demands that all non-conforming businesses hide from what is now visible along road right-of-ways and adjoining properties.

The owners have two choices: construct an opaque fence six feet high or use natural screening such as trees and other landscape vegetation.

See TOWN, page 2

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