

Tour DuPont makes quick pass through town

By Bill Kirkland

Only minutes before the Tour DuPont came through Morrisville, most of the spectators sat on the railroad tracks for a glimpse of the world's best cyclists.

"Train's coming," someone yelled. The spectators scattered and the freight cars roared through.

The noise and the brief scare would make the cycle race almost anti-climactic as most of the 200 or so spectators settled in safer locations along N.C. 54 on a warm May 4 afternoon.

A lead car with a 15-minute sign had already passed through and so had the 10-minute car. The 5-minute car would be the last signal that the cyclists were on their way.

Manuel Gil, his wife, Christine, and their 7-year-old son, Jonathan, watched from a spot near the Aviation Parkway intersection.

"We moved here for moments like this," said Gil, who had his own locksmith business in Chicago before settling his family in the Treybrooke Apartments. "We wanted a better quality of life."

Someone mentioned the appeal of Wrigley Field and the Chicago Cubs. "We never went to Wrigley Field," said Christine Gil. "But we do watch the Durham Bulls."

A voice boomed out from a loud speaker hooked to a car. "Read all about the cyclists," the woman said. "Get a program for



WHOOSH—This was the scene along N.C. 54 raced through Morrisville as part of the Tour DuPont competition.

only five dollars."

The driver rushed away when it was apparent the cyclists were just around a bend in the road. Not a single program was sold.

And so they came. And went. In a hurry.

Jim LeMar of Morrisville was fast enough to take 11 shots with a camera given to him by his

wife, Linda. Another bystander admitted he only had time to take one. Still another observer could only curse. "They aren't doing a damn thing," he said of the cyclists. "They're just cruising."

The crowd left as quickly as the 112 cyclists. Fran Minnich reopened Ben's Bargain Barn after taking a 10-minute break.

Under the shade of a small tree near the tracks, Liz Ryan and Joe Huegy, both Morrisville residents, enjoyed a picnic lunch of cream cheese spread, bread and tea "that had been left over in the refrigerator."

They would be the last to leave. And Morrisville was once again the same.

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Blankenship named Firefighter of the Year

Morrisville Assistant Fire Chief William Ray Blankenship Jr. has been selected as the Chapel Hill Firefighter of the Year.

Blankenship joined the Chapel Hill Fire Department in December of 1993 after 13 years of combined volunteer and professional experience in the Morrisville Fire Department, where he rose to and now holds the rank of assistant chief. The Chapel Hill Fire Department allows its members to serve in voluntary or part-time capacities with another department.

In selecting Blankenship as Firefighter of the Year, the peer selection committee said it recognized his commitment to the advancement of the Fire Department, including his involvement in the de-

velopment of the First Responder program and his participation on the fire apparatus specification committee. In addition, the committee cited the assistance and compassion he extended toward his fellow employees throughout the year.

The citation was started in Chapel Hill in the late 1960s. Potential candidates are nominated by their peers, according to Chapel Hill Fire Chief Dan Jones, and the winner is then named by a group composed of administration and employee personnel. Outstanding per-

formance during the year, related to a single event or related to overall service, is the basis for making the award.

Jones, who has been chief since 1990, describes Blankenship as the epitome of someone in professional service. "Bill is modest, but dedicated to his job," says Jones. "He does outstanding work, yet is not a person who looks for credit. He just wants progress."

Blankenship was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Clinton, Md. He and his wife, Melinda, and their 15-month-old daughter, Myranda, live in Apex.



WILLIAM BLANKENSHIP

New fire truck designed for variety of needs

"It's a great big hunk of money, but the town really needs it," Commissioner C.T. Moore said after fellow commissioners approved spending \$326,275 to purchase a new equipment truck for the fire department, a special vehicle specially designed for multiple assignments.

Fire Chief Tony Chiotakis said the vehicle will take about eight months to build. Six proposals were studied by the Public Safety Committee and Finance Committee and the winning bid went to Saulsbury Fire and Rescue Apparatus Inc. in Syracuse, N.Y.

According to Chiotakis, the vehicle will consolidate a lot of equipment in several separate sections, each designed to hold equipment for specific conditions the fire department may have to face. Included will be equipment for confined-space rescues, such as inside manholes, as well as a fire support ventilator, jaws of life and other forcible entry tools and hydraulic tools for heavy duty work such as extricating vehicles from construction sites.

Another area has been designed for firefighters overcome at the scene. It will supply fluids to cool off or provide warmth.

The front of the 34-foot-long truck will have a telescoping light tower capable of rising 30 feet into the air to flood areas with light. Another section houses breathing equipment to provide on-site, self-contained breathing apparatus.

Commissioner Mark Silver-Smith thanked Chiotakis for the effort he put into developing plans for the new vehicle. When it arrives it will be housed at Station No. 1.

It was noted that plans for the new station have been delayed somewhat. Commissioners have unanimously approved \$230,000 to buy a 4.1-acre site in the northeast corner of N.C. 54 and McCrimmon Parkway, property owned by Charles and Nancy Zimmerli.

Town authorities are studying a report that a gravesite exists on the property holding six to eight graves. Chief Chiotakis said nothing is definite at this time and that the report came from a tenant who said he recalls such a site as a child growing up in the area. "If there are graves, it depends on where they are located," he explained, adding that specific steps are available for handling such situations.

Approval of the fire truck expenditure took place at the commissioners' May 13 meeting.

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