

The Progress

Morrisville & Preston

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Thief steals car, coffin, cadaver

The Morrisville police department has received national attention over the theft of a car carrying a casket with a body in it.

Det. Danny Ennis, the investigating officer, said he has had calls from people all over the country, including a newspaper in Ohio and a friend in Florida, who saw it on the evening news.

"Every local TV station and local newspaper has called at least once, and some more than that," Chief Robert Whitesell said. "Everybody's under impression it was a hearse, but it was just a station wagon," he said.

The car was stolen on Dec. 30 from Henry Mobley, who was driving the car for Professional Mortuary Services of Durham. Mobley was getting gas at the Amoco convenience store at 960 Airport Boulevard. The suspect asked for directions before Mobley went into the store, leaving the keys in the car.

"Our best guess is he didn't know what was in the car when he took it," Whitesell said. "I guess he found out shortly thereafter and decided to part company with it."

Ennis said the suspect dumped the casket into the middle of Pettigrew Street in Durham.

The car has not yet been found. "I'm sure it's sitting in a parking lot somewhere over in Durham," Ennis said. He and another officer grid searched about a three-block area with no luck last week.

"Everybody calls and says have we found the hearse," he added. "It would have been easier to find a hearse. It's just a Ford Taurus station wagon."

"It's one of the most unusual things I've run across," Whitesell said. "I've never been involved with anybody stealing a body."

Indecent zipper leads to arrest

A Durham man was arrested on several counts of breaking and entering and larceny after drawing attention to himself by flashing an employee at the Village Cleaners at N.C. 54 and the Morrisville Parkway.

According to Morrisville police reports, Toby Lee Blackmon went into the Village Cleaners and asked an employee if she could repair the zipper on his pants. She looked at the zipper and saw more than she wanted to. She told him to get out, and he left.

The woman called the police, after getting the license number of the car, and he was pulled over on Crabtree Crossing Parkway, with a pillowcase full of stolen goods on the front seat.

Morrisville police charged Blackmon with indecent exposure, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, and no driver's license. Cary authorities charged him with breaking, entering and larceny, and the Wake County Sheriff's Department also charged him with breaking, entering and larceny.

Only about half of the stolen items, mostly jewelry, have been identified, so other charges are still pending against Blackmon.

Three officers promoted

Morrisville Police Chief Robert Whitesell promoted Corporal J. W. Check and Corporal Elena Sanchez to the rank of sergeant and Detective investigator D. D. Ennis to sergeant of investigations, effective Jan. 30.

"All three are exceptional employees," Whitesell said. "They have done, and I know will continue to do whatever is asked of them. They have that dedication to the department and to the town. They have been real assets to the department. I've got all the confidence in the world in the job I know they're gonna do."



Ernest Dollar sits next to what could be a Confederate rifle pit left from the Battle of Morrisville.

Local man resurrects the Battle of Morrisville Civil War buff wants historical marker

By Mary Beth Phillips
Staff Writer

It could be a rifle pit used in the Civil War, or it could be a hole, left by a fallen tree.

An official from the North Carolina Department of Archaeology was expected to make a ruling this week.

If the ruling is what he hopes, it will help Ernest Dollar in his quest for a state historical marker, to be placed at the road near the site, off Aviation Parkway near the Morrisville Town Hall.

Dollar, 28, has found what he believes are three to six Confederate rifle pits in a semi-circle where research indicates the battle took place—that is, three good ones and three questionable ones. He has also found some that appear to be Union soldier rifle pits in a location that would suggest battle lines.

He recently re-examined the holes, located on the property of Hans Stadelmaier, and was relieved that a sewer line will be built in the creek bed, away from the historic site. But Dollar is still concerned that development in a booming town will soon cover the shreds of history that remain.

His job at Measurements, Inc., pays the bills, but after hours Dollar immerses himself in what he really loves—history, especially Civil War history. He conducts tours at the Bennett Place in Durham, where Confederate General Joe Johnston surrendered to William Tecumseh Sherman, which offi-

'This history has been overlooked for so long. That's one reason why Morrisville had no attention until now.'

—Ernest Dollar,
Civil War buff

cially ended the War of Northern Aggression. Lately, he has had another after-hours activity—conducting talks on the Battle of Morrisville for groups ranging from the Sons of Confederate Soldiers to the Morrisville Rotary Club.

Dollar is arguably the most well-informed person in the world on the Battle of Morrisville.

"The Internet has been a good source of information, but nothing beats good old-fashioned slogging through library files," he said.

A committee of 10 history professors from across North Carolina will meet in April and consider the evidence.

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More burgers, dogs and trucks coming to town

By Mary Beth Phillips
Staff Writer

There will soon be two more fast food options in Morrisville, after the board of commissioners Monday night approved plans for Burger King and The Dog House.

The board also approved plans for a trucking facility, an office building and a landscaping company at the meeting.

Burger King will be located on 1.74 acres at the corner of Airport Boulevard and the western entrance to Prime Outlets Mall. After a suggestion by Commissioner C. T. Moore, the board asked the developer to provide 16 outside trash cans at

the site. The other conditions on the approval were that the company have no irrigation meters and that the trash cans not be cleaned over storm drains.

The Dog House will be located on 0.65 acres at the corner of Airport Boulevard and Waldron Court, next to the Tire King. The commissioners asked that the developer increase the entrance to 35 feet to provide for access by fire trucks, that the exterior of the building be changed from stucco to Alpine white boards, that the sign on the building be changed so it would not stick out, that no irrigation meters would be allowed, and that nine trash cans be provided.

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Town Board starts road project fund

By Mary Beth Phillips
Staff Writer

The Morrisville Board of Commissioners agreed informally at a work session Saturday to start setting aside funds to assist the NC Department of Transportation with road-building projects, especially the segment of Crabtree Crossing from its end near Morrisville Parkway to the Morrisville-Carpenter Road.

Obtaining rights of way for the new road is also a priority, commissioners said, although plans nearly completed by the town's consulting engineers, Bass, Nixon & Kennedy, are expected to sit at the Federal Emergency Management Administration office waiting for approval for another six to nine months. FEMA must make a flood analysis and a flood map amendment before the road can be built.

The area includes Crabtree Creek and a marshy area created by the railroad line, which acts as a dam, backing up the water. It will be expensive to put culverts in, and even more expensive to build a bridge.

But the traffic situation makes the connector street a high priority with commissioners.

'With the situation traffic-wise, the town would be crazy not to go out and get what funds they could...'

—C.T. Moore,
Morrisville Commissioner

"With the situation traffic-wise, the town would be crazy not to go out and get what funds they could get from the developers and the state right now, so they could get this design, and pitch in the funds and build that and get it through there right now," said Commissioner C.T. Moore.

"If you don't build it now, if you put it down as a three-year capital project, you're going to lose it. It

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Golf club thefts increase in Preston subdivision

Cary police are stumped by a series of golf club thefts in Preston, and they warn residents not to leave their garages or their cars unlocked.

Two more thefts occurred in January. Lt. Steve Lee reported. Between Jan. 12 and 16 on Old Pros Way about \$1,650 worth of golf equipment was taken from a garage, and between Jan. 15 and 16 on Hogans Valley Way three golf clubs worth \$900 were taken, also from a garage.

In mid-December, golf clubs were taken from seven homes in another part of Preston, with a total value of \$13,785.

"The majority of thefts are from unlocked cars and unlocked garages," Lee said.

Golf club theft is difficult to solve, he added. "There is nothing traceable, unless the owner etches a number in them, which they're not going to do. It's a matter of guesswork as much as anything, unless there is something unique."

The police department has been in contact with Play it Again, Sports and employees there are trying to keep a lookout for stolen clubs.

But "they've got outlets in other states, too," Lee added. And golf clubs can be pawned at any pawn shop.

Chris Davis of the records department at the Cary Police Department said there were at least five golf club thefts within half a mile of the recent thefts in the Preston area during 1998. Other thefts have been reported in other parts of Preston and in other subdivisions in Cary. But the thieves seem to hit Preston more than any other subdivision, he said.

Lee said he does not necessarily think the thieves are teenagers, although that was his first reaction when the thefts started last year. "We have no bonafide suspects at this time," Lee added.

Southport office park grows up

By Mary Beth Phillips
Staff Writer

When developers of Southport office park off of Aviation Parkway broke ground in 1988, they planned to build one building a year.

This year they are building four—as they reach their 10-year anniversary, they plan to finish their 15th building in early 1999.

The original concept was flex buildings, buildings which can be upfitted to provide warehouse space, laboratory space, or office space. This idea was understandable, considering the proximity to the Raleigh-Durham International Airport.

But Mitch Adams, project manager for Southport, discovered that tenants were more interested in office space. And he said the driving force behind the success of the development has not been the airport, but the access to I-40. Without that access, "I'd be on building 5 instead of 15 today," he said.

"From Morrisville, you can do business in any part of the Triangle," Adams said. "I-40 is that



Easy access to I-40 and Raleigh-Durham Airport has been a boon to Southport Business Park.

link that allows them to reach all parts of the Triangle."

Through the past 10 years, the buildings have evolved from siding with brick trim to a modern concrete

wall with a simple design to fancy brick office buildings, with ceramic tile in the bathrooms and all the bells and whistles. The first office

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