

# Closing Social Security Office Distinct Possibility

By CARMEN JACKINS  
Staff Reporter

Just when local officials thought the debate over the closing of the Statesville Social Security Department had been settled, or at least held in check, comes word that Hickory District Manager Max Davis is looking for new office space to house his 28-employees plus the seven he'll gain when the Statesville office closes.

According to information in the Feb. 2 edition of the Hickory Daily Record, the Government Services Administration is accepting bids for a 10,000 square-foot office building with at least 60 parking spaces. Smith is quoted as saying that it is hoped the move can be made by the end of the year.

This puts assurances Statesville officials received from Deputy Commissioner for Operations Janice Warden in doubt. In a November meeting with Mayor John Marshall, Warden said that before any decision affecting the office was started a thorough study considering all factors, including the county's growth, would be assembled. This data, she said, would be given to elected and public leaders in the community for review and response.

Only after this, she said, would the Social Security Administration reach a decision on whether they would leave the office as it is, reduce it in size, close it, or increase the size of the current office. She said that nothing would be done about closing or changing the Statesville office for a year and probably at least five years.

Employees of the Statesville office and others have long questioned the wisdom behind the proposed closing the office

and the lack of evidence supporting such a move. In September, at a public forum, Ron Tysinger, N.C. Area Director of Social Security was asked for copies of all data relating to the closing. Tysinger said that would not be possible, explaining that some information in the study could not be made public. Questions arose from the floor as to the study being public information; therefore, available to the public.

Rosemary Kelley, who serves as both a claims representative and shop steward for the Statesville office, feels that officials did not do a comprehensive study of the county and were simply not aware that Iredell County "... had two decent sized towns - Mooresville and Statesville - and with the annexation of Meck Neck would be gaining between eight and 10 percent of the North Mecklenburg population, increasing the county's current 105,000 population by 20,000. In addition, because of the configuration of Iredell County, the Statesville office also serves parts of Alexander and Davie Counties." The Hickory office handles claims for Catawba, Caldwell, Alexander, Burke and Avery counties.

On an average day, 75 clients are processed through the Statesville Social Security office which is staffed by seven claims officers, two service representatives, a receptionist and Manager Carolyn Ledford, who came on board after Peggy Buillion retired June 27, 1997.

According to Kelley, when local offices are absorbed into larger district offices, the department establishes a contact or satellite station which operate out of donated space a half day, one or two days a

week. Because these stations are not equipped with direct computer links to the Baltimore main frame, all a claims representative can do for a client is take the information and process it into the computer when he gets back to the district office. This, she says, will cause delays in pro-

cessing claims and providing necessary information to clients.

Iredell County is ranked the 18th largest county in the state and is 13th highest in revenue. The county ranks third in the state for residential and commercial building permits according to the Statesville

Chamber of Commerce. Officials also point out that with its central location between I-40 and I-77 continued, steady growth can not be avoided.

The current lease on the Statesville office runs through Aug. 1, 2000.

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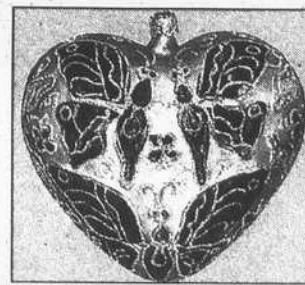
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