



## HELPING HANDS

"I especially love mowing the grass. I like looking back and seeing what I've done. I take pride in doing a good job." — James Ferebee **INSIDE, A3**

## WHO'S GOT THE BIGGEST

DOG, HOUSE, CHURCH FAMILY, TREE  
IN CHOWAN COUNTY? **COMMUNITY, C1**



## Steamers take Daredevils 5 to 4

Remain near top spot  
in division **SPORTS, B1**

# CHOWAN HERALD

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## Bertie invites Wal-Mart to build in Merry Hill

■ Site is 10 minutes from downtown Edenton

■ Smaller project was rumored for here years ago

BY SEAN JACKSON  
Staff Writer

Nearly a decade after some local businessmen crusaded against Wal-Mart coming here, Bertie County officials are inviting the mega-retailer to a site nearby.

The proposed site is in Merry Hill beside Black Rock Deli, about one minute from the Chowan Riv-

er Bridge.

"Bertie County is prepared to work with Wal-Mart to expedite permits and approvals necessary for development and construction of new retail facilities at this location," Bertie Commissioners Chairman Rick Harrell said in his March 6 letter to the Chapel Hill-based developer.

In 1998, some Edenton busi-

nessmen rallied against a rumor that Wal-Mart was considering a location on the northern edge of town.

The property owner requested that his land be rezoned to allow for large-scale retail development.

The owner's request was delayed as town officials drafted Edenton's first Unified Develop-

ment Ordinance. The owner ultimately pulled his request.

The proposed Bertie 841-acre project is tentatively named Mimosa Plantation, straddling U.S. Highway 17 just minutes from downtown Edenton.

The developer, Marcus Jackson of Jackson Stoddard Associates LLC, declined to comment about the Mimosa Plantation project.

"We just can't comment on behalf of our client," said Jackson, who also declined to say who his client is.

California-based development company Vicinages lists Mimosa Plantation on its Web site. The four-phase project includes "big-box" retail in the first

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## Taxes will increase

Allgood vows not to vote for an increase next year

BY REBECCA BUNCH  
Staff Writer

Chowan County commissioners unanimously approved a 1.5 cent property tax increase Monday night despite concerns raised by a small group of residents at the meeting.

Residents who spoke questioned the wisdom of raising property taxes in the wake of a revaluation carried out last year that more than doubled many homeowners' tax bills.

Copeland said he sympathized with people in the community, particularly retirees living on a fixed income, who were increasingly finding it difficult to make ends meet.

"You never recommend a tax increase unless you're absolutely certain it is needed," he said.

Commissioner Jimmy Allgood vowed that (he) "will not vote for a tax increase next year."

Town Councilman Steve Biggs was among those who spoke against the tax rate increase.

Many people, he said, "are ready to put their houses on the market and leave town ... I absolutely beg of you, give us a break."

He pointed out that in addition to the revalua-

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## First cotton blossom spotted



Earline White/The Chowan Herald

Benson Byrum, 5, son of Butch and Rachel Byrum of Tyner, poses with the first cotton blossom in Chowan County found in his father's crop Monday.

Butch Byrum planted this prima cotton crop in April. The prima crop, which has a longer growing season than the typical cotton crop in this area, is popular among brides for decorations. Byrum has been shipping his cotton and its bolls as far away as Singapore for wedding and educational purposes.

## Local woman shot to death

Warrant issued for alleged gunman; no arrest yet

BY EARLINE WHITE  
Managing Editor

The Chowan County Sheriff's office is looking for the estranged husband of an Edenton woman who was killed Monday night.

James Earl Freeman, 46, of 6578 Newlands Road in Columbia, is charged with fatally shooting his wife, Sharlene Moring Freeman, just after 10 p.m. Monday at the American Legion fairgrounds.



Freeman

According to witness reports, a 1992 white Plymouth Voyager was spotted in the parking lot of the Legion fairgrounds during bingo.

"I don't think anyone realized who he was," Sheriff Dwayne Goodwin said of Freeman.

Freeman allegedly waited in the van parked beside his wife's car until bingo was over.

As she was getting into her vehicle, Freeman fired two or three shots, Goodwin said.

Witnesses said that the gun used was a rifle, but the caliber and



Freeman

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## Local youth saves two friends from drowning

BY SEAN JACKSON  
Staff Writer

Dean Heffernan calls a young friend of the family a hero, saying the 13-year-old saved his and his son's lives.

Heffernan, his 19-year-old son William, and Winston Blackledge had just finished mowing the Heffernan lawn when the boys decided to take a dip in the pond out back.

A refreshing idea quickly went awry as William panicked after going under in 12-foot-deep water. His father, fully clothed, jumped in to rescue him.

But he needed Winston to keep William from drowning.

"I gave up," Dean Heffernan said. "I made peace with the Lord when I thought William was gone."

William, who had graduated from John A. Holmes High School just nights before, had gone under three times and had been down for a couple of minutes before Winston reached in and pulled his older friend to the surface.

"He's a hero," Heffernan said of Winston. "If it wasn't for him doing that, William would be gone."

Winston just grinned sheepishly and shrugged when asked if he felt he was a hero.

"Maybe a little bit," the rising freshman at John A. Holmes said.

Like his father, William said there's no doubt Winston is a hero. Just minutes after William and his father collapsed on shore, emergency officials arrived.

William's mother, Sandra Heffernan, had called 911.

"I told them my son was drowning," she said.



Sean Jackson/The Chowan Herald

Dean Heffernan, left, and son William, right, stand proudly with the friend that saved their lives, Winston Blackledge.

Dean Heffernan worked for 17 years with EMS staffs in Pasquotank and Chowan counties. He is currently a maintenance supervisor at Davis Place Apartments in Edenton.

"I never thought I'd need to call on them," Heffernan said of the EMS crews that rushed him and his son to Chowan Hospital that night. Both were

released within several hours.

William slept hard that night, while his father only caught a brief nap in a chair. Waking up the next morning, the scope of the incident hit William hard.

"I cried and cried," he said. "I didn't realize how close I'd come to death."



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