



Steamers continue to look for director of sales, no plans for GM this year **A9**

American Legion Post 40 hosts Four Chaplains service Sunday **C10**

Albemarle Bank will not lease Town Hall space **SEE BELOW**

## Puppy deaths ruled an accident

Tip given about heat lamp found in woods near home

By Earline White  
Managing Editor

Contrary to earlier reports, the death of two puppies on Sandy Ridge Road last month was likely caused by the use of a heat lamp in an outside kennel, local officials said Tuesday.

The deaths have been ruled an accident.

"We didn't have all of the story," Sheriff Dwayne Goodwin said of the month-long investigation.

During the probe, neighbors were interviewed, revealing that a lamp was being used in the kennel, authorities said. The charred remains of an extension cord was later discovered abandoned in the woods near the home, Goodwin said.

He believes that the lamp set items on which the puppies slept afire, later spreading to the puppies themselves.

"The owner failed to mention using a lamp to keep the puppies warm, a standard practice when dealing with young animals.

"By the time officials arrived on the scene there were no signs of the lamp," Goodwin said.

The owner Liddie Leach denies using a lamp for the puppies.

"There wasn't a heat lamp," Leach said. "Some kind of lamp shouldn't have that much watt to it. I don't understand how it happened."

Leach will not face charges based on the deaths of the puppies.

The investigation is continuing through the district attorney's office.

## Rash of break-ins sweeps county

A \$1,000 reward being offered for information

By Earline White  
Managing Editor

Gold jewelry and other high-priced items are at the center of a recent rash of break-ins in Chowan and Bertie counties.

Four homes in Edenton Bay and two in Village Creek were recently broken into. Over \$17,000 worth of jewelry was taken from one

home. Two guns, a TV and coins were taken from others.

Officials from both counties met Monday to discuss tactics on finding those responsible.

"The tools used in the crimes and the manner by which the perpetrators got into the homes are similar in each case," Sheriff Dwayne Goodwin said.

"These people know what they are looking for," Investigator Rhonda Copeland with the Edenton police said.

"They take exactly what they want, leaving similar high-priced items behind and get out. It's almost like they have scoped out the place beforehand."

Officials are compiling a list of common workers — contractors, landscapers, among others — to narrow down suspects.

"Several years ago when the price of gold was at an all-time high, there was a similar rash," Copeland said.

"We are checking with other agencies to see if

this sort of thing is wide spread," Copeland added.

Authorities are also looking at cases prior to the recent spree to see if there are any connections.

In the meanwhile, pawn shops and consignment shops in N.C. and Va. are being questioned about the missing items.

"Pay attention to your neighborhood," Copeland advises concerned residents.

"When people are doing work in the neighborhood, get their IDs and tag num-

bers. Tell the police so we can have a running list of these people.

"If you're going to be out of town, tell a neighbor, set your lights on a timer. Don't keep large amounts of money in the house."

There is a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for these crimes.

Anyone with information about the break-ins is encouraged to call lead investigator Tim Brabble at 482-0865.

## HWY. 32 WIDENING PROJECT TO BE COMPLETE BY NOVEMBER



Earline White/The Chowan Herald

Businesses along Hwy. 32 are preparing for a widening project from town limits to Byrum Farms. Virginia Fork Produce relocated one of its fertilizer storage facilities and above, Joe Lee Company, is having its gas lines lowered 18 inches to make way for the project.

## Plans to make way for Lowe's underway

By Connie Sage  
Contributing Writer

Engineers for Lowe's are scheduled to meet today with town officials in what is seen as the first step toward constructing the home improvement store in Edenton.

The meeting comes nearly three months after Town Council gave a thumbs up to expand the proposed Edenton Commons Shopping Center to include Lowe's.

"I feel like the process is moving forward," said Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton. "It's a good sign that they called and that they're coming; I'm pleased."

Knighton said consulting civil engineers Freeland and Kauffman of Greenville, S.C., are expected to talk about water, sewer, electric, stormwater drainage, parking, and landscaping designs for the proposed store.

Directors or representatives from the town's public works, electric and planning departments, and the local office of the state soil and conservation district, will join Knighton in the discussions.

### Still no confirmation

In August 2006, Town Council granted Norfolk developer Jon Wheeler a conditional use permit for the shopping center on Hwy. 32 North, near the Albemarle Ford dealership.

Wheeler was required to obtain a revised permit after Lowe's expressed an interest in becoming part of Edenton Commons last May.

The Planning Board recommended approving the resubmitted plans last October and the following month Council gave its OK after a contentious five-hour public hearing.

Since then, neither Wheeler nor Lowe's have announced when — or if — the store will be built.

A Lowe's spokeswoman said the national chain does not comment about specific sites "unless we have closed on all real estate matters."

Wheeler said last August that he had a letter of intent from Lowe's, but did not expect a firm commitment until Council approved plans for the expanded shopping center.

"I take it as a sign that things continue to move forward, but I have been told absolutely nothing," Knighton said.

### Farm Fresh out

Edenton Commons initially was expected to be anchored by a Farm Fresh grocery store.

Wheeler said last August that having two large anchor stores would aid the chances of success for the center, but said he was still in conversations with Farm Fresh and "nothing (was) consummated with them."

A 24-page fiscal impact report prepared by a Norfolk consultant for Wheeler the same month, however, said the "lead tenant of the proposed shopping center was a 56,000-square foot Farm Fresh supermarket."

But by October, the developer had taken down the Farm Fresh sign at the 38-acre shopping center site — the equivalent of

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## Proposed bank won't lease Town Hall

Town offices likely to remain on 1st floor

Upstairs could be converted into residences

By Connie Sage  
Contributing Writer

Leasing Town Hall is not an option for the proposed Albemarle Bank & Trust because of the high cost to remove a restriction that prohibits its use as a bank.

Instead, corporate and loan production offices for the planned bank will open Feb. 4 at the corner of S. Broad and E. Water streets in a building that until last week housed the Sweet Haven Bakery.

The municipal building is "not the best option for us at this point," said Eric Bergevin, founder and president of the planned bank.

Town Hall was built in 1911 as the Bank of Edenton, and later was home to Peoples Bank and Trust Co. Bank and later RBC

Centura Bank.

The two-story building was donated by Centura to the town in 1986 on the condition that no other bank could be located there.

Bergevin wanted Centura to lift the 22-year-old restrictive covenant in order to propose a lease-to-own arrangement with the town.

But based on their own market research and potential competition with their own bank, Centura told Bergevin it would charge "hundreds of thousands of dollars" to lift the ban.

"We didn't want to spend that kind of money, then remodel Town Hall and purchase a building," Bergevin said.

Offices for Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton and five other municipal employees are on the first floor of Town Hall; the second floor is vacant.

The building likely will continue to be used as Town Hall.

Knighton said she will ask the Town Council next month to authorize spending \$30,000, which already had been budgeted in the current fiscal year,

to restore the exterior of Town Hall.

The town also is actively looking for a tenant to lease the 3,200 square-foot office space upstairs.

"We investigated a while back turning it into residential space," Knighton said. "If office space market space stays slow, we may revisit that idea."

Bergevin said the proposed bank initially will have three employees and will offer residential, boat and commercial real estate loans.

Its first loan was made last week, he said, but until the bank is chartered, loans must be held by another bank.

Bergevin has until May 15 to raise \$12 million to formally open the bank; to date he has raised about 40 percent of the required funds. A public offering circular will be issued by the first of March, he said.

Albemarle Bank & Trust would join four other banking facilities on Broad Street: Gateway, Southern Bank, RBC Centura and Bank of America.

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