

Shane Bass, 22 months old, now has cutting edge electronic implants that will let him hear for the first time.

The \$100,000 cochlear implants will cure his deafness. But medical insurance won't cover it.



Vernon Fueston



Courtesy of the Bass family

Miracle cure has crushing price

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

Shane Bass is profoundly deaf, but a cure is only days away. On March 18, thanks to remarkable cutting-edge surgery, he will hear sound for the first time in his life.

That's the date the electronic "ears" doctors implanted in his head will be turned on.

Bryan and Suzanne Bass have no earthly idea how they will pay for their son's miracle cure. But they are determined to see him hear and speak, no matter what the cost.

Watching Shane at play in the living room of his Edenton home, it's hard to appreciate what almost total deafness is like. He shows no response to any noise, no matter how loud, unless he can feel the vibrations in his body.

He's a happy kid who loves to squeal and vocalize in nonsense syllables like most toddlers. But he should be on the threshold of speech.

Child development experts say children Shane's age should be using one or two syllable words and babbling with sentence-like inflection.

Profound deafness

That is impossible for Shane. Bryan and Suzanne feared their son would be seriously language-delayed unless the surgery was performed immediately.

"He's got 90 decibels or greater deafness," Suzanne Bryan said of her son as he played with a book, his back to her. "That's profound deafness."

She stamped her foot on the floor, hard enough to startle everyone in the room. It's the only way to get his attention.

He turned to her and smiled.

On Feb. 28, Shane received two cochlear implants, a revolutionary device. They will bypass his defective ears and feed electronic impulses from a microphone directly to his auditory nerves. It's the same miracle technology made famous when it was used to treat radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh.

A \$100,000 bill

It's a miracle cure, but miracles have a price. In Shane's case, the bill will come to over \$100,000.

The Basses have no real idea how they will pay for it, but they've

HOW TO HELP

Contributions to help with Shane's medical expenses can be dropped off in person at Edenton Furniture, S. Broad Street.

Call 482-8418 to learn more.

taken the financial risk anyway. Bryan works at a sawmill and Suzanne stays at home, tending to Shane and home schooling their 11 year-old daughter, Britni.

But whatever the cost, they want Shane to hear and speak before he starts school.

Shane's parents have done all the things they were supposed to do, but that may not be enough. They own their own home. They have some savings. Bryan has health insurance where he works.

But unless their appeals are successful, they may be facing a lifetime of debt.

Their insurance company does not pay for "hearing aids."

Bryan Bass gets indignant about that. "It's not a hearing aid," he said, "it's more like a pacemaker."

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On your mark

Party chairs ready for May 6 primary

"Turnout has always been a problem. They believe their vote doesn't count ... It affects them but they feel they have no say."

— Martha Badger



"I'm a big believer in term limits, two terms. Without that you end up with the arrogance of the incumbents."

— Bob Steinburg

For Democrats, it's all about turnout

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

There once was a time when they called it the "Solid South," an impenetrable, rock-solid wall of Democratic Party political solidarity that was seldom breached.

Today, Democrat superiority, at least when it comes to local politics, is still a formidable force in North Carolina. But that once solid wall has suffered a few dents here and there.

For Martha Badger, chair of the county's Democratic Party, maintaining that political home court advantage is all about motivating those Chowan County residents who are registered, or even lean, Democratic. It's a tough challenge.

Badger has been chair of the party since June of 2007. Born in Rocky Mount, she moved here 10 years ago from Nashville, Tenn.

She said she wasn't really active politically until her husband dragged her to a party precinct meeting one evening. Party rules required they have five in attendance. That was five or six years ago; she's been hooked ever since.

She said her Republican opposition tends to be well motivated with a high voter turnout. They also tend to be more affluent with their numbers concentrated in the county's more well-heeled districts.

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Democrats and their allies tend to be less affluent and less politically motivated, according to Badger. Following a national trend, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to stay home on Election Day if they're not strongly motivated. That can blunt or wipe out any advantages that numerical superiority in registered voters can give.

She said Democrats have the strength locally when it comes to numbers, but it's voter turnout that wins elections. Being in the majority only counts if the majority votes. She said she envies her opposition's commitment.

"Democrats fall in love," Badger said, "but Republicans fall in line."

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Republicans out to make their presence felt

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

Back in the early '60s, when Bob Steinburg was president of his college's student body government, he got the thrill of his life.

As president, Steinburg met both Barry Goldwater and Bobby Kennedy.

It was Goldwater, with his campaign slogan, "In your heart, you know I'm right," who made the bigger impression.

"He was a pioneer, ahead of his time," Steinburg said. "If it wasn't for Barry Goldwater, there would never have been a Ronald Reagan."

He's been politically active ever since, an unapologetic conservative. Two and a half years ago Steinburg moved from Virginia to Edenton, a place he had visited and admired for years. One of the first things he did was register to vote, as a Republican.

Then he began to meet fellow conservatives who were registered Democrats. It still makes him shake his head.

Their reasoning, according to Steinburg, went something like this: If there is no Republican primary and the Democrats frequently ran unopposed, only registered Democrats ended up with an effective voice in county politics. So, it's better to register as a Democrat, then vote your conscience in the statewide and national elections.

That did not sit well with Steinburg, so he checked into the local Republican Party. Then he was elected to chair it.

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Now, for the first time in memory, Republicans are fielding candidates in all of the races for Chowan County's board of commissioners. So many candidates have filed that the county will be holding both a Democratic and an unprecedented Republican primary.

Steinburg is a committed conservative Republican. He writes a political newspaper column that's now carried in numerous papers around the state. He believes his party is making progress in the region.

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Home sales steady. Foreclosures up. New projects forge ahead

By Connie Sage
Contributing Writer

At least two new local residential subdivisions representing nearly 1,000 homes are on hold until the faltering U.S. economy strengthens.

Queens Landing, off Hwy. 17 bordering Pembroke Creek, and Strawberry Hill by Queen Anne's Creek, will be delayed until the housing market rebounds.

"We're keeping all our permits current, but we've delayed the start

of the project because of the soft real estate market," said Richard Tremblay, an executive vice president with the Silver Companies, a real estate development and investment firm in Washington, D.C., and Boca Raton, Fla. "We're waiting for conditions to improve."

Tremblay said he told the town the project likely will be on hold until some time next year.

Strawberry Hill developer Gilliam Wood said his project is "poised to move" once the current market downturn improves.

"We're doing like everybody else," he said. "It's wait-and-see hoping the market condition will improve. If we had all of the good vibes in place, we'd be ready to go in 30 days."

Major work on Sandy Point, a proposed 1,500-unit residential development near the Albemarle Sound Bridge, is delayed until November because of state fisheries regulations, said Sam Young, president of the Fund for Sandy Point North Carolina.

Home sales steady

Daily news reports explain any developer's hesitancy.

The country is in or teetering on a recession, gas prices are at a record high, homeowners' equities have fallen below 50 percent for the first time since World War II, home foreclosures have soared to an all-time high, and the dollar hit a new low.

But at least for individual home

sales, Chowan County may not be as bad off as other parts of the country.

Since the beginning of the year, 20 homes have been sold here, compared to 18 closings for the same period last year, according to the Albemarle Area Association of Realtors.

"It's a steady market but it's not a great market," said Stephanie Bateman, executive officer for AAAR. "It hasn't stalled."

While the numbers are holding, the overall trend for annual home sales in Chowan County is down. A total of 165 homes, townhouses and condos sold in 2005; 148 in 2006, and 110 in 2007.

Those statistics do not include for-sale-by-owner, commercial prop-

erties, lots or homes sold by builders who do not use a Multiple Listing Service database.

Nationally, existing home sales in January were 23.4 percent below 2007 sales for the same month a year ago, according to the National Association of Realtors.

Foreclosures up

Meanwhile, a record .83 percent of U.S. home loans were entering the foreclosure process in the last three months of 2007 compared with .54 percent for the same time a year earlier, Reuters reported.

In North Carolina, 6.5 percent of the state's 1.4 million loans were past due for the same period, with

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AUCTION
7:00PM

RELAY FOR LIFE

BBO & FRIED CHICKEN LUNCH & DINNER
Tuesday, March 18th: 11:00am to 2:00pm - 4:00pm to 7:00pm
FREE Delivery at Lunch - \$7.00 Donation

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AUCTION
7:00PM