

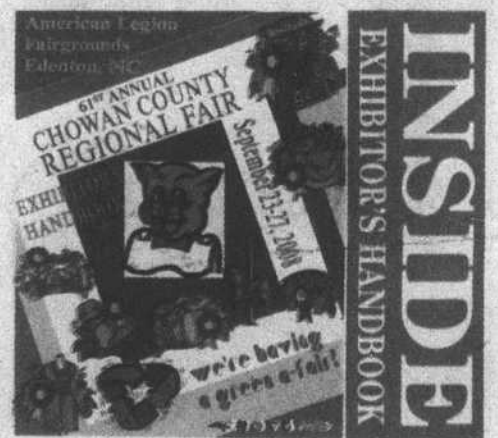


CHOWAN HERALD

482-4418

Wednesday, July 16, 2008

50¢



Low ticket sales have Rocky Hock Playhouse owners concerned about future of productions

Benjamin Weathers
Contributing Writer

After 10 years in Edenton, the fate of the Rocky Hock Playhouse hangs in the balance of its next three shows.

The independent Christian theatre company is concerned about its future in Edenton due to years of dwindling ticket sales. Last year the playhouse sold 14,000 tickets, a dramatic decrease from 20,000 when it first opened its doors.

Owners Jeff and Gloria Emmerich said that they were disappointed in the drop in attendance which has resulted in thousands of dollars of loss that the couple has personally had to absorb.

The couple said that they were somewhat optimistic about the future but conceded that if there was not a significant increase in ticket sales by the end of the year they will be forced out of Edenton and into a larger community.

"We'd be sorry to leave," said Emmerich. "But the community has grown accustomed to us, so they haven't supported us as much. If people don't start coming, it probably won't be here that much longer," said Emmerich.

Jeff and his wife Gloria first started the company in 1997 in the Outer Banks before relocating to Edenton. The location proved to be fruitful at first, with local patrons and others regularly traveling from out of town.

The couple was married in 1971 and has two children, now adults, Holly and Ben. Both had grown up heavily involved with theatre and the church and had always dreamed of starting their own Christian theatre company.

"Our goal was always to bring a spiritual message and bring the Bible to life," Gloria said.

The Rocky Hock Playhouse is one of very few exclusively Christian theatre companies, producing over 30 shows in the last nine years.

Jeff described the decrease in attendance as part of a larger culture shift.

"People are satisfied with secular entertain-



Ryan Clemens, Katie Fridsma and Rob Arbaugh star in the latest Emmerich production "Under His Wings," which could be one of the last shows if sales at the theatre do not improve.

ment," he said. "Christian entertainment isn't as valued as it was 10 years ago."

This summer the playhouse will celebrate its tenth anniversary in Edenton by reviving the first play the company ever produced, called "Under His Wings," a musical based on the book of Ruth.

Emmerich and his wife Gloria perform in the show, along with a cast of six other members with ages ranging from 19 to 33, the majority of whom are theatre and performing arts students at Regent University and the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C.

In what Emmerich describes as a gift to the community, children age 6 through 18 living in Chowan County will be admitted free. Discounts for groups will be given as well, Jeff said.

However, he reiterated that if ticket sales

didn't significantly increase with "Under His Wings" or the company's fall and Christmas productions, the Rocky Hock Playhouse will be no more.

So far, preshow ticket sales are just under 2,000 — a third less than past summer sales.

Through the good times and the bad the couple has remained committed to their faith and said they will continue working in the theatre, even if it's not in Edenton.

"When you're called on to do something, if you don't do it, you're miserable," Gloria said.

As "Under His Wings" cast member Ryan Clemens said, "We worry about putting food in our bellies but when we're on stage, it feeds our soul."

"Under His Wings" will run July 15, to Aug. 16. For information, check out the company's Web site www.rockyhockplayhouse.com.

Two new candidates selected for commissioner runs in Nov.

Gwen Brown announced candidacy yesterday; Soles also a contender

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

Local elections officials have approved the petition filed by Gwen Brown to run for the second district seat on the Chowan County Board of Commissioners.

She will run as an unaffiliated candidate.

In a related event, Republicans have decided to run Dana Soles for the first district seat left without a Republican challenger when no winner was declared in the primary.

Brown is a life-long resident of Chowan County and is employed at Chowan Middle School, where she is the cafeteria manager as well as the director of the After School Plus program and the restitution/victims' compensation for juveniles.

Brown also works with the recreation department, directing the girls power camp and arts and crafts program.

During the holidays, she is the coordinator of Operation Santa.

Brown has been recognized by the Chamber of Commerce as a Volunteer of the Year William P. "Spec" Jones Award. She has also been honored by the Edenton Civic League for outstanding community service.

Brown is endorsed by the local Democratic Party.

"She has consistently shown by her active participation in programs benefiting the youth of Chowan County that she supports the values of this county and its communities," said Martha Badger, Chowan County Democratic Party Chair.

Brown's petition required the support of 4 percent of registered voters in the second district to allow her to run. The second district comprises the precincts of East Edenton and Yeopim.

Brown will run against Republican Edward (Eddy) Goodwin in the fall. No Democratic challenger was filed during the primaries when Goodwin won against incumbent Republican Bill Gardner, Jr.

As a result, there will be no official Democratic challenger in the race. A petition drive to run Brown was organized after the primary election by the Democrats.

Republicans had been considering their options until this week regarding a candidate to represent the party for Chowan's first district.

On primary Election Day, Darryl Stallings and Dana Soles both appeared on the ballot, even though Stallings had withdrawn shortly before the election. When Stallings won a majority, the election was declared without a winner.

That put the decision in the hands of the Republican's executive committee. The committee said it was free either to run Soles or choose another candidate.

In the end, they chose Soles. "He made a fantastic platform presentation to the committee," Republican Chairman Bob Steinburg said. "I think he's going to be a great candidate."



Brown

New county planning director sought

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

Elizabeth Bryant, who until recently served as town-county planning director, will soon find herself out of a job because the county needs a full-time person in that capacity.

A new full-time planning and inspections director will be hired in the next nine months, said Chowan County Manager Peter Rascoe.

Salary range for the job is \$33,700 to \$60,500.

In order to fill the position, the part-time job held by Bryant, the department's former full-time director, is being eliminated.

The recent departure of Chowan County Emergency Management Coordinator Patty Madry will make Bryant the second longtime county employee to leave.

Madry recently announced plans to use personal leave time until her retirement in January.

County Manager Peter Rascoe said he does not anticipate any additional departures in the near future.

Bryant worked full-time for Edenton and Chowan County from May 2003 to May 2007.

When she returned from 12 weeks of maternity leave, she came back on a part-time basis.

She has remained on staff part-time ever since.

Holly Colombo from the inspections department became interim director at that time.

According to a job description provided by the county, the director's responsibilities include administering and enforcing ordinances for the town and county.

The director is also expected to provide staff analysis during review of zoning and subdivision plans, as well as coordinate with local government, developers, property owners and contractors in addition to departments, boards and

commissions as necessary. Rascoe said that a state-wide search for a new director is being made.

Applications can be found at www.chowancounty-nc.gov.

Rascoe said he had recently talked with Bryant about the necessity for a full-time director and had asked her to consider working full-time again.

He said she indicated she could not.

Rascoe praised Bryant's past work on behalf of the department and said he deeply regretted that the downturn in the economy made it necessary to eliminate the part-time position she currently holds to hire a full-time director.

"Elizabeth has done a fine job," Rascoe said. "I really wish she could come back full-time. We would love to have her."

Bryant said she is looking for another job that would allow her to work part-time and still spend time with her daughter, Laura Beth.

"I just could not make the choice to go full-time again and spend less time with my family," she said.

Bryant said before her daughter's birth she was working an average of 50 hours a week with 60-hour weeks "on occasion."

"I was averaging 10 to 12 night meetings per month," she added.

Planner Wes Haskett, who already works full-time in the department, said he does not plan to apply for the position.



Bryant

Step taken to sanction Bill Gardner, Jr. dropped days later

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

Local Republican leaders threatened sanctions against Bill Gardner, Jr. this week but quickly dropped the matter.

If sanctioned, Gardner, a Republican county commissioner, would have been removed from the party's leadership and disqualified from running as a Republican candidate for the next four years.

The Republican leadership cited Gardner's signature on a petition supporting the candidacy of Gwen Brown as an independent.

Brown is seeking the right to run against Republican Edward (Eddy) Goodwin for the second district commission seat. Goodwin beat Gardner in the May primary election.

An e-mail, sent by Republican chairman Bob Steinburg, told Gardner that his signing of the petition was a violation of the party's plan of organization.

The plan prohibits any action by party officials publicly supporting a non-Republican, Steinburg said. Party officials may privately support whomever they wish.

The letter threatened to prohibit Gardner from running for public office as a Republican for four years and disallow his participation in party activities such as local, state, or national conventions.

The e-mail further stated that the executive committee would inform him of its decision by registered mail.

In an interview Friday, Gardner said the fact that he signed Brown's petition should not be seen as an endorsement.

"I'm supporting the process," Gardner said. "I'm absolutely not supporting anybody."

The petition to place Brown on the ballot as an independent was orchestrated by the Democratic Party.



Gardner

See GARDNER, Page A2 >

INDEX

A Local
EditorialA7
Land Transfers.....A5

B Sports
Recreation News.....B1
Nascar B2

C Community News
Upcoming Events.....C2
SocietyC4
ObituariesC6
Church C7, 8

D Classifieds
Buy/Sell/TradeD1
Service DirectoryD2
Employment.....D4



6 89076 44813 0
©2006 The Chowan Herald
All Rights Reserved