

## Residents up in arms about Chowan's 'fiscal crisis'

Copeland says he never benefited from public monies

By Earline White  
Managing Editor

Many residents are furious that Chowan County finds itself in a "fiscal crisis," with insufficient funds for a \$1 million school loan payment.

A tax increase might be

necessary to balance this year's budget.

Also, questions are swirling about how the county's multi-million reserves were depleted without more oversight.

The county Board of Commissioners will meet to consider a revised 2008-09 budget Aug. 4 at 6 p.m.

"To know that \$20 million was spent and we didn't realize it was shocking," said commission Vice Chairman

Jimmy Alligood.

"But I'm just as much to blame as anyone. I should have critiqued the budget more."

Retired County Manager Cliff Copeland said in an e-mail Tuesday, "I have always worked with the county commissioners to make careful and deliberate decisions about county affairs."

"At every turn the strategy has been clear: to borrow internally to finance our fa-

cilities and services and repay these monies when the economy improved."

He said he "never benefited in any way from any public monies."

He declined to answer specific questions yesterday.

According to county audits, the reserve fund has been used to cover the shortfall between revenues and expenses for the last five years.

Copeland told *The Herald*

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in a story published in *The Daily Advance* on Saturday that he borrowed money "internally," but that he checked with the Local Government Commission before doing so.

County Finance Manager Lisa Jones said, "As finance officer, I kept the county manager regularly informed of all fund and in-

vestment balances and performed all fund transfers only as directed by him.

"All expenditures paid by Chowan County were [for] lawful purposes."

Commissioner Bill Gardner said, "people want and deserve answers."

Resident Rich Halbert said, "The damage done to Chowan County is significant and lasting."

"Future growth that ev- See COUNTY, Page A2 >

## Town electric rates to rise 12.7 percent

National price of uranium, coal to blame for cost

By Vernon Fueston  
Contributing Writer

Responding to a wholesale rate increase, Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton said she is proposing a 12.7 percent increase on retail electric rates in Edenton.

The proposed increase is considerably higher than an estimate of seven percent made by Knighton in May.

She said the Power Agency released revised figures in June.

The increase will be effective on bills issued in September.

Knighton said the Power Agency staff presented a 14 percent increase in wholesale electric rates to a special meeting of the town council Monday.

Edenton's power is generated by coal-fired and nuclear power plants.

Knighton said a steep increase in the price of coal, the transportation of coal and the price of yellow cake uranium caused the increase.

Uranium prices have risen on commodities markets as plans for new U.S. nuclear plants have been announced, Knighton said.

A typical household in Edenton using 1,500 kilowatts of electricity per month can expect an increase of about \$25 per month, Knighton said.

The town council will vote on the increase during its Aug. 12 meeting.

## AN EDENTON "OLYMPIAN"



Bridget Baxter poses with her replica Olympic Torch at the Barker House in Edenton.

Special to the Herald  
By Blair Currie

As the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games open, there is a great interest worldwide.

What isn't widely known is that we have a young lady in Edenton who had an active part in the inauguration of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, and who actually ran with the Olympic Torch.

Bridget Baxter was an occupational health nurse in Reston, Va. She liked to enter contests, so when one appeared promoting a trip to the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, she entered, and

she won.

The contest was sponsored jointly by Shoppers Food Warehouse, a local radio station, and Coca Cola.

The adventure started at Dulles airport, then on to J.F.K. in New York where she met up with Coca Cola chaperones, officials and other winners from across America.

Arriving in Barcelona, the group was shuttled to a super-luxury Mediterranean hotel in nearby Alicante.

Coca Cola officials briefed the contest group on what was expected of

them in procedure during the four-day stay.

Baxter's part was to run holding the Olympic Torch for a distance of 200 yards. A pro athlete ran alongside her, and a follow-up truck carried four spare torches in case of mishaps.

As Baxter ran through the densely crowded streets, she responded to the cheers of the crowd with her own greeting — "Como esta!"

This was the experience of a lifetime, a great honor, and her beautiful three-foot replica of the Olympic torch will be a treasured remembrance for a lifetime.

## Chief Bonner to retire

By Earline White  
Managing Editor

After 35 years, Police Chief Greg Bonner is retiring, effective Dec. 1.

Bonner was the first full-time African-American officer with the Edenton police, and he quickly moved up the ranks, attaining every "first" a black male could in local law enforcement history.

"I feel confident walking away, knowing Edenton has received quality police protection," Bonner said.

Bonner was recruited by J.D. Parrish, former police chief, while on leave from the U.S. Marine Corp.

He remembers coming home from Okinawa and visiting his grandparents.

He remembers civil rights marches and turmoil in the streets.

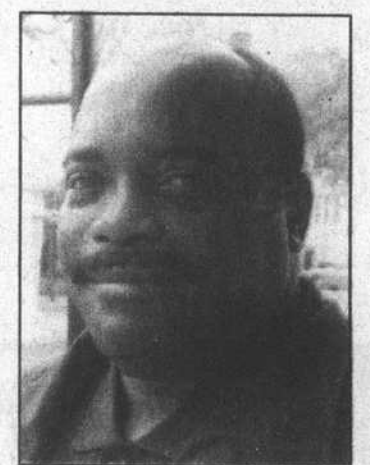
It was not the town he remembered leaving just one year earlier.

There were only 11 officers, on three 8-hour shifts. Years later, Bonner would find himself in the same predicament — less than the state average of police officers, by 4.

Gang graffiti was popping up in the town. Stories were popping up of 'bad cops' in Edenton. The town again was no stranger to news crews.

His desk is buried in paperwork — a part of the job he will not miss.

Nor will he miss being on the clock all the time, every-



Bonner was the first African-American sergeant, captain and chief in Edenton.

where.

After becoming chief, Bonner and his family quickly became accustomed to late night visits from frantic, troubled, confused residents at their home.

But they never turned anyone away.

For similar measures of generosity, Bonner has been given awards by civic clubs and churches, too many to name.

"That's what I'll miss when I leave here — helping people. But in some ways I'll continue that."

Bonner was hired by the police department Nov. 30, 1973; he also celebrated his 20th birthday and separated from the U.S.M.C. all before lunch.

His career continued in a whirlwind fashion.

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## Local man on leave tells of life patrolling streets of Iraq

By Vernon Fueston  
Contributing Writer

Joel Williams has passed the half-way mark on his tour of duty in Iraq.

That's earned him a well-deserved few weeks of R&R at home with his family and a chance to get acquainted with his one-year-old twins, Braxton and Marik.

It's been nine months since he's seen them.

"I surprised him with a limousine at the airport," Ellen said of their reunion. Her plan was to greet him with a big smile, but there was a make-up malfunction.

"I didn't want him to see me with my mascara running," she said. "I was a mess."

That was July 16. Joel will catch a plane back to Iraq Aug. 3.

It hasn't taken Joel long to realize he's not the only hero in the family. The twins are demanding, even with two parents in the house.

"I thought my job was hard, but I've got it easy compared to what she's got to go through," he said.

Ellen stays with her mother in Elizabeth City. Beside her in-laws, Michael Williams and Jane Mabry of Edenton, the rest of her family is in upstate New York.

Joel and Ellen met just as he was entering boot camp two years ago.

Joel could see something special was happening from the start, but he was a realist and told Ellen not to wait for him.

During his time in boot camp, they fell in love over old-fashioned letters, the kind you put in envelopes.

They were going to do the rational thing and wait; at least that was the plan.

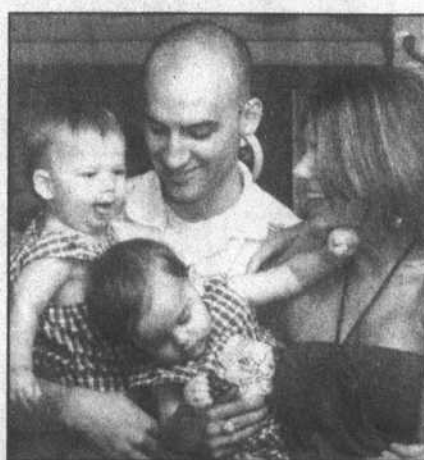
They ended up getting married six months later.

Joel figures they were actually in each other's presence for a total of two months in all that time — not a long courtship.

Joel said it was a scary leap that he's glad he made. "I like it a lot better than being single," he said. "I just happened to find my soul mate."

Williams is an army specialist, E-4, serving with Bravo 3-7, an infantry company stationed near Iscandariah, Iraq. He's actually stationed in the area around a vital hydroelectric plant that produces half the power the country consumes.

He patrols the streets of small towns around the dam, keeping the area clear of Al Qaeda and insur-



Joel and Ellen share a moment with sons Braxton and Marik.

gent forces.

"We know every street and the people on them," he said. "We pushed out the Al Qaeda presence."

"Now we work with local leaders on projects involving food, water and utilities. We pull patrols around there on a daily basis along with the Iraqi Army."

The area is a fish-farming and agricultural region. Williams spends a lot of time face-to-face with the people there.

"For the most part, they're accepting," he said of the Iraqi people in his area.

"None of them are hostile.

"It's been a relatively safe place to be. It's a grab bag.

"Some of the people are indifferent to us, but that's OK. We can only extend a hand to them, then it's up to them to take it or not."

Conditions in Iraq change on a dime, and that's tough on Ellen.

"It's hard," she said. "With him over there, I can't watch the news. I'll hear something and not hear from him for weeks. That destroys me."

Joel can call home, but Ellen can't call him in Iraq.

No communication from Joel can mean one of several things. Joel said sometimes he's in places where there is no communication by phone or Internet.

Often he's pushed so hard in the field that he just doesn't have the energy or the time to call.

Or there could be a communications lockdown.

Whenever there is a casualty or even an incident involving the unit, communications home are stopped by the Army until families can be officially notified. Often Joel will come in from patrol only to find the phone locked.

Joel left for Iraq the first time on

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