

In the works
\$28 million by-pass proposed
outside of town



Karate instructors Ashlee and Eric Gilbert had their program terminated due to county budget cuts.

Recreation cuts affect hundreds

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

With 30 kids and adults taking classes at the Northern Chowan Community Center, Eric and Ashlee Gilbert's karate class was one of the center's most successful programs. Now that program has been cut. The demise of the karate program illustrates just what the dismissal of 10 part-time recreation department employees will cost the county.

Heavy cuts

In the county's second proposed budget option — the one calling for job cuts and an 8.5-cent realty tax increase — the loss of those 10 jobs was put forward. But those cuts have already been made.

Also on the table under option #2 is a 10 percent cut in operating funds. The recreation department has already started making cuts in services to the public, starting with the Northern Chowan Community Center.

About 2,000 users per month take advantage of the center's sports programs and weight rooms. During the colder months, that number swells to 3,500.

The center, once open 73 hours per week, has cut back to 50 hours because of staff cuts, said Robbie Laughton, director of Chowan's recreation department.

The center is no longer open on weekends and only until noon on Fridays.

Possible closure

Under County Manager Peter Rascoe's third budget option, the one calling for a 2.5-cent realty tax increase, the center would close completely, along with Swain's senior center in town.

Closure of the Northern Chowan Center would affect more than the public. Chowan Middle School also makes use of the center.

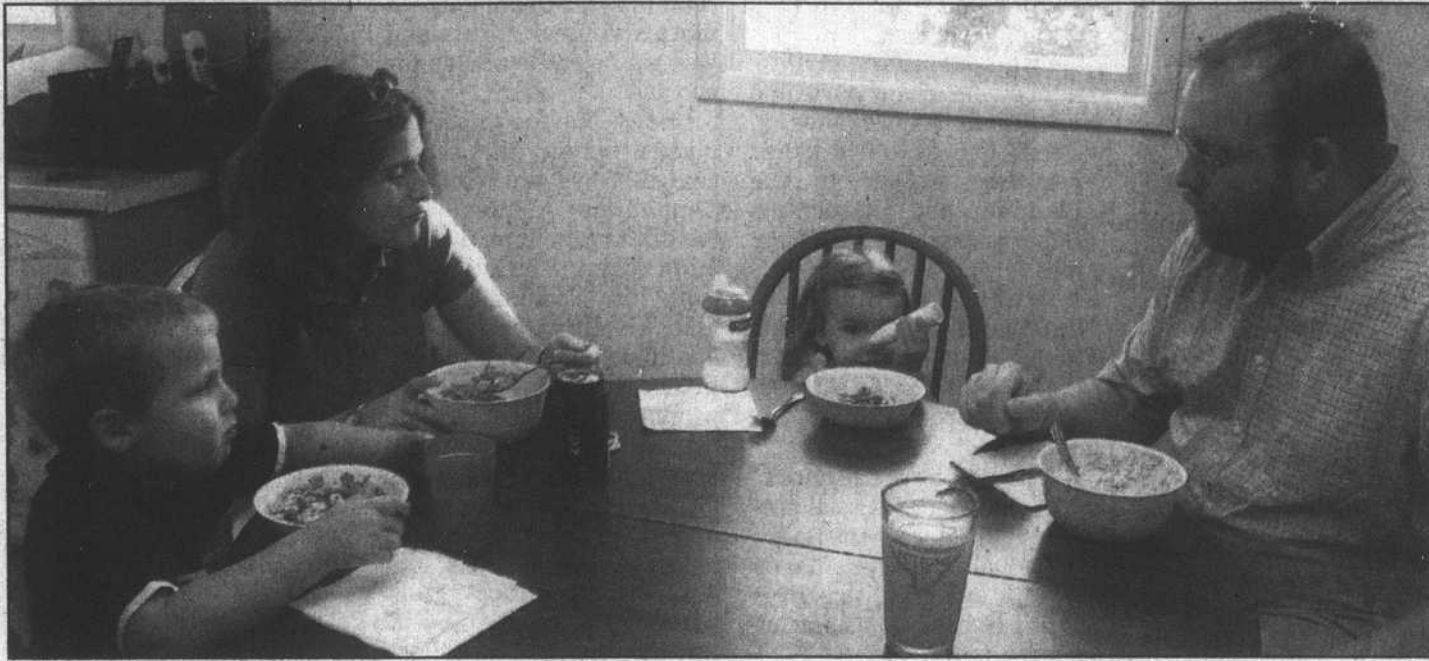
When it was constructed, the Northern Chowan Center was designed as a compromise between the recreation department and the school system.

The middle school was built without a full gymnasium and auditorium, saving money for the school system. The school now uses the center's facilities next door for athletics and assemblies.

The recreation department was able to do without building extra ball fields. See RECREATION, Page A2

FACES OF A FISCAL CRISIS

Beneath all the journal entries and beyond the PowerPoint presentations are our neighbors — volunteers, county employees and residents who rely on certain Chowan services. Here are some of their stories.



The DeVines — Kincaid,4, Jill, Cyndy,2, and Kirk — sit down for breakfast before Kirk starts another day of job hunting.



"After trying for so long to come back, my community has disappointed me and that hurts more than anything." — Kirk DeVine

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Former county social worker helped neglected and abused seniors

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

A lot of tears were shed the day layoffs came at Social Services.

Kirk DeVine's supervisor, Renee Long, cried for him when he lost his job. A secretary, Kim Goodwin, did a lot of weeping too.

DeVine spent most of the day contacting his clients — adults dealing with suspected abuse or neglect, or unable to perform even basic life skills without help — and wondered who would watch out for them now.

He also thought about how he had longed to move back to Edenton so his 2 and 4-year-old children could grow up in his hometown.

Now he spends his days filling out job applications and hoping to find work here.

But he doubts that will happen. "After trying for so long to come back, my community has disappointed me and that hurts more than anything," he said.

Staff meeting

DSS Director Ben Rose had called a staff meeting the week before the layoffs took place to tell workers

there were going to be some cost-saving measures taken because of the county budget crisis.

"You could tell something was going on but nobody would say anything," DeVine said.

A week later, at 11:58 a.m., DeVine was told he no longer had a job there as of the end of that business day.

He wrote an e-mail to County Manager Peter Rascoe saying that the services people who had been eliminated were providing should have been considered in the layoffs and not just how long they had been on the job.

DeVine, you see, was a one-person department. No one else did the job he was doing.

DeVine, who had joined the staff in March, said being a newcomer made him an obvious target.

"I was easy," he said. "The people who were gotten rid of, were gotten rid of without considering what services they provided. I think they (county officials) are scared and they acted rashly."

"At 5 o'clock I left for good," he said.

Rascoe said the layoffs represented a necessary cost-saving measure.

Coming home

Prior to March, DeVine had worked for four years at Skills, Inc. in Elizabeth City in what he described as a "family-like" setting.

He said the decision to leave there was a difficult one but that he had a strong desire to come back to Edenton.

Now, though, DeVine said the limited job market in the area might leave him and others who've been laid off with no choice but to relocate.

He's talked with his former employer in Elizabeth City but the only thing available is the entry-level job he took when he went to work for them in 2004.

The salary that goes with the job isn't enough to support a family, he said.

Although his wife, Jill, is still employed, DeVine said he is weighing his responsibility as a husband and father who should be able to support his family against his desire to raise his children, Kincaid and Cyndy, here.

And like many young families who have already had to leave Chowan to go where they could find jobs, he said, his family may be next.



"Losing these programs would be disastrous."

Bill Miller, Area Agency on Aging board member

Future of "Meals" uncertain

By Vernon Fueston
and Rebecca Bunch
Contributing Writer

Cynthia Penny, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, is worried that her visits from Meals on Wheels could end with the county's belt tightening.

She rarely sees visitors at her home in Rocky Hock, and considers the program's volunteers her lifeline to the outside world.



Penny

Without the program, she said, "I'd miss it, not because of the food. But because of the interaction with the people."

The program is also important to volunteer Linda Robbins. On Monday she delivered a hot meal to Penny consisting of a hamburger, potato salad and fruit.

She's been delivering meals to the elderly for three years now, but her own limitations are catching up with her.

"I've been told that with my using oxygen, I should not be doing this job," she said. "But as long as God lets me keep doing it, I will."

Shutting down?

The program, known to many as "Meals on Wheels," is actually called the Albe-Marle Commission Senior Nutrition, Home Delivered Meals.

It, along with week-day lunches served at the Chowan Senior Center, may soon be lost, according to Bill Miller of Edenton, who serves on the board that administers the programs.

Miller said if the county's budget woes prevent it from providing \$51,483 in matching grant monies to the Area Agency on Aging Nutrition Fund, the lunches and meals program would end.

County Manager Peter Rascoe said if Option 1 or 2 ends up being the one approved by the county commissioners, the matching funds would remain in the budget.

They would not, he said, if one of the other two options is chosen.

The Home and Community Care Block Grant that funds the programs totals \$177,983 for the 2008-09 fiscal year.

Those funds pay for about 20,500 meals in Chowan County that are distributed annually, resulting in 12,428

See MEALS, Page A2 >

Local youth travels to Europe on peace mission

by Earline White
Managing Editor

In Germany a girl asked Destiny Askew if she was rich.

Destiny was wearing Levi's, but she was far from designer jeans.

She was an American in Europe on a peace mission.

Since 1956, students from across the U.S. have traveled to countries across the globe as People to People Ambassadors — students with a belief that ordinary people can make a difference in the role government plays.

Askew, who made the area papers for her political activism during Sen. Hillary Clinton's campaign, knew that the chance to study politics abroad might happen only once.

But the 20-day trip across



Rising Holmes Junior, Destiny Askew just got back from a 20-day, 6 country tour as People to People Ambassador. Six countries cost \$6,500; she only had \$1,000 she'd been saving over the past nine years.

"I wanted her first time abroad to be with me backpacking," said Askew's mother Kristy LaLonde. "But how could I keep her

from going? How many kids her age get to have such an experience?"

Back at home in Valhalla, Askew keeps her daily itinerary handy just to remember it all. The group (of 33 from northeastern N.C.) hit Rome running, she said.

They went to the Coliseum and Roman Forum; the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel; a salt mine, a flour mine; Germany, Switzerland and France.

It was a trip of firsts — a rail car up an Austrian mountain, witnessing national militia carrying AK-47s at a rally for public jobs, shopping for authentic Italian shoes.

But what struck Askew the hardest was a visit to the Mauthausen concentration camp.

"I didn't understand how people could come from there and act the same way,"

Askew said.

"The idea that one man can take control and commit such crimes and the people can do nothing... My brother would have been killed; I would have been forced to work; women younger than my mother would have been killed... I cannot understand."

The group picked up 20 bags of trash on a beach in Jesolo, Italy; lived with a German host family; haggled in the markets. They toured the Murano glass factory; slept on straw mats; attended cooking school.

"Twenty days seemed like a week and a half," Askew said. She's off the ground running, again. She's reading some books she picked up on the trip, getting ready for school; and thinking of next year, and Australia.

