



Rocky Hock Playhouse to close doors

By Earline White
Managing Editor

With attendance declining since 2003, the Rocky Hock Playhouse will close its doors after the Christmas show and move to Washington, N.C.

"If attendance would have picked up, then we could have remained open," said co-founder Jeff Emmerich. "Our Easter show was down 1,000 from the previous year. We began the year in debt — we've never

done that.

"We tried everything in our power to stay here, but what has opened up in Washington is something we could not pass up."

Since 2000, the Rocky Hock Playhouse has drawn more than 170,000 people to the rural theatre and welcomed actors from 26 different states.

"We'd always hoped to get up to a quarter of a million patrons, but it looks as if that may happen faster in Washington (because of its

proximity to the Triangle and universities, including ECU)" Jeff said.

It was a difficult decision for Jeff and his wife Gloria who have grown to love their place on stage in Rocky Hock.

"We are sad and sorry to leave, having made a thousand wonderful memories at the playhouse, but we are young enough to know that we are not done yet — we have more to give," Gloria said.

Following the announce-



Jeff and Gloria Emmerich

ment this past summer that low ticket sales could be the end of the Rocky Hock Playhouse, the Emmerichs received numerous pleas from local business people to remain open and even received a reduced rent offer from the Rocky Hock Ruri-

tans.

The Emmerichs were delighted that local people answered their plea and attended the summer production at the Playhouse. But the increase did not affect the theatre's bottom line.

The Emmerichs are hoping for good local support for their final fall and Christmas productions in Edenton.

"Between salaries [for actors], housing, insurance and rent there was no way we could continue going

..." Jeff said.

Then, to the Emmerich's surprise, an anonymous person from Newport News donated 800 yards of purple velvet.

What better makings for a new backdrop?

And shortly thereafter, the couple learned of Tim and Angie Hardison of Washington who were looking to renovate the former Washington County high school auditorium into a

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Hundreds reunite at Sandy Point

Edenton High classes of 1956-1963 back together

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

For Deanna Hollowell Darnell, Class of 1958, it was a chance to greet old friends.

"I'm seeing people I haven't seen in 50 years," she exclaimed as she greeted Ruth Stokely Lupton, who now lives in Raleigh.

For Sid White and others who played football here during the fabled Bill Billings era, it was an opportunity to relive gridiron glory days.

White, who still lives in Edenton, joked, "They can't run me away. I've never left!"

They were among the 230 graduates of the Edenton high school classes of 1956-1963 who attended the Sandy Point Beach Blast II, a reunion held at Leon Nixon's Catering Saturday night.

The former students, who last saw each other 11 years ago, held that reunion at Sandy Point Beach where they spent lots of their leisure time during their teens.

That privilege came courtesy of classmate Kermit Layton's parents, Kermit Sr. and Lib Layton, who owned the property.

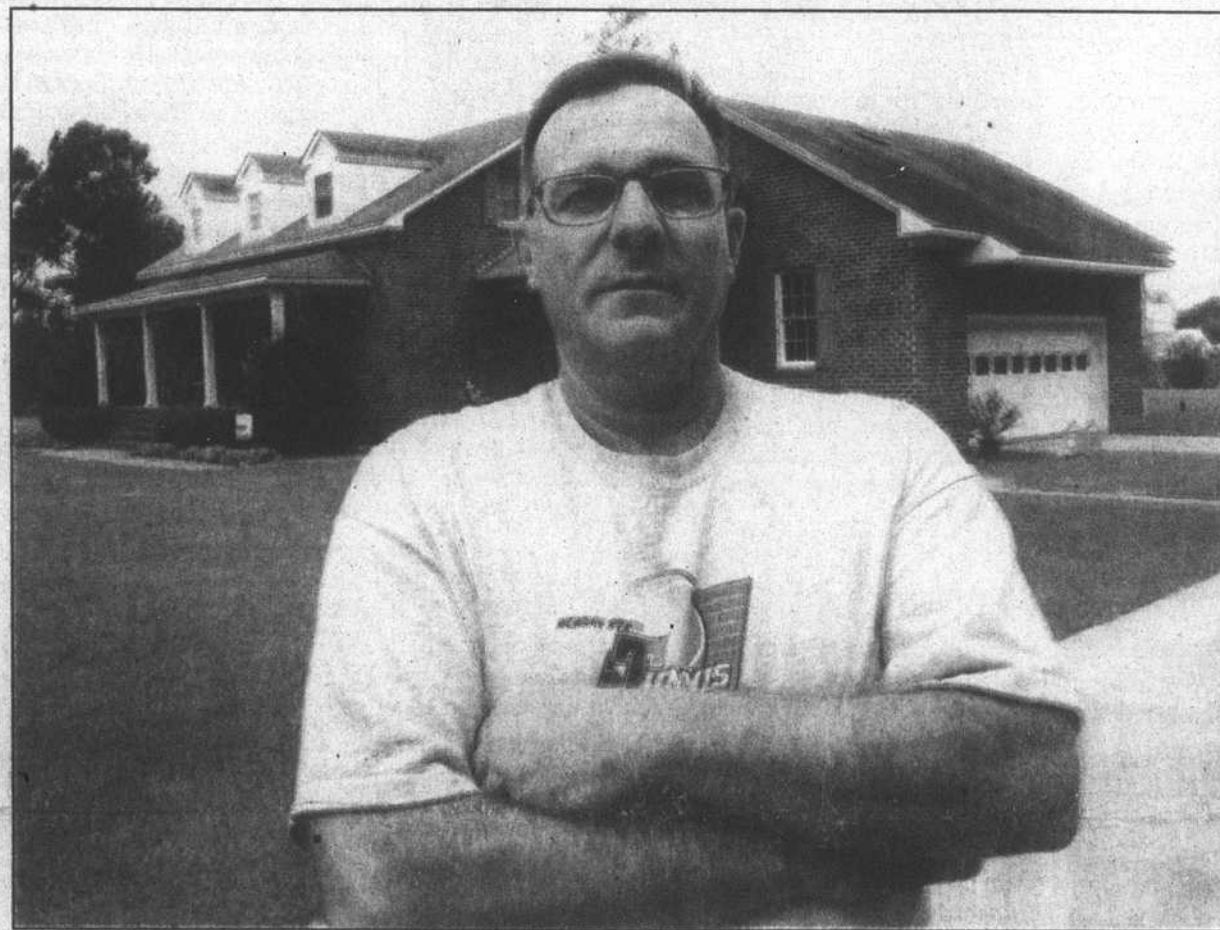
They had some great times in and out of school, said John Mitchener, who graduated in 1959.

In addition to Billings, See REUNION, Page A2 >

Bypass complaints prompt new meeting

Validity, benefits of Edenton bypass a concern

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer



Vernon Fueston/The Chowan Herald

No matter which route is chosen for the bypass around Edenton, the state will take Leonard Small's garage on Hobbs Lane to create the road.

State Rep. Tim Spear inquires about bypass

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

Rep. Tim Spear is asking state highway officials to re-examine the assumptions used to justify a planned bypass around Edenton.

Spear also said he believes any bypass should allow access by all the property owners along the route.

"I have requested some additional information from DOT, including any recent traffic surveys, updates to long range plans and the number of trucks

(18-wheelers) that may be traveling through town to access Highways 17 and 32," Spear said.

Opponents to the project have maintained that truck traffic from industries along Soundside Road has decreased over the last few years, making the bypass unnecessary.

Spear, who is a state representative for the second district, said he is also concerned that limited access to the road will make some homes and farmland worthless.

Charles Small, DOT project manager for the bypass, said

keeping rights-of-way to a minimum is necessary, even if it means condemning homes and farmland.

He said unless the roadway is made "limited access" now, future developers could demand additional driveways along the road.

"The more access points you have, the more conflict points you have," Small said.

He said too many access points could lead to accidents and congestion on the road.

Citizen complaints about a proposed bypass have prompted town leaders to ask for a new public meeting with DOT officials.

Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton made the announcement during public comments at a town council meeting Sept. 9.

Among those opposing the project are homeowners, farmers and business owners.

"What I'm asking is for the DOT to re-visit the initial feasibility study," Knighton said.

"The study was done back in the mid '90s, so it's 13 to 14 years old. It's important to establish that the assumptions made there are still valid."

Opponents to the bypass say truck traffic from industries along Soundside Road has reduced as some businesses have closed and other have changed their ways of doing business.

Those favoring the bypass say it will be needed to handle an expected increase in general traffic over the next 15 years.

They also say the town should plan for future industrial growth now and not cancel the project.

Leonard Small, whose garage sits in the path of the bypass, said he couldn't understand the reason for the project in the first place.

"Nobody seems to know what it's all about. That's the whole problem," Small said.

He said the loss of a logging and a lumber company from the industrial park and a decision by another manu-

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Edenton's beloved Frank Halsey dies after illness

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

Edenton has lost one of its best-known residents, and the Edenton Steamers one of their biggest boosters, with the passing of Frank Halsey, Sr.

Halsey died Thursday in a Virginia hospital.

When he drew his last breath at age 74, he had far surpassed the predictions made at an early age about what his future held in store.

Halsey, who long ago lost the ability to stand and walk upright, spent more than 50 years as a local jeweler and watchmaker known for his kindness and his ability to make others smile.

As a young boy, Frank

was diagnosed with an arthritic condition that doctors predicted would leave him disabled and with a life span that would not let him live past his twenties.

His son, Rev. Frank Halsey, Jr., of Jamesville, said his dad had enough "stubborn determination" not to let that happen.

Instead he graduated from Edenton High School and attended the Spencer School of Watchmaking.

A good man

Most recently, Halsey had worked for Roland Vaughan at Vaughan's Jewelry and Gifts. But he had long been a fixture on Broad Street.

Vaughan said he would remember Halsey as a "kind, generous soul" who

never let his infirmity get in the way of doing his job or helping others.

Halsey had a way about him, Vaughan recalled, that made others stop by the shop not just to have jewelry engraved or repaired, but sometimes just to talk.

"He always reached out to others," Vaughan said.

Katy Ebersole, speaking on behalf of the Steamers organization, noted that Halsey was a regular at the ballpark.

"He always sat in the



Halsey

same spot," she said. "I can't remember a game I didn't see him at."

Ebersole said the team was honored to allow the pallbearers at Halsey's funeral to wear Steamers hats as a tribute to his devotion. She said plans are being made to honor him at Hicks Field as well during the first game of the season.

Family man

To his family, he was someone they could admire.

His son, Frank Jr., said the slogan, "You can't keep a good man down," certainly applied to his dad.

He said his dad never let his life be defined by the predictions of others but

traveled the path he set for himself to the very end.

Frank Jr. said that his dad loved his work, and the people he met. In fact, he said, his dad had worked a half-day at the store on the he went to the hospital.

In the days since his death, those whose lives Halsey touched have reached out to his family. On behalf of his mother, and the family, Frank Jr. expressed appreciation to those who have been there for them in their time of need.

"We miss him, but we know today that daddy is standing straight and walking tall with the Lord," he said.

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