

CHOWAN HERALD

482-4418

Wednesday, November 19, 2008

50¢

Peebles staying put for now

Corporation okays lease extension at downtown site

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

Peebles department store still plans to relocate to Edenton Commons but will remain downtown for several more years, a local official said.

That is significant because of its role as the anchor store for the downtown business district, said Jennifer Moore, executive director of Destination Downtown Edenton.

"This is very good news for us," Moore said.

Moore said she was informed of the decision by one of the building's landlords, Dalton Furlough.

"It is my understanding they will remain at that location until March, 2011," she added.

Moore said the decision to stay was made by Peebles corporate staff in Houston, Texas.

Store manager Jadelle Wagner said that, as a member of the DDE board, she understood very well the importance of having a strong anchor store in place to keep shoppers coming downtown.

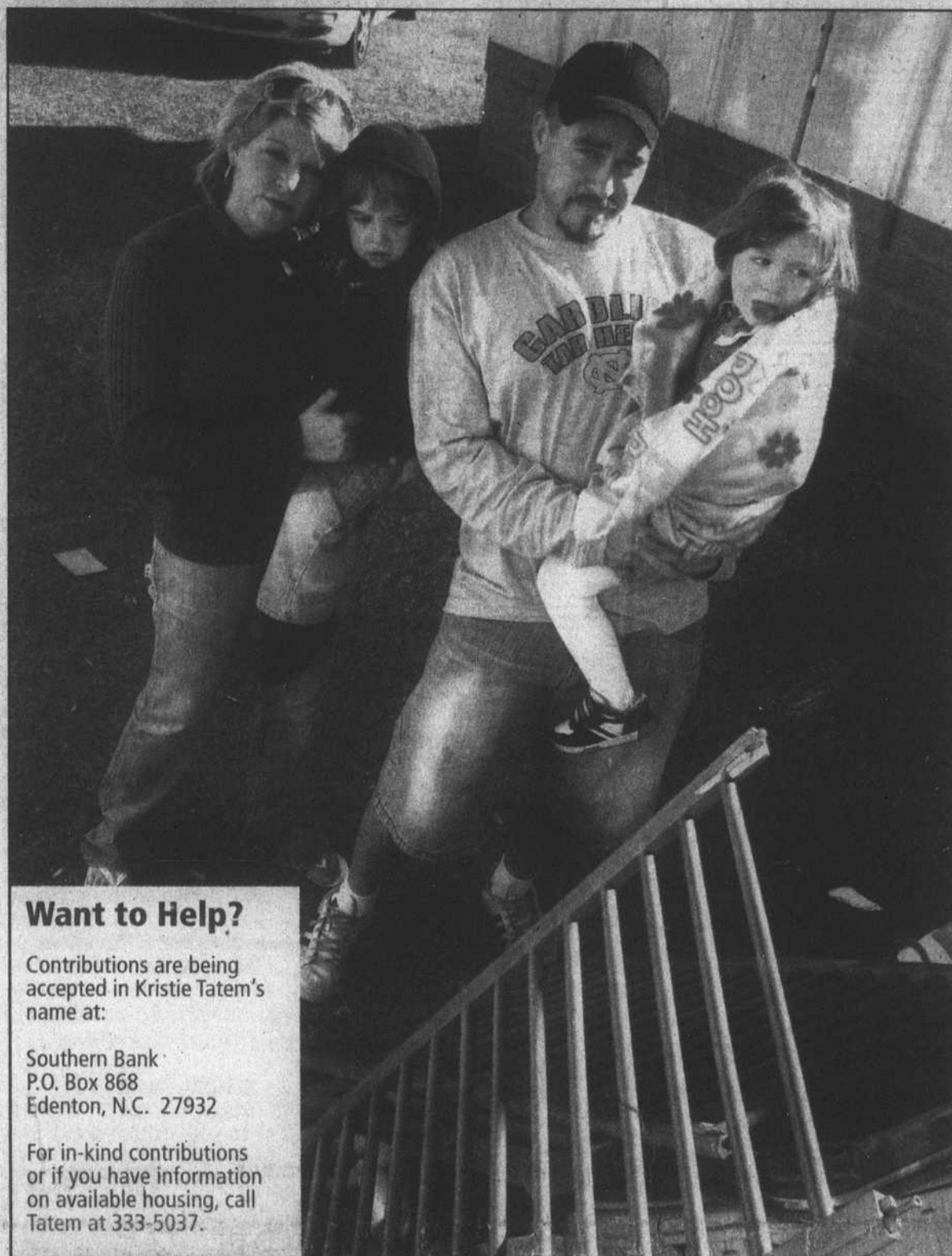
Wagner said that business at Peebles has remained strong despite the shaky economy. She said that the store's sales have remained almost even with last year's.

"We are about where we need to be," she said.

Wagner said she could not confirm whether the store would remain at its current location until 2011.

She did say that the store is still committed to relocating to a new shopping center, Edenton Commons, where construction has been delayed. Work is now scheduled to begin in 2010.

FIRE CONSUMES FAMILY'S HOME



Want to Help?

Contributions are being accepted in Kristie Tatem's name at:

Southern Bank
P.O. Box 868
Edenton, N.C. 27932

For in-kind contributions or if you have information on available housing, call Tatem at 333-5037.

Kristie Tatem with her son, Corey, and James Soto with his daughter, Gabie, with some of the personal effects salvaged from their mobile home following a devastating house fire.

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

James Soto and his daughter Gabie were watching television in their living room when he smelled smoke, Tuesday evening.

Just like that, Soto, his girlfriend Kristie Tatem and their two children lost everything they owned.

Their trailer, located in the 1700 block of West Queen St., still looks fine from the outside. Two Halloween pumpkins sit on the porch steps.

But Soto points out a telltale

smoke stain that rises from the window where the fire started as he stands next to a trailerload of trash that used to be the family's worldly possessions.

Smoke and fire damage destroyed just about everything.

To compound their problems, Soto and Tatem rented the home they were living in. Like most tenants, they had no insurance.

Inside the home, a computer sits in a puddle of water next to sodden and smoke-stained furniture.

The couple's kitchen cabinets stand open, stripped of what canned goods could be salvaged.

Outside by the porch stands a pile of salvageable plastic toys and wooden furniture.

It's all pretty overwhelming.

"We're living in pretty close quarters, now," Tatem said of their situation.

The family has moved in with her brother, putting seven people under a roof that was sheltering three.

They've received some help from the Red Cross, Bandon Chapel and Catholic Social Ministries, allowing them to get a few items of new clothing and basic necessities.

See FIRE, Page A2 >

Officials question lobbyist payments

"We'd definitely say we didn't have sufficient documentation to justify payment."

— J.P. Timberlake, III, CPA, for Chowan County

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

Chowan County's auditor says he wouldn't have paid more than \$150,000 in bills that a Raleigh-based lobbyist submitted to the county.

The invoices are among the documents state investigators are reviewing as part of their fiscal probe in Chowan County.

The county's contract with the lobbyist required "audit-worthy invoices," but the county's auditor says the bills failed to meet that standard.

Questions raised

If his office had received them, "we'd definitely say we didn't have sufficient documentation to justify payment," auditor J.P. Timberlake, III, said.

The Raleigh lobbying firm, Capstra, did not immediately respond to an e-mail requesting specific information about the services they provided.

"This does not pass the smell test at all," Town Councilman Steve Biggs said of the invoices he has seen. "There is nothing about this that smells right."

Biggs is a board member of the local airport commission which reportedly benefited from the Capstra deal.

Current County Manager Peter Rascoe said that County Finance Officer Lisa Jones paid the invoices at the direction of his predecessor, Cliff Copeland.

Copeland could not be reached for comment.

On the record

Copies of the documents show bills for \$6,000 to the Edenton-Chowan Development Corp. were sent to Copeland each month over a 25-month period.

Many of the invoices offer few details. For example, an invoice dated Jan. 31, 2006

See LOBBYIST, Page A2 >



Copeland

Holmes High School renovations will have to wait

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

Long-planned renovations for John A. Holmes High School will almost certainly be among the casualties this spring as commissioners deal with the county's financial crisis.

Allan Smith, superintendent of Chowan schools, said he understands that any large-scale renovation to the high school won't be feasible right now.

But it's a hard admission to make after seven years of planning.

"The students need and deserve a physical environment that is conducive to learning and that meets the demands of today and into the future," Smith said.

He added that the board of education will have to take a hard look at what im-

provements can be made in the short term.

No room for debt

Built in 1952, Holmes High School has already had \$5 million of short term renovations done in the last few years. But millions more were planned to bring the school into line with state guidelines and student needs.

The exact amount was to be determined this year as plans were approved.

Of that money, state lottery funds would have covered a portion, but most of the renovation's costs were to come from county funds, something that seemed within the county's capabilities.

That's when it was discovered that almost \$20 million in reserve funds had been spent, taking the county be-

low the reserve limits required by law.

The county, once considered cash-flush, was suddenly unable to pay its bills and in danger of having its finances taken over by the state.

With new annual debt payments totaling \$881,000 due this year to cover several recent building projects, incurring more debt to renovate the high school seems impossible.

A different era

But that means putting up with a number of difficult situations at the school, Principal Bill Moore said during a recent visit.



Moore

"This building was built as at a time when we were preparing kids for jobs in factories and farms," Moore said.

"Now we have problems meeting today's educational needs like installing Internet capacity."

Moore said the school, which sprawls over 36 acres, has grown over the years to include 12 separate buildings. Only three of those have running water and bathroom facilities.

As the lunch bell sounded, students crammed the hallways, rushing to and from the cafeteria. Standing in his office door, Moore pointed out that the crush only represented two thirds of the student body.

The high school eats lunch in three shifts due to its limited cafeteria and kitchen facilities.

Small knots of students caused log jams in the hallway as he spoke.

"The halls are narrow by today's standards," Moore said. "If a couple of students stop to talk, the traffic backs up," he said.

Deserving better

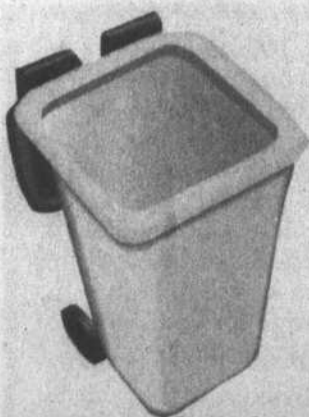
Exiting the main building, Moore pointed out three of the high school's 10 portable classrooms.

By the time he reached the steps to one of them, rain had spotted his shirt. There are no covered walkways to the classrooms.

There is also no running water in the classroom units. When a student in one of the units needs to use the restroom, a trip back to the main building is required.

Moore had no trouble

See SCHOOL, Page A2 >



Town officials to evaluate cutting trash collection to once per week

A2



©2006 The Chowan Herald
All Rights Reserved

Friday, Nov. 21, 7:30 PM

Saturday, Nov. 22, 7:30 PM

Sponsored by the Rocky Hock Ruritans Relay For Life Team

Rocky Hock Opry

E.A. Swain Auditorium, Edenton, NC

Tickets \$10.00 Available at:

Byrum True Value Hardware - Downtown Edenton 252-482-2131 • Acoustic Coffee - Downtown Edenton 252-482-7465 • Nixon Family Restaurant - Rocky Hock 252-221-2244 • Edenton Coffee House - Downtown Edenton 252-482-7465
Clown n Around - Elizabeth City 252-331-2250 • Woodard's Pharmacy - Downtown Hertford 252-426-5527 • Billy Smith - Suffolk, VA 757-925-4541 • Chowan Arts Council - Edenton 252-482-8005 • Mail orders call 252-221-4875 or 252-340-3438