

CHOWAN HERALD

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Residents may pay bills online

Program will be discussed at next town meeting

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

A proposed new program that would allow Edenton residents to pay their utility bills with a debit or credit card may help cut costs enough to lower a rate increase this spring.

If the plan is approved, the town will be partnering with Voice Data Solutions so that residents' utility bills and fees can be paid over the phone.

Payments could be made for electric and water bills using this method.

The service would be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by calling 1-866-607-8147.

"We are planning to use it to help offset a fraction of the (utility) rate increase that is coming in March," said Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton.

Knighton said that that the Eastern Municipal Power Agency, which serves the town, would be raising its rates by four percent.

"So," she said, "we are looking at a 3.6 percent rate increase, but hoping we can do a 3.5 percent increase" by looking at the town's budget to see what changes and cuts can be made.

That comes on the heels of a 12.5 percent utility rate hike approved last September.

Knighton said the town council would be discussing the proposed plan at its Jan. 26 committee meeting.

Knighton said the move would save the town thousands of dollars each year since more and more local residents are already paying that way.

"Over the last few years, and especially over the last few months, the Town of Edenton has seen a dramatic increase in the number of customers paying by debit or credit card," she said.

"The town's cost for processing debit and credit cards has increased from an average of \$12,000 per year to a projected \$30,000 for 2008/09.

"By offering this new service the town will no longer incur these processing fees," Knighton added.

Knighton said that last fall the power agency raised its wholesale rates by 14 percent, leading to the town's 12.5 percent utility rate increase.

"That rate increase was the result of several factors including the cost of fuel used to generate power (uranium and coal)," she said.

Customers may also pay their bills online by using a link found on the town's Web site, www.townofedenton.com.

EVERYONE'S THOUGHTS TURN TO INAUGURATION 2009 HISTORY IN THE MAKING



Madison Britton, seven-year-old daughter of Charles and Vickie Britton, drew this picture of the White House while learning about the U.S. government.

If I were President of the United States, I would do many things to make the world better.

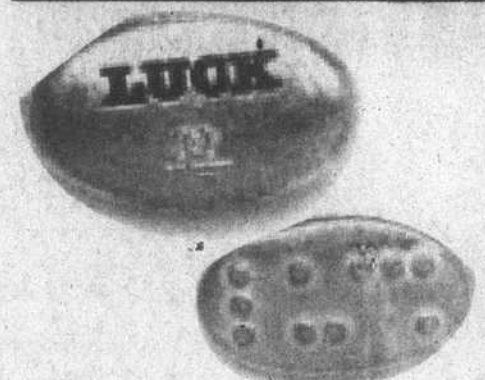
First, I would keep the world clean. Next, I would make the gas prices go down to \$2.99. Then I would help the

sick. Then I would make the tax price go down. Finally, in four years, I would be done as President.



Obama's good luck charm has local ties

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer



Kaycee Binns, daughter of Harvey and Penny Binns of Edenton, is the proud creator of President-elect Barack Obama's favorite good luck charm, above.

When Kaycee Binns started her own business in 1993 in the basement of her home, she had no idea how far her dream would take her.

Today, President-Elect Barack Obama has made her company, Metal Morphosis, Inc., national news.

During his campaign, Obama told a group of reporters about his favorite good luck charm.

To Kaycee's surprise, it was one she had created.

That story, reported by Time magazine in its "Man of the Year" issue honoring Obama, and video of his conversation with reporters posted on YouTube, have led to interviews with CNN and

the Today Show for Binns.

What many people don't know is that she has roots here in Chowan County.

Her dad and stepmom are Harvey and Penny Binns, who call Edenton home.

Just amazed

Penny Binns said that when a photo of Obama holding the silver pebble bearing the word "Luck" engraved on the front and translated into Braille on the back showed up in Time magazine, she and her husband were thrilled for Kaycee.

Then, when they saw the YouTube video, Penny said, "We were like, 'Oh, my God, isn't that exciting?' We are just so proud of Kaycee, and all she's been able to accom-

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Hospital minister pleads for Chaplains

By Vernon Fueston
Staff Writer

Thomas Biggs says his calling as a hospital chaplain has lots of scriptural precedent.

There are plenty of times Jesus is shown visiting the sick in the New Testament. Biggs said he can't recall a verse where Jesus asks what congregation somebody was from.

Biggs and eight other volunteer chaplains tend to the spiritual needs of Chowan Hospital's patients. Some don't have a minister of their own, some find themselves in the hospital with their pastor out of town and others simply need somebody to talk to, right now.

He remembers the case of a woman who raced to the hospital after learning of her husband's heart attack, only to find him already dead.

There in the emergen-

cy room, she passed out twice from the shock of the moment. At times like those, many people need someone just to help them through the event.

Almost all ministers regularly visit members of their congregation who find themselves hospitalized. But Biggs said the hospital is short of volunteers willing to tend to the needs of the rest.

Of the eight ministers currently serving as chaplain volunteers, none are from congregations within the town of Edenton. He said the hospital could use another 12 to 13 chaplains.

A volunteer must be an ordained minister in his church and be willing to commit to two hours per month visiting the sick after a brief orientation session.

Biggs said hospital chaplains are not there to preach.



Thomas Biggs, director of Chowan Hospital's chaplains, in front of the hospital's emergency room.

"This is not a proselyting thing," Biggs said. "A person's faith is between him and God."

Patients fill out a questionnaire when entering the hospital specifying their church affiliation, or lack of

one, and their willingness to be visited by a chaplain.

Biggs said he tries to make that first contact with each patient willing to see a chaplain. After that, he said his volunteers drop in for visits or come on re-

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"We're running with-out a negative impact right now. We had a waiting list of 130 clients two years ago."

— Ben Rose, DSS



State cuts daycare funding

By Vernon Fueston
Staff Writer

Chowan County's funds for daycare assistance were cut this month following a statewide belt tightening due to decreased revenues and a widening recession.

The cuts, mandated by the state, were made official by a county commission vote Jan. 5, reducing the county's social services budget by \$15,000.

The cut amounts to a two percent reduction in daycare assistance.

Social services director Ben Rose said he doesn't anticipate the cuts seriously affecting services to Chowan's families who need them.

He said the cut in daycare assistance came as part of an effort by the state to reduce spending across the board. The statewide cuts addressed revenue shortfalls due to the sagging national economy.

Rose said he feels fortunate the cut in county daycare spending was only \$15,000. He said initial estimates had placed the number at \$30,000.

Demand for daycare assistance is down in the county right now, Rose said. He said the reduction is probably due to Chowan's high unemployment. People who aren't working don't need daycare assistance.

Currently, there is no waiting list for daycare assistance.

"We're running without a negative impact right now," Rose said. "We had a waiting list of 130 clients two years ago."

Rose said the cut should not create a waiting list for daycare assistance other than what's needed for administrative

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State increases funds for heating assistance

By Vernon Fueston
Staff Writer

An increase in funding for the county's Crisis Intervention Program will make more money available to families in need of short-term assistance on heating bills.

An additional \$20,000 in federal money is being funneled by the state into Chowan for families facing an immediate financial crisis like job loss or illness.

The additional funds will beef up the program by over a third from its previous budget of \$56,000.

The money comes just as the county's jobless rate of nine percent placed it at the eleventh highest among the state's 100 counties.

The program is not the same as the department's low-income energy assistance program. Crisis funds are designed to be a one-time fix for a short-term problem and not for the support of families with long term financial problems.

"We're usually helping people who have been displaced from work," DSS Director Ben Rose said. "We like to fix this to some kind of medical need, but that can even be something like having a one-year old child in the house."

The maximum benefit from the program is \$600, up from \$300 two years ago. While intended as a one-time fix, Rose said clients can reapply for more assistance, if needed.

The key for the Crisis program, Rose said, is that, unlike low-income energy assistance, this money is intended for short term, emergency relief.

"We like to determine that we're not going to be in same position next month," Rose said. "We like to be able to see that we are actually fixing a problem."



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