

## FLAMENCO VIVO!



VERNON FUESTON/THE CHOWAN HERALD

## Kids treated to performance by Spanish dance troupe

By Vernon Fueston  
Staff Writer

"I remember two teenagers came up to us," Antonio Hidalgo says. "They said, 'I never heard about this. I never knew this existed. This Flamenco, where did it come from?'"

Hidalgo was between shows at Swain Auditorium in Edenton, April 22. He was in the middle of a whirlwind, weeklong tour of eastern North Carolina with his dance troupe, Flamenco Vivo! Eleven days ago he was sitting in his home back in Madrid.

Now after seven days of intensive rehearsals, Hidalgo, his four dancers, a singer and a guitarist are three days into a seven-day, 10-show tour of schools in eastern North Carolina.

The dancers will be exposing kids to a culture many never dreamed existed.

Hidalgo directs the troupe's touring company. He has been dancing Flamenco for 24 years and working with Flamenco Vivo! for 10. The dance company is headquartered in New York City with a "second home" in Durham. A native of southern Spain, today Hidalgo lives in Madrid where he directs his own dance company. Each year he comes to America to spread the word about Flamenco.

Flamenco is the traditional dance form of Andalusia, a region in the south of Spain. The dance traces its origins to the mosaic that is Spanish culture.

Drawing on the influence of Spanish Jews and the cultures of Arabia and India, Flamenco is best known for its wild guitar music, clapping hands, stamping feet and flamboyant dancing.

It was all pretty exotic stuff for most

of the Chowan County kids who attended the show, but Hidalgo thinks he's leaving them with something special, a vision of a wider world.

"I think Flamenco is usually taken well by a new audience because you have the music, sometimes happy, sometimes sadness, no? I think children will like this and listen," Hidalgo said.

"Maybe next time when they hear Flamenco, they will want to go and see it, yes? They will say, 'I remember once I saw a show. I enjoyed it. It was fun.'"

Hidalgo pauses and then adds hopefully, "Maybe some of them will become aficionados."

The school performance was funded by the North Carolina Arts Council's cARTwheels program while an evening public performance by the troupe was partially funded by an NCAC Grassroots grant.

## Commissioners nix emergency declaration

Vote taken after learning Chowan faces an expected \$18.2 million in expenses with only \$15.1 million in revenues

By Vernon Fueston  
Staff Writer

Chowan's commissioners, after learning next year's budget is \$3.1 million in the red, ended its budget retreat without adopting the document and rejecting a motion to declare a financial emergency.

The motion to declare an emergency was defeated in a 5-2 vote, April 21.

The commission's chairman, Eddy Goodwin, said the resolution would have made it possible to void employment contracts allowing more flexibility in dealing with the crisis and also paving the way for the county to seek state and federal aid.

The commissioners also instructed County Manager Peter Rascoe to prepare a balanced budget for its consideration at a regularly scheduled meeting of the board May 4.

The commissioners took the vote after learning that the county faced an expected \$18.2 million in expenses for the 2009-2010 fiscal year with only \$15.1 million in revenues.

Pressure from the national recession has reduced sales tax revenues by 30 percent while increases in utility, insurance and other costs have increased the county's ex-

penses.

But Goodwin said the county's financial problems run deeper than this year's recession. He said the county hasn't operated within a balanced budget for at least seven straight years, running millions in the red each year.

Goodwin said he had hoped the emergency declaration would pass.

"Every tool that is available to make decisions should be available to us, especially considering the time line we are under," Goodwin said.

The commissioners left no specific instructions on how to bring revenues and expenses in line when they sent the budget back to Rascoe.

Goodwin, who favors cutting expenses while holding the line on property taxes, said he felt the message was clear enough.

"The county manager knows that we want to cut expenses," he said.

"The county manager knows that the budget needs to be balanced."

"The county manager knows that the commissioners did not like \$18 million when you had \$15 million projected in revenues."

"The county manager knows it's got to be better than that. I think he got a lot of direction in my opinion."

## Chairman discusses county budget crunch

By Vernon Fueston  
Staff Writer

After a surprising vote last week on declaring a financial emergency in Chowan County, the commission's chairman, Eddy Goodwin, discussed the county's fiscal woes and where he sees the budget process heading.

Goodwin said that while the budget gap of \$3.1 million between revenues and expenses on next year's budget is due in large part to a national recession, it would be a mistake to think the issue is a one-year problem.

### History of deficits

Chowan County has racked up \$19.5 million in deficits over the last seven years, with most of that imbalance due to overly optimistic revenue projections.

The deficits appear to be the reason Chowan's \$20 million hospital reserve fund, money left over from the sale of the county's hospital to University Health Systems, has been depleted, plunging the county into financial chaos.

He said the county hasn't operated within a balanced budget in recent memory and needs to take a long, hard look at the way it handles money.

"We are all in this together," Goodwin said. "We have

done business a certain way and look what the outcome of that was."

Goodwin said he wants to bring the county's spending under control before he does anything else, including raising taxes.

"You can't put a Band-Aid on this with a tax increase and not address the expense," he said. "You can't continue to operate the way we have been operating, not only for our own good but for the law of the land."

"If you have a cancer, what do you do? You cut it out or you treat it."

### Holding taxes

He said raising taxes will eventually harm the county's quality of life.

"If you continue to just tax, we will be like one of those resort communities where the locals have been taxed to death and can't afford to live there," Goodwin said.

"Overtaxing hurts everybody. It comes down to hurting even the people who don't pay any taxes."

The current makeup of the

See BUDGET on Page 2A

## Superintendent asks for three percent increase from county commissioners

System lost \$648,458 in revenues last year

By Rebecca Bunch  
Staff Writer

Faced with funding cuts at every level of government, the local school system is asking for the county's help.

Last week during a budget work session Dr. Allan Smith, superintendent of the Edenton-Chowan Schools, asked the county commissioners for a nearly three percent increase in funding for the next fiscal year.

If granted, that would increase the current expense allocation in the school budget from \$4,065,660 to \$4,176,203—a difference of \$110,543.

The budget does not request an increase in the standard \$200,000 capital outlay funding provided by the county.

The amount of the school system's budget for the 2009-10 fiscal year is unknown at this point, said Smith, "since we don't have the final state or federal allocation" amounts. But, he said, the 2008-09 budget ended up at \$25-million.

The county has until the end of June to finalize its budget.

### Situation critical

"Every attempt has been made to limit the request to address the most critical needs of the school system," Smith said in his budget message.

Smith noted that the combined loss of local, state, and federal revenue combined with rising personnel, energy and other costs, "and the cumulative effects of budget constraints has created a very difficult picture."

He pointed out that the budget request just delivered to the commissioners "actually reflects a reduction if loss of revenue and cost increases are factored in. For example, mandated increases in

employees' health and retirement benefits will require an additional \$111,603 in the 2009-10 budget."

Smith said that during the 2008-09 fiscal year the school system had lost \$95,458 in state funds, along with local current expense reduction totaling \$413,000, local technology allocation cuts totaling \$100,000 and estimated lost interest as a cumulative effect of the other lost funding, equaling \$40,000 for a total of \$648,458 in lost revenue.

The loss of funding has already translated into jobs gone.

During the current fiscal year, 20 positions were eliminated through attrition and layoffs.

### Other forces

And then there are other things the school system can't control, like mandated personnel costs and health

care for school personnel.

For 2009-10, Smith said, "local school systems have been instructed to plan for an additional two percent salary increase for teachers, principals and assistant principals."

Significant increases in health insurance costs (about 10 percent) and retirement are also expected for the coming school year.

"Since salaries and benefits constitute about 80 percent of the total budget, dollars otherwise reserved for purposes such as technology and instructional materials have had to be reallocated to pay for rising state-mandated personnel costs," Smith said.

"Similar reallocations have been required to adjust for rising energy, fuel, insurance, food and other costs over the past several years."

Without an increase of the current expense allocation, Smith said, additional reductions in instructional and support staff "will have to occur in order to balance the school system's budget."



Smith



Goodwin



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