

Capstrat: Who knew what when?

by Dee Langston
Correspondent

That seems to be a central question surrounding Chowan County's association with Capstrat, a Raleigh communications and lobbying firm.

But Frank Hill, a lobbyist who was employed by Capstrat from 2004 until 2007, said that at some point, he believes he probably met everybody in Edenton, including most of the town's public officials.

"It sure did seem like I met

all of the elected officials and shook their hands," he said. On his frequent visits to Edenton, he worked with former County Manager Cliff Copeland and Edenton Town Manager Anne Marie Knighton, "except when I was walking downtown and being introduced to everyone," he said.

Bunch, Knighton and Vaughan on Capstrat/ECDC

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He said the two made a good team, as Copeland had a clear overall vision of the county's needs, and Knighton was more of a "nuts and bolts" type person.

"Everybody's really nice down there in Edenton," Hill added. Usually, he introduced himself as the former chief of staff for Elizabeth Dole and currently a Washington lobbyist for Capstrat.

"That's what I told them, and nobody recoiled in horror, nobody ran away from

me," he said. Sometimes, he was just introduced by Copeland as "our lobbyist," he added.

During a meeting in February, 2007, regarding a communications system that might benefit the county, he said he was introduced to between 30 and 50 people, including the sheriff, the Edenton chief of police and the emergency management staff.

It was initially reported

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Music in the Parks



REBECCA BUNCH/THE CHOWAN HERALD

Fred Hill smiles at the crowd Sunday afternoon during a break in performing during the Music in the Parks series on the Edenton waterfront. Hill and his 007 Band performed R&B favorites. Also entertaining during the event was Anthony Horton, flutist.

Nixon legacy lives on

Marks left on commercial fishing industry by Murray Nixon are irrefutable; community leader draws expansive crowd at funeral service

By Earline White
Managing Editor

Murray Nixon obituary

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More than 900 attended Murray L. Nixon's funeral Sunday. Letters written by his children and grandchildren were read. People from all walks of life filled the church hall. Later, the trail of cars that led to the nearby family cemetery seemed never-ending.

In the past three months, Murray welcomed over 2,500 visitors to his Rocky Hock home. The man who put knowledge and ingenuity into his work, his family and his country was dying of cancer.

During one of Nixon's final talks with friend Rev. Gene Asbell, Murray said to Asbell, "let Dr. Horton take care of business, but you talk about me."

Asbell spoke of Nixon — a "great friend, nice man, good neighbor and community leader." Asbell spoke of the quiet and calm that drew Nixon out into the water for the best fishing — when it's rain-

ing and when it's not.

Nixon's legacy and his contribution to the seafood industry are irrefutable. His eldest son Ricky wrote "Rocky Hock has lost part of its heart."

Nixon had a great sense of humor and a strong love for the Lord. Of his favorite hobby, fishing, Nixon would say fishing is "a jerk on one end waiting for a jerk on the other."

As to the Lord, Nixon was happy with Him in his heart and was blessed to tell everyone so.

Nixon leaves behind his wife Ruby, six children, 20 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. And parked in front of Rocky Hock Baptist Church where Nixon spent his Sundays, was his jon boat which took part in the funeral procession.

On the seat from which Nixon

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ECDC director releases statement about Capstrat

Hole in auditor's report leads to unanswered questions

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

Chamber Director Richard Bunch is denying reports that he may have misled a State Auditor's investigator looking into the county's financial shortfall.

Town Councilman Steve Biggs has been quoted in news accounts as saying that he had a conversation with Bunch during which Bunch made the comment that the Edenton-Chowan Development Corporation, better known as the ECDC, "would have more money in its kitty" if it did not have to pay Capstrat, a Raleigh-based lobbying firm, \$6,000 a month.

Biggs has since been quoted as saying he could not understand why Bunch apparently led a state investigator to believe he did not know about Capstrat's activities.

Biggs repeated those con-

cerns during last Tuesday night's Town Council meeting and expressed the hope that at some point Bunch would step up and shed some light on the situation.

Days later, Bunch told The Chowan Herald he did not mislead the investigator when asked about the relationship between the Edenton-Chowan Development Corporation, of which he serves as director, and Capstrat, a North Carolina lobbying firm.

In a written statement released to the paper, Bunch said he met on two separate occasions in the fall of 2008 with an investigator from the State Auditor's Office who was looking into the county's financial troubles.

Bunch said he "willingly and honestly" answered all the questions put to him.

It was during a second visit to his office by the investigator that Bunch said he related a conversation he had had with then-county manager Cliff Copeland in 2005.



Bunch

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Knighton opens up about dealings with Capstrat

Town Manager says Capstrat portrayed as county investment

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

Edenton's town manager wants to set the record straight.

Anne-Marie Knighton recently briefed members of the town council, and the mayor on her knowledge about activities carried out by a Raleigh-based lobbying firm, Capstrat, on behalf of the community.

At times wiping away tears, Knighton read from a prepared statement during last Tuesday night's town council meeting.

"Mayor, no one has worked harder to promote, preserve and improve the economic vitality of this community than you," she told Vaughan.

"I apologize to you and to the council that my association with the former county manager and Capstrat has caused so much confusion. I am deeply sorry that I did not tell you about my involvement with the former county manager and Capstrat."

During the meeting, the council considered, and rejected, a motion by Councilman Steve Biggs asking that

the town withdraw its share of funding — \$36,000 — for the embattled Edenton-Chowan Development Corporation.

Another motion, that the council ask the U.S. attorney general's office to look into findings from the report issued by the State Auditor's office, also died for lack of a second.

Councilman Willis Privott originally seconded Biggs' motion to end the town's

contribution to the ECDC's funding, then withdrew his second after Councilmen Jimmy Stallings and Sam Dixon said they would prefer to allow the ECDC an opportunity to present plans for remaining viable at the next regular council committee meeting.

That meeting is scheduled for Monday, Aug. 24.

Privott said he "did not want to slam the door" on economic development efforts here.

The county recently withdrew its portion of the ECDC funds, \$46,000, for the remainder of the fiscal year.

"I hold out hope they'll



Knighton

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Mayor questions findings in state auditor's report

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

The Edenton-Chowan Development Corporation is contesting information in a preliminary findings report recently issued by the state auditor's office.

The report on the county's budget shortfall as a result of depleted reserve funds finds that funding connected with the ECDC was not detailed correctly.

Edenton Mayor Roland Vaughan, who also serves as chair of the ECDC board points out that the report was removed from the county's Web site at the state's request because the document was considered "a work product and confidential."

"The document as written contained errors that reflect poorly on the ECDC," Vaughan added.

"We therefore feel compelled to publicly disclose the information that corrects the errors in your report. We also feel a sense of responsibility to disclose this information to the Chowan County Board of Commissioners."

"I am deeply disturbed to find errors and misinformation pertaining to the ECDC," said Vaughan in his letter.

Specific objections by Vaughan include

• Questions about why the ECDC is the only "agency fund" listed. Vaughan feels that the ECDC was singled-out.

"The (auditor's) report cites \$248,821 in ECDC expenditures made by the former county manager without the benefit

of budget ordinances," Vaughan said.

ECDC reviewed the county's audits from FY 2003-08 showing at least seven or eight

additional organizations that should require the county manager get budget ordinance approval of commissioners.

"Should not (these other organizations) also (be) required to have their expenditures approved through a Chowan County Board of Commissioners budget ordinance?" Vaughan asked.

"Your report recommends the county ascertain its recourse to seek reimbursement for amounts disbursed without benefit of spending ordinances.

"It appears to us there is a lot more than \$248,821 to be considered as part of possible recourse for reimbursement."

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