

Obama's school plan to get look

School board to eye 'Race to the Top' idea

By REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

At its January meeting, the Edenton-Chowan Board of Education will consider letting the school system become part of the Obama administration's "Race to the Top" initiative.

The initiative, developed to reform education in America, has already won the support of Gov. Bev Perdue.

Monday night, the board received a briefing on the plan from Superintendent Allan Smith.

He noted that the goal of this \$4.5-billion federal grant, developed as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment



Smith

Act, is to reward states whose school systems embrace innovation and reform in an effort to help students improve their academic performance.

North Carolina would be eligible to receive between \$200-\$400 million if selected to receive one of the grants, Smith said.

Exactly how much each participating school system would receive is unknown at this point, Smith said, although he noted that there is a higher incidence of students living in poverty in Chowan County than some others in the region, which would probably translate into additional dollars.

Areas that would receive greatest consideration would include turning around low-performing schools and improving teacher effectiveness.

For the first time, Smith said, student performance would be tied to teacher evaluations, something he said was "probably the most controversial" part of the process.

He added that there was still much to be learned about the initiative and that he hoped state-level meetings planned for later this week would help him and other officials in the area better understand it.

"I still have some questions, and I'm sure others do too," Smith said.

"What are the strings attached?" asked board member Gil Burroughs.

Smith admitted that while he was sure there would be strings attached, the answer would depend on what the final state plan looked like.

"I have read the draft, hopefully we'll get more information soon," Smith said. "There are still some blanks, at this point."

Deadline for submitting applications for Phase I of the program is Jan. 19. North Carolina is expected to meet that deadline.

Each school district has the freedom to choose to be part of the process, accepting the funds and guidelines that go along with them, or declining to participate.

Turn on the lights, be merry



STAFF PHOTO BY BRETT A. CLARK

Mayor Roland Vaughan and "Santa" flip the light switch during Edenton's annual tree lighting ceremony, Friday.

Let the Candlelight Tour begin

By REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

A special group of homeowners will throw open their doors for the annual Candlelight Tour, set for Friday and Saturday.

The weekend event will be filled with hospitality and treasured memories. But, it doesn't end there. Area businesses have found that the annual holiday launch translates into an economic boost for Edenton and Chowan County. Many out-of-town visitors end up spending the weekend. In addition to lodging, visitors spend on dining and shopping.

"Last year, when the economy was in such turmoil, business owners here told me that the two days of the Christmas tour were the best two days in business they had the whole year," said Becky Winslow, executive director of the Edenton Historical Commission (EHC), which sponsors the event.

Last year, some 1,400 people visited the downtown homes, considered by many to be some of the region's most beautiful, Winslow said.

Proceeds from the event



STAFF PHOTO BY BRETT A. CLARK

Members of Albemarle Sounds serenade the audience with Christmas carols during the annual tree lighting ceremony in Edenton, Friday. The event was sponsored by Destination Downtown.

support local historic preservation efforts. More than \$30,000 was netted last year.

EHC President Jerry Climer noted that local historic sites are also beneficiaries of the monies raised during the tour.

"Those funds help keep the Barker House in decent condition," Climer said. The Barker House is the most revered historical

home in Edenton.

Also benefiting is the project to renovate the Roanoke River Lighthouse that sits on the downtown Edenton waterfront. About two years ago, it was moved to its current location on a barge.

2009 Tour Private homes along West Water Street, South Granville Street and Pembroke

Circle will be among those showcased on this year's tour.

Hours will be 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. both days.

Tickets for the tour are \$25 per person. There is no admission for children 12 and under. For groups of 20 or more, the cost is \$20 per person.

See LIGHTS on Page 5A

Holiday safety tips from FEMA

Between the need for heat during the winter months and the fire risks associated with Christmas decorations, homes can easily become a tinderbox.

Now is the time to take winter and holiday precautions with fire safety. While Edenton and Chowan County have been relatively safe of tragic fires, this is the time of year when extra caution should be heeded. Of the roughly 350 fire department service calls during the year, about one third involve some type of fire, according to Edenton Fire Chief Charles Westbrook. Seldom are the fires categorized as major and they typically involve cooking, Westbrook added.

Nonetheless, practicing safety first during this time of year will reduce the likelihood a serious fire.

Winter fire safety tips for the home

The high cost of home heating fuels and utilities have caused many Americans to search for alternate sources of home heating. The use of wood-burning stoves is growing and space heaters are selling rapidly, or coming out of storage. Fireplaces are for burning wood and manmade logs.

All these methods of heating may be acceptable. They are, however, a major contributing factor in residential fires. Many of these fires can be prevented. The following fire safety tips can help you maintain a fire safe home this winter.

Kerosene heaters

Be sure your heater is in good working condition. Inspect exhaust parts for carbon buildup. Be sure the heater has an emergency shut off in case the heater is tipped over. Never use fuel burning appliances without proper room venting. Burning fuel (coal, kerosene, or propane, for example) can produce deadly fumes. Use ONLY the fuel recommended by the heater manufacturer. NEVER introduce a fuel into a unit not designed for that type fuel.

See SAFETY on Page 9A

Chowan's unemployment rate drops slightly

Jobless average still among area's worse

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
News Editor

While the state's overall unemployment rate rose in October, Chowan County's rate continued to improve, dropping slightly, according to the latest report by the state Employment Security Commission.

But, what appears to be good news is a bit misleading. While the unemployment rate slightly improved, Chowan's labor force expanded, said Ricky Coltrain, manager of the county's Employment Security Commission.

"We're not any better off than we were," Coltrain said. "The labor force went up more than the unemployment rate.

"Helping the jobless find work continues to be one of our major goals."

Moses Carey Jr.
Chairman, Employment Security Commission

Despite its slow pace of continued improvement, Chowan still ranks among the worse of its northeastern North Carolina neighbors. Although it's too early to compare November's employment statistics, Coltrain expects the county's unemployment rate to further dip after the first of the year. Coltrain explained that the first quarter of the year typically stalls because

retail sales slow after the holidays with many retail workers sidelined from employment. Add the trend of employers seldom hiring immediately after the new year and the unemployment rate will likely take another hit.

Chowan was among 19 North Carolina counties that showed improvement. Figures show that Chowan County came in at 11.7 percent, slightly better than its September mark of 11.9. Since July, the county has been pacing employment numbers that show continued improvement, albeit slight. Those improvements still trail the state's overall average.

Seven counties remained unchanged from the previous month with 74 of the state's 100 counties experiencing an increase in unemployment.

"While some of the increases are seasonal, there is a continued effect throughout the state from this recession," said Moses Carey Jr., ESC chairman. "Helping the jobless find work continues to be one of our major goals. We have seen some hiring over the past month, but we also know that layoffs continue to take place. Meanwhile, the ESC is aggressively working to finish the necessary programming of our computer system so that the new extension of claims can be filed and paid."

North Carolina had 49 counties that were at or below the state's unadjusted unemployment rate of 10.7 percent. Currituck County had the state's lowest unemployment rate in October, at 6 percent.

Other area counties posted the following jobless rates: Bertie, 10.6 percent; Camden, 7.4 percent; Dare, 8.6 percent; Gates, 6.7 percent; Hertford, 9.2 percent; Pasquotank, 9.3 percent; Perquimans, 10.3 percent; Tyrell, 9.7 percent; and Washington, 11.9 percent.

