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Wednesday, May 26, 2010

Edenton loses VA clinic to EC

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

After months of delays, Chowan County officials learned last Wednesday that Elizabeth City would be the new home for a clinic designated to serve northeastern North Carolina.

Chowan leaders had hoped to lure the VA into using a county-owned

building that previously housed the Albemarle Mental Health Center before its financial collapse

led to the county contracting with another mental health provider. County



Rascoe

officials had offered the facility as a potential clinic site; however, the site would have required facility renovations.

"I think it was a long shot to take our proposal for when the government had to do the work," said Chowan County Manager Peter Rascoe. "That's all we could do financially, but we gave it our best shot."

The VA cited both Eden-

ton and Elizabeth City previously as possible sites for the facility.

Rascoe received notification Wednesday in a letter from Lee Russell of the VA office at the VA Medical Center in Hampton, Va. Further correspondence indicated that the awarded site would be located at 1845 West City Drive in Elizabeth City. West City Drive is a short connector

street that runs parallel to Halstead Boulevard Extended and West Church Street.

Records also show that a contract for the clinic had been awarded to Wise Developments of Mount Airy for an estimated \$1.76 million.

When contacted, Russell referred questions to VA spokesman Bruce Sprecher. As of Wednesday, Spre-

cher had no knowledge of the chosen site. By Thursday, he had confirmed the site location in a press release via email.

"Enhancing access to health care by locating outpatient clinics in close proximity to where the Veterans reside is a key goal for the Department of Veterans Affairs and

See CLINIC, 6A

FISHING PIER OPENS TODAY

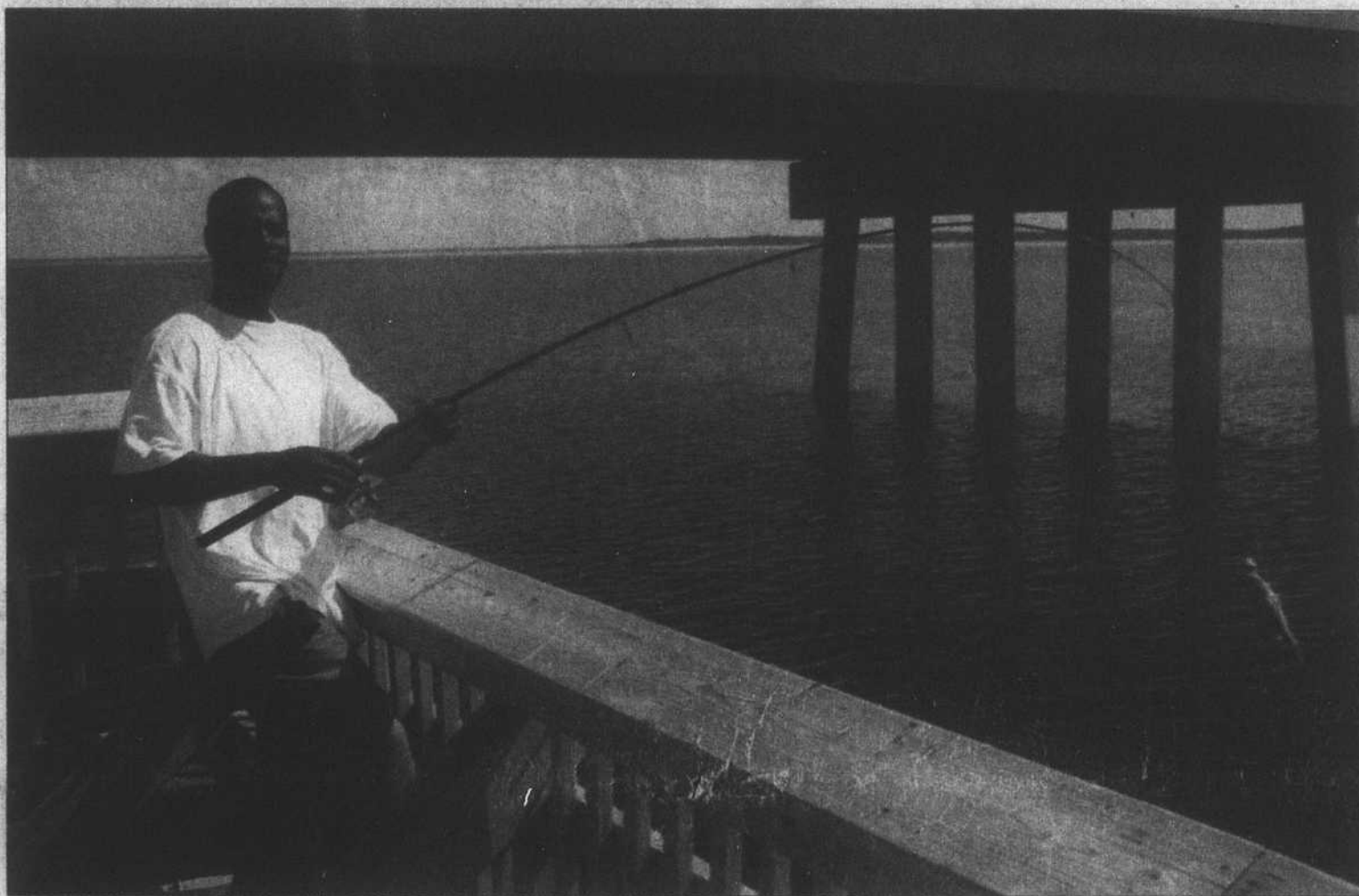


PHOTO BY RITCHIE E. STARNES

Darvin Felton, 41, of Edenton gets an early start fishing off Chowan County's new pier - the former two-lane U.S. 17, located on the northside, or west-bound lanes, of the current U.S. 17, Felton caught a yellow perch last Thursday afternoon, using a bite of shrimp. The pier officially opens today.

Nearly \$220,000 structure took about four months to build

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

Today marks the opening of Chowan County's much-awaited fishing pier.

Just days away from the Memorial Day weekend when pedestrian anglers will have free access to a 600-foot pier, a combination of concrete and lumber of what used to be the former U.S. 17 that span across the Chowan River. The pier is located adjacent to the west-bound lanes of the current U.S. 17 off Wharf Landing Road or what used to be Wildlife Access.

"This opens fishing opportunities up to so many more people, especially for those who don't have a boat," said Robbie Laughton, Edenton-Chowan Recreation director. "It's a tourist attraction for the community. People from surrounding areas will be coming here."

Proceeds from the N.C. Coastal Recreational Fishing License paid for the nearly

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Robbie Laughton

Edenton-Chowan Recreation director

\$220,000 pier that took roughly four months to build. Because of how it was funded, the county cannot charge for pier access, according to County Manager Peter Rascoe.

"It's an outdoor amenity for Chowan County to provide to the public," Rascoe said. "It will attract people to come here and fish and sight-see."

"It's another project that re-establishes access to public waters," Rascoe added.

In addition to the extended

platform that includes handicap ramps, pole lighting, and extended sidewalls, the new structure includes a cedar building, which houses restrooms and a concession area.

The project also includes a pair of public boat ramps, complete with an asphalt parking lot large enough for vehicles and trailers. No fee is required for the boat ramps.

"We're very fortunate to have a facility like this at no expense to the county," Laugh-

ton said.

Laughton's Recreation Department will be responsible for maintaining the facility that will be open from 6 a.m. to midnight and closed between midnight and 6 a.m. with some seasonal exceptions. The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and Division of Marine Fisheries will regulate the property.

A valid N.C. Fishing License is required to fish from the pier.

No swimming or diving is permitted from the pier. No skateboards, bicycles, or scooters are allowed on the pier.

Consumption of alcoholic beverages is also prohibited. "We figure there will be less problems with no alcohol," Laughton said. "Chowan County is more interested in trying to keep this pier family oriented."

An official ribbon-cutting opening is planned within a couple of weeks.

SRO gets probation for sex offenses

Officer had porn at school office

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

The former school resource officer (SRO) charged with sex offenses involving a student struck a plea agreement

Monday that calls for intensive probation, but no jail time.



Whitehurst

William Greg Whitehurst, 48, pleaded guilty in Chowan County Superior Court to two felonious sex offenses involving a female student at John A. Holmes High School where he worked as an SRO. Whitehurst was accused of nine offenses that occurred in the fall of 2005 and at the school, but he was not charged until nearly four years later, according to prosecutors.

Terms of the plea deal call for Whitehurst to register as a sex offender and surrender his law enforcement certification, records show. He must undergo 18 months of intensive supervised probation along with 60 months of probation. He must perform 72 hours of community service and pay fines totaling \$8,570.

Superior Court Judge Jerry R. Tillet sentenced Whitehurst to two consecutive prison terms, but suspended jail time provided he meets probation conditions.

"It was a fair disposition for everyone involved," said prosecutor Jennifer Karpowicz. "(The victim) has some finality."

Karpowicz said Whitehurst took advantage of his victim while working as an SRO.

"She viewed him as a father figure," Karpowicz said. "She would talk to him about her personal problems."

The victim subsequently would visit Whitehurst in his school office. It was there that the visits turned sexual, Karpowicz said.

A year earlier, Whitehurst suspended the student for an unrelated incident, Karpowicz said.

Whitehurst began making sexual advances toward the student as their relationship developed.

See WHITEHURST, 6A

Town of Edenton to hold line on taxes, fees

By REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

For the fourth consecutive year, the Town of Edenton's proposed budget includes no tax increase.

If adopted next month, that would leave the tax rate at its current rate of

29 cents per \$100 of property valuation.

Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton described it as a budget that "holds the line," pointing out that it includes no fee increases in electric, water and sewer rates.

The 2010/2011 proposed general fund budget totals \$4.2-million. It contains appropriations totaling close to \$685,000.

"Consistent with the policies and goals adopted in the Town Council's Financial Management

Plan, staff continued the practice of projecting revenues conservatively and containing expenditures," Knighton said in her budget message to the mayor and town council.

"The budget acknowledges the very difficult economic times our taxpayers, businesses and citizens are facing," Knighton added. "We continue to be keenly aware of the personal financial pressures all are facing."

The proposed budget does include funding that

would allow the town to fill a position for a patrol officer within the Edenton Police Department that has been frozen since last year.

"The police chief has requested that the position be funded," Knighton said. "The (additional officer) will allow us to continue to have three officers on patrol, and have a full-time investigator to investigate and solve crime cases."

The inclusion of funds for a planning position

is also being proposed. Whether the job will be full- or part-time has yet to be decided.

Previously, that position was jointly funded by the town and county. It has been vacant for about a year; Knighton and her staff have been handling inquiries concerning town-related planning issues in the interim.

A public hearing on the budget has been scheduled for Tuesday, June 8, at 6 p.m. in the council chambers.



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