



Farmers rally to save FSA office

State director:
Money not a factor

By RITCHIE STARNES
Editor

Chowan County stands to lose its Farm Service Agency because it has only two employees and sits within 20 miles of another FSA office.

Those are the two determining factors, not money, as to why Chowan could lose its primary tenant in the agriculture building in favor of relocating services to Perquimans County, according to Aaron Martin, FSA's state executive director. Martin delivered



PHOTO BY RITCHIE STARNES

State Farm Service Agency representatives field questions about a proposed office closure in Edenton-Chowan. Seated (l-r) are Pat Mabry, district director, Aaron Martin, state executive director, and Mike Eaves, administrative officer.

the news during a public meeting Monday night.

"The secretary (U.S. Agricultural Secretary Tom

Vilsack) did not want to do this. I didn't want to do this. The budget is driving it," Martin told an audience of about 30 that attended the forum held at the agriculture building.

As a result of the 2008 Farm Bill, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has identified those offices with two or fewer employees and within 20 miles of a neighboring FSA as targets of consolidation. It has also prevented the hiring of replacement personnel when FSA offices lose employees to attrition, Martin said.

Chowan is one of six counties listed as tier 1,

See FSA, 4A

FARM SERVICE AGENCY		
	Chowan County	Perquimans County
Salary and Benefits	\$146,704.30	\$504,202.69
Annual Rent	\$16,848	\$22,165.50
Total Admin Cost	\$167,829.58	\$545,565.60
Number of Farms	578	523
Number of Operators	272	240
Number of FP Payments	2,460	2,890
Number of FLP Borrowers	18	33
Number of FLP Loans	24	62
Total Program Benefits	\$7 million	\$7.3 million
Admin Costs/Benefits Ratio	.02	.08

GRAPHIC: THE DAILY ADVANCE/SOURCE: USDA STATE INPUT SEPT. 30, 2011

Judge rules tape public

Order sides with Bertie

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

A N.C. Superior Court judge ruled Monday that Bertie County does not have to release an audio recording of a closed session commissioners' meeting whereby its then county manager was given a 42 percent annual pay increase. He also ruled, however, that the audiotape is a public record and ordered it sealed, pending a possible appellate review.

During a civil court trial in Windsor, Judge Richard L. Doughton issued a summary judgment in favor of Bertie County's refusal to release the audiotape from the Aug. 17, 2009 closed session meeting. A grassroots group - Friends of Bertie - filed suit in April 2011 against Bertie in hopes of learning how the commissioners reached their unanimous decision to give Lamb a pay raise from \$101,725 to \$144,000 and a travel allotment hike from \$6,000 to \$9,000. Details of the raise did not become public until 18 months later.

After hearing arguments from lawyers representing both sides and before rendering a final decision, Doughton opted to listen to the recording outside of the courtroom.

"It does contain personal information and the county shouldn't have to release it," Doughton said afterward.

Because the recording contained confidential information, Doughton said

See BERTIE, 2A



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EDENTON CAMPUS OPENS



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The ribbon was cut at the Edenton-Chowan Campus, which was attended by (from l-r) Elouise White, member, Foundation Board of Directors; Roger Lambertson, chairman, Board of Trustees; Edward Goodwin, chairman, Chowan County Commissioners; Kandi Deitemeyer, president, COA; Keith Nixon, vice-chairman, Chowan County Commissioners; and Deborah Lee.

COA ribbon cutting marks new era

From staff reports

After more than a year of planning that included several obstacles, some controversial, College of The Albemarle officially celebrated the opening of its new Edenton campus with a ribbon cutting last Wednesday.

College, county and town dignitaries attended the festivities that capped a campus relocation from the Edenton Village Shopping Center to the former D.F. Walker school site at N. Oakum Street. Many areas of the campus were renovated to accommodate an increase in classrooms, labs and programs while also creating an enhanced

atmosphere conducive to higher learning.

"Today, we are excited to come together to celebrate the history of this campus, as well as the future opportunities this campus will provide to Chowan County, its residents, and the region," said Kandi W. Deitemeyer, COA president, at the ribbon-cutting. "This campus has strong roots in the community and has a strong history of teaching and learning. This campus has brought the college robust partnerships with the county commissioners, the chamber of commerce, the Northeastern Workforce Development Board, the Tourism Development Authority, and Destination Down-

town. And we are glad for those partnerships. They strengthen not only the college, but this community as well."

Chowan County Board of Commissioners Chairman Eddy Goodwin echoed those sentiments, adding that COA's new campus is already providing cultural dividends.

"There's a different attitude on the campus and in the community," Goodwin said. "Everyone has bought in. It's a win-win for everybody."

COA completed its move last October after negotiations with the county as well as heated discussions with the D.F. Walker

See COA, 2A

Inmate found hanging in cell

Ober serving time in grandmom's murder

From wire, staff reports

RALEIGH — Officials are investigating the death of an inmate from Edenton found hanging in his cell at one of North Carolina's highest security prisons.

Carl M. Ober III was found Jan. 8 at Maury Correctional Institution, a 1,000-cell close security prison for adult males near Hookerton.

Ober was serving a 32-year sentence for an October 2006 murder conviction in Chowan County.

Ober, 21 at the time, pleaded guilty to charges of second-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder in the death of his grandmother, Joyce Smith Lee. He was sentenced to a minimum of 26 years in prison.

His accomplice, Casey Lynn Forward, 16, was sentenced to a minimum of 12 years in prison for her role.

A spokeswoman for the N.C. Department of Public Safety said deputies from the Greene County Sheriff's Office are investigating to determine how Ober died.

It was not immediately

See OBER, 3A

Bylaws snag Partnership consideration

By REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

A vote that will determine whether the Edenton Town Council will shift its support from Edenton Today to the Edenton-Chowan Partnership is expected to come next month.

During its committees meeting night Monday evening, the council tentatively agreed to vote during its regular monthly meeting on Feb. 14 on whether to throw its financial support behind the ECP in place of Edenton Today.

The town's attorney, Hood Ellis, said Monday night that the bylaws

and articles of incorporation of the Edenton-Chowan Development Corporation (ECDC), now known as Edenton Today, could be altered to allow it to come under the umbrella of ECP. If that happens, the annual \$36,000 contribution the town gives the ECDC could come with it. Another \$17,500 could be coming from the establishment of a solar farm.

But Ellis said that since the town and county governments created the ECDC both needed to review and approve proposed changes to the existing organization's bylaws before a vote takes place. The changes would affect local

government representation on the Partnership board. Ellis said that current ECDC bylaws call for two mayoral appointments and two appointments by the county commission chairman. The proposed Partnership's bylaws call for at least one but up to three appointments each by the mayor and commission chairman.

Also of concern is the future of property at the industrial park currently controlled by the ECDC. Town officials have expressed a desire to ensure that title to any industrial park property would revert to the town should the Partnership dissolve after taking over

the ECDC.

"It would be a good thing for everybody to go forward holding hands and singing from the same hymn book," Ellis observed.

Currently, Edenton Today maintains control of \$1.16 million in property assets.

In addition to potentially matching annual financial funding by the town to ECP, Chowan County could offer the former county office building and the jailer's house for the non-profit's use, Keith Nixon, commissioners vice chairman previously said.

See COUNCIL, 2A

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