

Third holiday robbery strikes Super 8 Motel

3 armed robberies since Thanksgiving

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
News Editor

The holiday season was again marred when an armed gunman robbed the Super 8 Motel, marking the third armed robbery in a month.

On Dec. 22 a light-complexioned black male, wearing a dark-colored hoodie and a mask entered the motel at 10:20 p.m. brandishing a handgun while demanding cash, according to Edenton Police Chief Jay



Fortenberry

Fortenberry. The suspect fled in an unknown direction with an undisclosed amount of cash.

One week earlier on Dec. 15 at 6:11 a.m. a masked black male wearing a distinctive white and red leather jacket robbed a lone female clerk at the Edenton Shell station. The suspect fled on foot toward First Street.

On Thanksgiving night, a masked black male wearing a

multi-colored hoodie used a knife to rob the ETNA Snack Mart before he too ran away on foot.

Fortenberry acknowledges that the crimes could be connected, but he has doubts.

"I think they're all different people," Fortenberry said. "The suspect in the ETNA robbery seems skinnier than the one at the Shell."

Fortenberry said he also be-

lieves the ETNA robber may be younger.

In the Shell robbery, Fortenberry said they've been circulating photo images captured from a surveillance camera in hopes someone identifies the suspect who was wearing a jacket that had the No. 72 displayed in large numerals on the back.

See ARMED, 3A

Retired Marine carves wood into art gig

Class held at Senior Center

By REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

Al Reynolds had never visited the Chowan Senior Center until the fall day when he went there to talk with site manager Connie Parker about starting a woodcarving group.

Reynolds, 74, of Edenton, said he wasn't sure what to expect. After listening to his pitch for a start-up group for seniors, Parker looked at him and said, "Let's give it a try."

So Reynolds scheduled a presentation about the group and what it had to offer. Twelve people came and about half of them are still coming.

"I'd love to see more people get involved, both men and women," Reynolds said. "Women do really well with carving, I think because they pay a lot of attention to detail."

Reynolds, who has won awards for his woodcarvings, said that while he does provide guidance to those who attend, the group does not represent a class in a traditional sense. No one is getting graded or pushed to complete a project, and the objective is to relax and have a good time while learning a new skill.

That's exactly what appeals to retiree Ron Musante who is one of the new group's members.

Musante is an artist who has painted in oil, watercolor and pastels. His subjects have included portraits of his wife and other family members.

Musante initially learned to carve by



STAFF PHOTO BY REBECCA BUNCH

Instructor Al Reynolds (left) teaches Ron Musante during a woodcarving class that Reynolds oversees at the Chowan Senior Center in Edenton. Musante is wearing a glove on his left hand to prevent cutting himself.



This relief carving by Al Reynolds shows a baby cradled in its mother's hands.

patient and forgiving. He'll keep correcting you until you get it right."

And Reynolds is a master at woodcarving, he added.

"Every time I think I've done something good he comes up and makes a few more cuts, and that makes all the difference," Musante said.

Musante said that when Reynolds held his presentation at the senior center his attention was caught by three figures carved as caricatures of mountain people wearing slouch hats and with the toes ripped out of their boots.

"They were just terrific," Musante said enthusiastically. "I thought to myself, that's what I want to do. I want to be able to carve things like that. Every

Musante said. "He is

See CARVING, 3A

Stores cite uptick in holiday sales

Surge credited to more local shoppers, visitors

By REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

While holiday shopping overall appears to have been lackluster for retailers, local merchants report a busy Christmas season due to those who opted to shop at home.

They also credit the town's 300th anniversary celebration and the success of the 2012 Christmas Candlelight Tour with bringing more shoppers — in the form of visitors that translated into increased sales for merchants.

Heather and Paul Newingham, owners of the Christian Book Seller, credited holiday visitors for increased business at their store.

"Friday, the first day of the Candlelight Tour, we were especially busy," Heather Newingham said. "We were really slammed. The tour definitely helped us."

Destination Downtown Edenton director and business owner Jennifer Harriss agreed that both the shop at home strategy and the increased number of visitors played a role.

"I think that people who live here are becoming more and more aware of the importance of supporting our local businesses by shopping at home," Harriss said. "I also think they've made a real effort this Christmas to find out what is available in our little town."

Harriss added that "Have a Downtown Christmas," a special holiday promotion carried out by participating downtown merchants, also was popular with shoppers.

During the promotion, which took place Nov. 23 to Dec. 21, shoppers were provided cards to fill with five stickers from participating businesses. Once a card was filled it could be dropped in a ballot box at one of the businesses. Two weekly winners took home over \$100 in gift certificates provided by stores taking part in the promotion.

"That promotion was very successful," Harriss said.

See UPTICK, 3A

Request to dismiss racial-bias case denied

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
News Editor

A federal judge has denied the Edenton-Chowan Board of Education's request to dismiss the case claiming it used racial bias in the firing of a former school administrator.

Judge James C. Fox signed the order Dec. 10, refusing to dismiss the case filed by attorneys on behalf of Mary E. Lyons-Felton. The July 31, 2012 lawsuit alleges that the school system violated the

Civil Rights Act by discriminating against her because she is black.

Court documents show, however, that Felton has amended her original complaints and is no longer suing school leaders individually.

A trial date has been set for March 10, 2014.

Felton, a former assistant principal at John A. Holmes High School, claims that she was denied an opportunity to interview for the principal's job at the high school, instead demoted with a reassignment as a counselor at Chowan Middle School. School officials went outside the system and hired Jamie Gillespie, a white

See DISMISS, 2A

300th anniversary highlights 2012

Editor's note: Following is a list of the top 10 local news stories from 2012. These stories were chosen primarily because of newsworthiness and the overall impact on the community.

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
News Editor

Hands down the 300th anniversary of the founding of Edenton marks the top local story for 2012. Not just for the monumental birthday that three centuries represents, but for all that the 14-month long celebration will bring to Edenton-Chowan. Early proof lies in the strategic marketing that contributed to the record-setting ticket sales of the recent Christmas Candlelight Tour, which by all accounts could



qualify as one the year's top stories on its own merit. Instead the tremendous feat falls in the fold of the anniversary's recognition here. This rare birthday will likely serve as a catalyst of more success throughout 2013, including the upcoming biennial Pilgrimage in the spring.

If not for local leaders uniting and forging a marketing campaign for the 300th celebration we may

not have realized the full potential of this opportunity.

Tourism has been identified as the economic linchpin for Edenton-Chowan with visitors spending \$17 million here during the previous year. Many of our new residents first learned of Edenton as tourists and by bolstering its appeal should continue to pay dividends for future years.

Sure there were settlers here well before the founding of Edenton, but the 300th anniversary puts us in rare company in both the beginning of North Carolina and early America.

Ironically, the 300th celebration nearly escaped due recognition when town leaders thought the anniversary could conflict with the town's official incorporation that didn't occur until 10 years after Edenton's founding. Fortunately, the decision to celebrate the event won over and then gained momentum. By all appearances the anniversary signals a harbinger for other prosperous events.

See TOP 2012, 1B



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