



Edenton home to state's oldest house

Wood used dates back to 1718

By REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

Edenton can now add being the home of the oldest house in North Carolina to its list of historical assets.

The news was officially confirmed by dendrochronologist Michael Worthington of Baltimore-based Oxford-Tree Ring Laboratory to a

small group of onlookers at noon on Friday.

Steve Lane, who along with his wife, currently owns the property — a one and a half story house at 304 East Queen Street — said they were amazed to learn that the house dates back to 1718.

Worthington was on the front porch of the home Friday flanked by Steve Lane and former owner Ruby Vopelak to announce the results.

"This is one of the most exciting moments in my

career," Worthington commented after the announcement. He said that dendrochronology — using tree ring dating — during the past two decades has become a highly accurate tool for dating historic buildings.

Also present for the announcement was Reid Thomas, a restoration specialist with the eastern division of the State Historic Preservation Office.



STAFF PHOTO BY REBECCA BUNCH

Reid Thomas (left), a restoration specialist with the eastern division of the State Historic Preservation Office, listens as Steve Lane (center) talks about the East Queen Street house he bought three years ago that has just been declared the oldest known house in North Carolina. Looking on are former homeowner Ruby Vopelak (seated, at right) and her daughter Mary.

See HOUSE, 3A

Schools rank tech as top priority

Golden LEAF to fund initiative

By REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

School board members voted unanimously on Jan. 7 to focus on the school system's technological needs when prioritizing the three projects they are hoping to fund through Golden LEAF.

An increase in funds for a secondary STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) curriculum and the creation of a cultural arts/distance-learning center comprise the other two projects. Total cost of all three projects is \$1,862,500, Smith said.

The original amount requested by the school system came in at \$62,500 above the \$2-million available but Smith said changes in the engineering design for the proposed cultural arts/distance learning center would allow them to ask for the lesser amount.

John Guard, board chairman, said if secured the funds would help pay for a new One to One technology initiative for students at Chowan Middle School and John A. Holmes High School.

"The initiative, if we get that (Golden LEAF funds), would help us put an electronic device in the hands of every student in grades 8-12," Guard said.

Board member Gil Burroughs noted that there was an urgent need for the funds so that implementation of the initiative could move ahead. At present, he said, the school system only has enough funds to pay for a pilot program at Holmes that includes three classrooms.

"I certainly agree wholeheartedly with making the technology needs our number one priority," Burroughs said. "I would hope that at least that one (from among the school system's proposals) would make the

See LEAF, 3A



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High gas prices irk consumers



PHOTO BY REBECCA BUNCH

As of Tuesday, the price of regular unleaded gas throughout Edenton-Chowan stood at \$3.47 per gallon, as shown here at Exxon Bridgeturn. The price of fuel routinely runs higher in Edenton-Chowan than neighboring towns, like Elizabeth City and Williamston.

EC, Williamston have lower prices

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Editor

Questions are mounting about why gasoline prices are higher in Edenton than neighboring towns.

Last month the Edenton Discussion Group mailed a letter to the various gas stations in Edenton questioning why fuel prices here are routinely higher than places like Elizabeth City or Williamston. The question was also volleyed at last month's Town Council meeting.

Jim Badger, chairman of the Edenton Discussion Group, said he has yet to receive an answer from any of the dealers about why gas prices run as high as 20 cents higher than in Elizabeth City or Williamston. He argues that the pricing disparity is adversely affecting local commerce.

"People see the price of gas from the road (U.S. Highway 17) and think I'll stop farther down the road where they might also eat," Badger said. "This is hurting our businesses."

Steve Taylor of Bridge-

turn Exxon said the fluctuating cost is primarily due to the volatile nature of any commodity.

"Gas prices change everyday like the stock market," Taylor said. "You might get lucky with the price and you might not."

Bob Cheek of the recently closed Shell Station echoed the point.

"The price (wholesale) changes every night at 6 (p.m.). That's the rack price, then there's transport costs," Cheek explained.

When asked if he believes gas distributors are charging local stations more for fuel, Taylor said "They say not. They're supposed to charge us 1 penny over their cost. Sometimes freight runs a little more."

For his last delivery Taylor paid \$3.35 per gallon for his regular unleaded gasoline. His station posts a current retail price of \$3.47.

"I might make 5 cents a gallon, sometimes less," Taylor said.

Other stations in Edenton are selling gas at \$3.45 per gallon.

On Tuesday in Elizabeth City the price of unleaded gasoline could be found as low as \$3.35 per gallon.

See GAS, 3A

Town secures Lighthouse access funding

Grant to complete interior restoration

By REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

The Town Council unanimously voted at its Jan. 8 monthly meeting to approve a grant agreement with state officials that will fund an access system to the 1886 Roanoke River Lighthouse.

With that approval in place, work on the access portion of the project should begin again fairly quickly, according to Mark Cooney, who is managing the project for the N.C. Department

of Cultural Resources. Cooney said that A.R. Chesson Construction that completed earlier phases of the project would also build the access system. Since work on the interior constitutes a separate phase of the project, Cooney said, a bidding process will soon open to contractors interested in taking on the project.

Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton said that Cultural Resources would provide \$131,000 to cover the cost of interior restoration to the historic structure. And through the grant agreement the town will be able to secure an additional \$125,000 from the North Carolina Public Beach and Coastal Water Access Pro-

gram to provide a public bridge from land to the structure that sits atop pilings over the water in the Edenton Bay.

"We did not want that treasure (lighthouse) not to have any access available to the public," Knighton told council members at the meeting.

Knighton added that the grant required matching funds but said that the agreement would allow the town to count the Cultural Resources funds as its match. She explained that the grant calls for a 25 percent match but allows that match to come from sources other than the applicant.

See LIGHTHOUSE, 3A

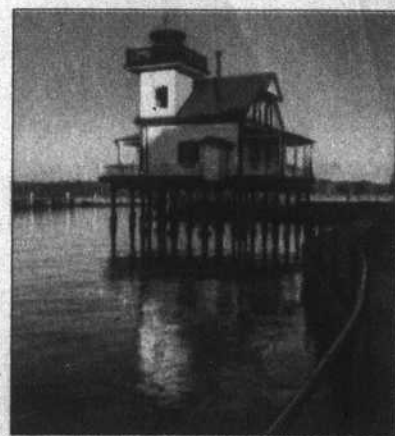


PHOTO BY MARK RIDLEY

Work will soon begin at the 1886 Roanoke River Lighthouse to install a public access system.

Thieves break into Agriculture Center

From staff reports

Count the Chowan Agriculture Center as the area's latest crime victim, according to Edenton police.

As workers returned to work at 7 a.m. Monday it was discovered that someone had broken through a small door-side window and then unlocked the door. Several items were

taken and the offices ransacked, said Capt. Tim Hickman.

Laptops were left just outside the point of entry, police say. Evidence suggests the suspect left on foot toward Virginia Road.

Offices currently housed in the agriculture building located at the corner of Granville Street and Virginia Road

includes: N.C. Cooperative Extension, Board of Elections, Soil and Water, and National Resources Conservation Services.

Only the Cooperative Extension appeared to be victimized. Four offices there were ransacked with a credit card and camera reportedly stolen, said Tim Smith, extension director. "They left the com-

puters and rummaged through the offices, but it could have been a lot worse," Smith said. Otherwise, the vandalism was limited to strewn materials.

Smith said the break-in had to have occurred sometime Sunday night because an extension employee had been in the building during the afternoon and reported not

seeing any damages at that time.

A shovel was found outside the broken window and may have been used to break the glass.

Last month someone broke the front glass of the Nethin' Fancy restaurant and stole \$10, leaving merchandise untouched.

If you have information about these crimes, call Edenton police at 482-5144.

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