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What's ahead for Edenton, Chowan in 2016?

Schools look for progress in 2016

BY REBECCA BUNCH
Staff Writer

Edenton-Chowan Schools Superintendent Rob Jackson said he is optimistic that the coming year will be a time of progress for students and staff.

"I believe that 2016 will be a great year for the school system as we will continue to see our positive trends gather momentum," he said. Jackson said he is anticipating that the graduating class of 2016 will break records set by last year's graduates in terms of both graduate rate and the number of scholarships received. He added that Chowan Middle School, which has been deemed a North Carolina Middle School to Watch, "is fielding requests from other middle schools and school districts to send teams to visit our teachers and staff to learn from their success."

"The elementary schools are having tremendous years and are benefiting from growing parent and community involvement," Jackson said. "Each of our schools is on a positive trajectory and I believe that we will witness even more student success in 2016."

He said that one of the greatest challenges for the school system and for the community as a whole remains school readiness.

"This school year, 86 percent of our entering kindergarteners were below where they needed to be (in terms of skills) to start kindergarten," Jackson said. "As a community we must address the critical issue of school readiness. We all need to do our part to encourage parents of very young children to read to them every night and to have meaningful conversations with them."

He emphasized that recent research shared through Chowan CARES shows that a child who is read to 20 minutes a day is exposed to 1.8 million words per year as compared to a child who is not read to and is only exposed to 8,000 words a year.

"This disparity in preparation creates a difficult barrier for children to overcome as they must work to catch up with their peers," Jackson said.

But positive steps are being taken to close the gap, he said.

"Our public library is offering powerful opportunities for parents and children to meet authors and engage in a community of readers," Jackson said. "We must encourage the parents of young children to take advantage of our tremendous public library," he added.

See SCHOOLS, 3A



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Destination Downtown Edenton eyes growth

BY REGGIE PONDER
Editor

If Destination Downtown Edenton has its way, 2016 will be a year of growth for the town's already vibrant downtown district.

Jennifer Harriss, executive director of Destination Downtown Edenton Inc., which is Edenton's National Main Street Program office, said in a recent interview that recruiting new businesses to downtown, helping existing businesses expand and encouraging public art in the community will be among DDE's efforts in the coming year.

The DDE Board has an 18-month plan of work. One of the goals in that plan is the development of an incentive program for the recruitment of new businesses and the expansion of existing businesses. DDE will be working with other organizations to see how they might be able to partner on that.

"We think it's important not only to recruit new businesses but to assist the businesses we have now with expanding and offering new goods and services," Harriss said.

In particular, Harriss said, DDE is very interested in bringing a sporting goods component to downtown, either through a new business or the expansion of a new business into the sporting goods line.

Also, a canoe and kayak outfitter could be part of a larger sporting goods business or could be a small standalone business, she said.

Market analyses have shown a lot of leakage when it comes to sporting goods, she said.

"So the board really wants to zero in on that for our downtown," Harriss said. "It's a need and we hope to fill it."

See DOWNTOWN, 4A



STAFF PHOTOS BY REGGIE PONDER

This window at Shoppes on Broad (above) tied for first place in the windows contest sponsored by Destination Downtown Edenton Inc. Edenton Bay Trading Co. (below) was brightly decorated for the holidays and shared first-place honors in the contest. Honorable mention went to Polka Dot Palm and John Gay Studio.



Water woes top county concern in coming year

BY REGGIE PONDER
Editor

Finding a cost-effective way to comply with state regulations at the county's water treatment plant while resuming the water-softening process tops the agenda for Chowan County officials as 2016 dawns.

"That's our number one issue next year," said County Manager Kevin Howard.

State environmental regulators have told county officials they must stop softening the county's water as long as the county continues to discharge the effluent from the treatment process into a swamp near

the treatment plant. The county already has begun phasing out the softening of the water and will stop the softening completely by March 1.

Meanwhile, the county commissioners plan to start meeting in the next couple of weeks to discuss how to resolve the water treatment issues.

County Manager Kevin Howard said that there also would be meetings for public information and public input on the issue.

Constructing a reverse osmosis water treatment plant would be a

costly solution, with estimates around \$30 million for a new RO plant.

A much more affordable options, and therefore one the commissioners likely will focus on, is to use the current water treatment system but change the way the effluent is disposed of, Howard said it could cost \$4 million or more to reroute the effluent, depending on where the discharge site is.



HOWARD

The state has to approve the discharge location, and alternate discharge sites could range from as close as three miles away to as far

away as 15-16 miles.

Howard said the timetable for resolving the water issues was not necessarily tied to the budget process since the county already increased water rates this fiscal year in anticipation of needing to upgrade the plant.

What is driving the timetable instead is a general sense of urgency to resolve the water issues.

"We're going to move as fast as possible to figure out something," Howard said. "Our plan is to get back in the softening business, not just stay the way we are now."

See COUNTY, 4A

Town infrastructure a priority in year ahead

BY REBECCA BUNCH
Editor

Looking ahead to the coming year Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton says the town government "has a lot on its plate."

And while all of the goals and priorities won't be finalized until the town council meets in January to review and update its Vision Statement, Knighton said that

projects for 2016 would include the future use of the former Northeast Commission building, the new headquarters for the Edenton Police Department, implementation of the redevelopment plans for the North Oak Street and Moseley Street neighborhoods; upgrades to the electrical distribution



KNIGHTON

system and water mains on Peanut Drive; and continuing to help the Edenton-Chowan Partnership with its efforts to recruit a second grocery store.

"The upcoming budget for 2016/17 is a budget I am looking forward to," Knighton said. "Thanks to the General Assembly

giving municipalities the authority to increase the vehicle tag fee beginning in July, the Town will have additional revenue to pay for street paving work. We will be updating our priority list in the spring and reviewing it with the town council as part of the budget preparation work."

Knighton acknowledged that one of the areas of greatest interest in the com-

ing year would be the future ownership and use of the Northeast Commission building — the last remaining piece of commercial real estate available on the downtown waterfront.

"Our town council administrative committee chaired by Councilman Steve Biggs has recommended that Reid Thomas

See TOWN, 3A

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