

LRDA Awarded A \$533,259 Early Start Grant

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office, for Children and Families has notified Lumbee Regional Development Association that it has been awarded a \$533,259 Early Start Grant to provide child services in the Fairgrove, Greengrove School area of Robeson County.

LRDA is one of only three such grants awarded in all of North Carolina for 2003 Early Start Funding. Over \$200,000 of the grant will be used to help construct a building that will consolidate LRDA's current Head Start Program in the Greengrove community into one larger building combined with the new Early Head Start Program.

The grant provides \$100,000 for start-up planning this year, and \$433,259 for operations of the services component once the building is completed.

The program will provide new services to an additional 40 pregnant women, infants and toddlers, and enhance the development of children as they move into Head Start or kindergarten in following years.

LRDA has operated Head Start Services in Robeson County since 1984 in the communities of Rennert, Allenton, and Fairgrove/Greengrove. LRDA owns the land and buildings in the communities where these services are provided.

The LRDA Head Start Program employs 37 people and provides a host of services, including transportation to the centers for children. The Early Start Program will allow LRDA to employ 14 new people to provide this new childcare services component.

Mr. Leroy Freeman, Chairman of LRDA stated "this is a great day for LRDA and the Fairgrove/Greengrove community. This grant and the construction of a new modern Childcare facility will represent over a \$1.5 million investment for families, especially the children of this com-

munity. Early Start and Head Start will enhance the future educational success of these children who will go on into the school system of Robeson County."

Mr. Dewey Locklear, Executive Director of LRDA expressed equal excitement about these new services. He stated, "LRDA with all the competition for these Early Start grants nationwide is very fortunate to receive this grant with indefinite funding. Robeson County is the winner because this grant will serve a low-income area near an Enterprise Zone which will benefit greatly from these services for years to come. The economic impact of this program is also needed in this county."

Mrs. Patricia B. Locklear, LRDA Head Start Director also added that "These are exciting new directions for LRDA Head Start. I am excited about our three new programs, Early Head Start which will provide comprehensive services for children, birth to three. Fatherhood Literacy Initiative Program (FLIP), an initiative to enhance the literacy skills of males and promote a holistic family approach to literacy. Youth Involvement in Early Literacy Development (YIELD) which is designed to promote positive youth development through participation in the LRDA Head Start Center.

I understand we are the only program to receive all three grants. Providing quality services to children in Robeson County continues to be one of our top priorities.

LRDA's Board of Directors has made a commitment to seek services for its service areas. This is just one of several new projects they have secured and implemented over the past year.

For more information about this press release, please call Mr. Dewey Locklear at 521-8602 or Patricia B. Locklear at 522-2127.



Aja Locklear, the new Miss UNCP

Aja Locklear crowned Miss UNCP

Pembroke, N.C.-It was a busy night for the new Miss UNC Pembroke.

Aja Terrell Locklear, a sophomore from Maxton, was crowned Miss UNCP 2003 at the 49th annual Scholarship pageant held Jan. 30 in the Givens Performing Art Center.

She also won the talent portion of the competition.

Locklear will receive a \$1,000 scholarship, free room and board for the fall semester, a class ring from Jostens, an oil portrait, and a \$1,000 wardrobe allowance to help her on her way to the Miss North Carolina Pageant.

"This is a wonderful experience," Locklear said. "It's going to be well worth the hard work. I'm going to definitely make a difference this year."

The crown was awarded based on judge's private interviews with the nine contestants, swimsuit and evening gown competitions and talent competitions.

Former 2001 Miss UNCP Katherine Greer, of Fuquay-Varina, N.C., thanked friends and loved ones for a wonderful year and crowned Locklear the new Miss UNCP.

Locklear wore a white two-piece bathing suit that left a crowd of more than 1,000 stunned. Later, she wore a long purple evening gown while she belted out her version of "A New Life" from the Broadway musical "Jekyll and Hyde."

Mistress of Ceremonies was Rebekah Revels, Miss UNC Pembroke of 1998 and Miss North Carolina 2002. She entertained as did Pageant Director Lorna McNeill, Miss North Carolina 2000.

First runner up was Robyn Baker of Northfield, N.J. She will receive a \$300 scholarship and will take on any future commitments if Locklear is unable to attend.

Second runner up was Crystal Batten of Lumberton. She will receive a \$200 scholarship.

Third runner up was Selina Craig from Laurinburg. She will receive a \$100 scholarship.

The Jessica Reed and Family Service Scholarship was awarded by Miss UNCP of 2001, Jessica Reed. The \$100 scholarship went to Jessica Park of Clinton.

Fallon Lord, of Hope Mills, won Miss Congeniality award. The theme of the pageant was "A Bit of Broadway." With the talent seen that night, it was clear these girls would be going wherever they wanted to go.

Aja Locklear, the new Miss UNCP, is going to Raleigh in June to compete for the Miss North Carolina title. And if recent history and crowd reactions to Locklear's performance are any indication, she has a chance to win the state title.



Lorna McNeill and Rebekah Revels

Head Start now recruiting students

Head Start is in the process of recruiting children who will be ages three and four years old by October 16, 2003 school dead line date. Head Start is a federally funded program designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing pre-school children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet the children's emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. Applications are being accepted daily from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. For further assistance or information, please call the Head Start Center nearest you.

Report to the People by Rep. Ron Sutton

There is much speculation and confusion about the proposed The Robeson I-73 (relocation of US-74 between the Maxton bypass and NC-41, Martin Luther King, T Jr. Highway).

This status report is intended to give citizens an update on the progress of that project.

First of all, the many changes apparent on the existing US-74 such as new stoplights, turn lanes, widening of intersections, etc. are not in any way related to the proposed relocation of US-74 to be known as I-73. These changes are made for safety and traffic congestion reasons and do not mean or imply that US-74 is not on schedule to be relocated. These improvements are needed now to handle the safe flow of traffic and protect our citizens. They are funded from a totally different pot of money and will in no wise delay the new highway. Remember, US-74 as we know it now will continue to exist with a relationship to I-73 similar to that of US-301 and I-95.

Some background on developing a new highway is worth mentioning. It should be noted that from inception of a new road to beginning construction takes longer than the actual construction process. The many things done outside the public view take much longer than that we see after the heavy equipment arrives on the scene.

It took several years to plan, evaluate, review and finalize the route. It was only last December 2002 that the final plan was adopted in its entirety. Naturally, certain sections of the route were known before but not the final route.

Wetlands, the environment, residences, proposed interchanges and traffic flow were many factors leading to final route determination. The environmental impact study takes years to complete and get approved. Some parts are still in progress.

As everyone knows by now, I-73 will run slightly south of the present US-74 eastward from Maxton bypass and rejoin the existing US-74

near the Southeastern Farmers Market and Agriculture Center about a mile west of I-95.

The design of the entire highway is 85% complete. Environmental permitting is ongoing with some permits already approved.

That section of US-74 east of NC-41 was completed first because the state already owned the right-of-way (purchased many years ago) and in certain parts the roadbed had already been established.

Closer to home, the portion next to Maxton was easiest to determine; they have already begun buying right-of-way along that section. The area from near Hopewell Church to I-95 had more wetlands and the route was harder to identify. Present plans are to let the contract in July 2004 to begin construction at the Maxton end from the Maxton bypass to Cabinet Shop Road in September 2004.

Right-of-way acquisition is beginning soon on the mid section (from Cabinet Shop Road to SR 1157 near NC 710 and eastward). A similar schedule applies to that section between SR 1157 to west of SR 1164.

Right-of-way acquisition for that portion between west of SR 1164 to NC-41 began sometime ago and a contract for construction should be let soon. Actual construction for all the new road is scheduled to begin in late 2004-2005.

One important consideration is a major intersection/interchange that is to be located on I-95 just south of the present I-95/US-74 interchange. This will provide an improved access to the Southeastern Farmers Market and Agriculture Center.

The target date for all phases of the new I-73 to be completed from the Maxton bypass to NC-41 is 2008. It is on target and proceeding normally.

There is little dispute that this road should have been improved 35 years ago. However, for various reasons, that was not to be. That is behind us now. We can and must look toward the future. It has taken a long time just to get us where we are presently.

Some citizens, rightly so, want this project to be moved up and work to begin immediately throughout the entire section. However, that is not feasible. Construction of a major portion of a road like this takes more than 10-12 years from its initial approval until the ribbon cutting ceremony.

In recent years, I have served on the House Transportation Committee, the Transportation Appropriations Sub-committee (Department of Transportation money committee), and the Transportation Oversight Committee, and I assure you I am keeping a close watch on this project.

Again, the project is moving forward, on schedule, and should be an outstanding section of interstate type highway when completed. I will continue to keep readers updated on the progress.

Meanwhile, we must continue to upgrade our existing intersections, roads and streets as needed. There are other much needed road improvements throughout the area and we must continue to work for them. Robeson and Hoke counties are experiencing a significant increase in bridge and highway improvements and that needs to continue.

Public Forum on Economic Development Strategies Set

The Robeson County Board of Commissioners & the public will get a first-look at the Federal Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that is being developed for the 10-county 8th Congressional District, in which Robeson County is part.

A public forum is tentatively scheduled at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, Friday 19, 2003, at the O.P. Owens Building located on Hwy 72 west at the Robeson County Agriculture Building.

Representatives of Fluor Global Strategies, a Greenville, S.C. based consulting firm, will be on hand to formally present their economic development strategy for Robeson County. Since June 2002, Fluor has been gathering data for the 8th District, which is represented in Congress by Rep. Robin Hayes, to form a regional and a county-by-county strategy to spur economic development to bring new jobs to the district.

The economic blueprint has been overseen by the CEDS Committee, representatives from Robeson County, Ken Windley, County Manager; Gregory Cummings, County Economic Developer; Mayor Lillie McKay and Joe Loflin, Town of Maxton; and Red Springs Town Manager, Wayne Horne.

We urge the county citizens to attend this meeting concerning economic blueprint to combat the economic crisis that our county is facing. For more information, call Robeson County Economic Development Commission at 739-7584; or visit the CEDS Committee's website at www.8thdistrictceds.info.

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Absentee ballots for referendum now available

Absentee ballots can be requested by mail for members of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina beginning Wednesday, February 12, 2003. The deadline to apply by mail for an absentee ballot will be Wednesday, February 26, 2003 at 5:00 p.m.

Absentee ballots may be requested from the Tribal Elections Board by completing an absentee ballot request form. To request an absentee ballot please write to Lumbee Tribal Elections Board, Post Office Box 2709, Pembroke, NC 28372. An application may be also obtained from the front desk at the Tribal Office or by visiting the tribal website: www.lumbee Tribe.com

The tribal election will be Saturday, March 8, 2003 for a proposed constitutional amendment to Article 1 that deals with tribal territory. The proposed amendment is, "The territory of the Lumbee Tribe shall include Robeson, Hoke, Scotland and Cumberland counties."

Currently the Constitution defines the Tribe's territory as the State of North Carolina.

The proposed amendment would not affect the service area of the Tribe, only change the representatives of the Tribal Council. The Lumbee Constitution states that only members within the territory can serve on the council. The tribally designated service area is determined by Tribal Council and can include any area they desire, unless restricted by a grant or federal law.

Council passed the amendment so as not to conflict with other tribes in North Carolina and their territory. The Lumbee tribal Council wishes to respect other tribes and their tribal territory but to be inclusive of as many tribal members as possible. Without passage, the tribal territory would stay as the state and may hurt federal recognition efforts.

Special Bible Study planned at Sandy Plains UMC

Pembroke-Sandy Plains United Methodist Church invites the public to take part in a study of God Was Here & I Was Out To Lunch, one in a series of books by Rev. James W. Moore.

The study sessions will be held at the church on Wednesday nights at 7 o'clock, with the first of the planned 16 sessions slated for Wednesday, February 19.

Rev. Moore is an ordained Elder in the Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church and he serves as the senior pastor at St. Luke's UMC in Houston.

Sandy Plains UMC is located at 2468 Union Chapel Road, 1.7 miles north of Pembroke and 0.7 miles south of the intersection of Highway 72 and Union Chapel Road. Rev. David Malcolm is the Pastor. Call (910) 521-8600 or e-mail spumcnc@bellsouth.net for more information.