

Office for Civil Rights conducts investigation of local schools

By BRIDGET EVARTS
Community News Reporter

Representatives of the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights visited Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools this week to investigate a complaint first-hand.

The officers will be looking for evidence to support or refute the complaint charging that the school system's redistricting plan would segregate schools. The complaint, filed by a group of parents after the school board voted to approve the plan in

1995, has gone through the ranks of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR).

The visit is one of two on-site investigations that the OCR will conduct, said Tom Harris, one of the parents who filed the complaint.

"We hope the investigation will be an impetus for the community at large to look at the redistricting issue," said Harris.

Harris and the other parents felt that the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school board's plan lacked control over integration levels. This sentiment

was shared by the three board members who voted against the plan. Geneva Brown, Dale Folwell and former school board member Walter Marshall (who is now a county commissioner) said the redistricting plan did not offer enough safeguards to maintain integration levels.

Since the implementation of the zones, five elementary schools in southeast Forsyth have failed to maintain the +/-20 ratio for integration.

Harris hopes that with federal prodding, the school board will

agree to rework the plan into a "bona fide controlled choice plan." One model he supports was implemented in St. Lucy, Fla.

The St. Lucy plan restricted the slots of guaranteed neighborhood placement to only those children who could walk to school — safely. The classification of "walking distance" prevented elementary school students from crossing major highways or thoroughfares on their way to school.

However, school board sup-

port for the plan remains constant.

Buddy Collins assumed Gloria Whisenhunt's school board seat after she was elected county commissioner last fall. Like his predecessor, Collins wholeheartedly supports the redistricting plan.

"My position has been that it is premature to make a decision whether redistricting is working or not working," said Collins. He said that the school board can make adjustments as they see fit without dismantling the entire plan.

Collins, a native of Winston-Salem, transferred from Dalton Junior High School to the all-black Paisley High during the early years of integration.

"While 25 years ago that forced busing was necessary, I don't think it's necessary anymore," said Collins.

Attitudes have also changed during the past 25 years, he added.

"There is a remarkable difference in the way the school board operates now than the way it did in the 1970s," Collins said.

Chronicle names High Point editor

Chronicle publisher Ernie Pitt recently announced the appointment of Carole Weatherford as contributing editor. Weatherford, a poet, essayist and author of children's books, will cover High Point. *The Chronicle* expanded into High Point and Greensboro earlier this month following the newspaper's merger with the *Charlotte Post*. *The Chronicle* is currently being delivered in selected High Point neighborhoods. High Point readers can order subscriptions or obtain the paper from vending machines located throughout the city.

Weatherford has contributed to this newspaper for several years. In addition, her articles and essays have appeared in the *Washington Post*, the *Christian Science Monitor* and *Essence*.



Carole Weatherford

She has won several awards for her poetry and is the author of five children's books.

"I am pleased to have a writer of Carole's ability and commitment to the African-American Community as a part of the Chronicle's staff," Pitt said of Ms. Weatherford.

Sims Center presents fourth annual Happy Hill Reunion

A weekend of festivities is planned to celebrate homecoming for past residents of the Happy Hill Gardens community. Dates for Reunion activities include the following: Thursday, July 17, beginning at 7 p.m. will be Arts and Music Night at the Sims Recreation Center, featuring local jazz great Joe Robinson and local artist Jerry Hanes;

Friday, July 18 at the Sims Center beginning at 7 p.m. will be the Happy Hill Community Service Awards Program;

Saturday, July 19, in Happy Hill Park and at the Sims Recreation Center, Happy Hill Reunion 1997 will take place with games, a parade, and history about Happy Hill; Sunday, July 20, at 11 a.m. all

Happy Hill residents will go to a church of their choice to worship as well as former residents of the community. Anyone can come to enjoy the fun and history of the oldest African-American community in Winston-Salem. Happy Hill Reunion meetings will be held the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month at Sims Recreation Center at 7:30 p.m. starting June 11. Sims Recreation Center is at 1201 Alder St. in Winston-Salem. For more information about the Happy Hill Reunion, call Ben Piggott at (910) 727-2837. We are asking families to bring picnic baskets on Saturday, July 19, at 11 a.m. to push the love of sharing throughout the community of Happy Hill.

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