

# Vigil opens mental health week

By FELECIA P. MCMILLAN  
Special to THE CHRONICLE

According to the Mental Health Association, 60,000 people in Forsyth County have a diagnosed mental illness, and 1,300 of them are children. The good news is that up to 80 percent of the mentally ill can be successfully treated. The Mental Health Association, various treatment centers and area hospitals came together on Sunday, Oct. 5, at Grace Court Park for a candlelight vigil, the opening program of a week of activities. Mental Health Awareness Week will be held Oct. 5-11. The purpose of the week-long celebration is to raise awareness about issues of mental health. Todd Fleischhauer, WGHP-TV (Fox 8) served as the master of

ceremonies.

Local minister Mikal Muhammad from the Nation of Islam presented the opening invocation and the closing prayer. Harris Richardson read a poem on the value of the Holy Spirit as a "precious oil of healing." General Wade sang an a capella version of "You'll Never Walk Alone." She also led the audience in "Amazing Grace during the lighting of the candles. This nationwide event will serve as a "light of hope" for persons affected with brain disorders.

"This week is for everybody," said Jim Gallager, board chairman of Forsyth-Stokes Area Mental Health Authority. "We want to address all the people who think they won't ever need our services ... Let's celebrate for the people who will

See VIGIL on A12



Nan Parrish, Diane Jenkins and Mildred Burns lit their flames of hope and observed a moment of reflection.

75 cents

WINSTON-SALEM GREENSBORO HIGH POINT

Vol. XXIV No. 6

# THE CHRONICLE

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## Alabama to appeal race bias suit

By BILL POOVEY  
Associated Press Writer

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Taxpayers will be footing a \$36 million bill for the Alabama Transportation Department's 12-year-old court battle over employee racial bias, unless a federal appeals court says otherwise.

The money would cover the back pay, plus interest, being sought by black employees in a racial discrimination case.

Ray Bass, the department's chief engineer, said the \$36 million was being taken out of the department's accounts Friday, just two days into fiscal 1998, and deposited with the court. He said the payout would delay some planned highway projects.

Bass said attorney fees in the case already total \$8.9 million, much of that to the Birmingham law firm represented by Robert Wiggins, the chief attorney for black employees suing the department.

Bass said there are more legal fees to be paid. He said Wiggins has not sent the state a bill in more than a year. Wiggins could not be reached for comment.

Bass said budget analysts in the Transportation Department say the case has cost taxpayers another \$6 million in administrative fees, such as employee time spent in court sessions.

The Legislature's Contract Review Committee on Thursday delayed for 45 days a \$2 million department contract with a Maryland consulting firm. The contract was for help in developing new personnel tests that are not racially biased.

Attorneys for the black employees are also employing consultants, who will have to be paid by the state.

A member of the panel, Rep. John Knight, D-Montgomery, said the bias problem won't go away because there are "individuals who are still working in

See APPEAL on A2



(AP Photo/Greg Gibson)

With the Washington Monument in the background, John Livingston of Rochester, N.Y., holds friend Robert Brooks on his shoulder as they participate in the Promise Keepers rally on the Mall in Washington Saturday, Oct. 4. In a soul-searching quest for spiritual renewal, hundreds of thousands of Christian men prayed and sang among the great monuments of Washington, eager to own up to their failings and halt a nation's moral decline.

## CONTACT losing volunteers

By BRIDGET EVARTS  
THE CHRONICLE Staff Writer

Most businesses couldn't run for seven years with little more than half of the needed work force. And most business owners who attempted such a feat would soon be filing for bankruptcy.

CONTACT Helpline of the Triad, a local nonprofit counseling service, is currently operating with about 167 volunteers; 250 volunteers are required to fully serve those who call CONTACT for assistance.

"We have fewer volunteers today than when we started 17 years ago," said CONTACT director Jim Fatzinger. "It's bizarre, considering the increased service provided."

CONTACT offers a 24-hour emergency line for people facing any type of crisis, from suicidal thoughts to rape, domestic abuse and loneliness.

Keeping the lines staffed for that service is difficult enough, but CONTACT also provides a Teen-Line with peer counseling for youth, a Kids Line service for latchkey children, a Violence Reduction Helpline for victims of violent crimes and Contact Reassurance, a service that does daily check-ups with elderly and infirm clients. The nonprofit also offers in-person, short-term counseling for people who can't afford other services.

Volunteers can't just sign up to provide services such as these. CONTACT's national organization requires volunteers to complete 50 hours of training before they may take calls.

"We're going to trust you on the phone with someone who has a gun to their head," Fatzinger said bluntly. "We can't just put someone out there willy-nilly."

The thought of spending 11 weeks in intensive training classes sends most prospective volunteers running to a more convenient volunteer agency. And the demands on CONTACT volunteers is becoming greater.

See CONTACT on A2

## HUD investigates insurance firms

From the NNPA Wire report

Four of the nation's largest insurance companies have been accused of racial discrimination under the Fair Housing Act.

Fair housing groups said the companies turned down or limited home insurance policies to residents living in minority and integrated neighborhoods.

The Prudential Insurance Company of America, The Travellers Group, Aetna and Liberty Mutual Group allegedly restricted, limited or denied homeownership insurance in African-American, Latino and integrated communities.

The National Fair Housing Center, Metropolitan Fair Housing Center and Home of Richmond, who all filed the complaint, said

that the insurance companies had violated the Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in real estate related transactions.

"If our findings confirm the complaints are correct, we will end any discriminatory practices and take steps to see that such violations are prevented in the future," said Housing Secretary Andrew Cuomo.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) must investigate the complaints and determine whether there is reasonable cause that the act has been violated.

The case will be given to an administrative law judge, who may provide victims with monetary or injunctive relief and civil penalties.

The complaints against the four insurance companies were based on a study authorized by HUD's Fair Housing Initiatives Program of 1985.

## Downtown plan could unite black and white interests

By BRIDGET EVARTS  
THE CHRONICLE Staff Writer

Downtown Winston is alive — until five.

After business hours, downtown is a ghost town of empty restaurants, darkened windows and vacant parking lots. Those looking for food or fun gravitate outside of central Winston-Salem.

What downtown needs is a draw, said Jack Steelman, head of the city's downtown revitalization efforts. And that, he added, could be a large undertaking or a smaller venture, whatever the citizens of Winston-Salem want.

Perceptions of Winston's downtown are dim, though the picture isn't as dark as it seems. The abundance of empty street-level retail space leaves



Jack Steelman

pedestrians with the impression that the city's heart has moved elsewhere.

In reality, said Steelman, Winston-Salem has some of the highest office occupancy rates in the area. Almost 100 percent of the class A office space is occupied, and only 20-25 percent of class B space is vacant.

Visit the business district during the lunch hour, and Winston appears to rival any medium-sized city

See DOWNTOWN on A2