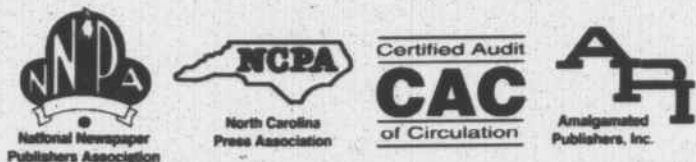


OPINION

Letters to the Editor

THE CHRONICLE

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A pat on the back for Sprinkle-Hamlin

Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin's ascension to the top post with the public library is a victory for us all.

Over the years, she has shown herself to be a tireless worker and the kind of person who knows how to get things done and bring in the kinds of people needed to really make a difference.

Nearly 20 years ago, Sprinkle-Hamlin introduced Kwanzaa to the library and since she's also been on the cultural cutting edge.

We hope her reign will be a long and successful one. We feel the library has made a good decision.

Proud of WSSU

Winston-Salem State University athletics have awoken from their slumber.

In February, the basketball team earned a CIAA championship for first-year coach Rick Duckett. Now the football team pulled out a victory at the Pioneer Bowl for long-time coach Kermit Blount.

Coach Blount deserved an enthusiastic thumbs-up for his hard work and dedication to the program.

Way to go, Rams.

A really merry Christmas

This holiday season, take time out to finally give thanks for things that you have that are worth something.

Begin with your health. Even if the bones creak a little and things aren't exactly where they used to be, be grateful that they - and you - are still here.

Offer up a little thanks for you family. No matter what happens, someone you're related to will always be there for you. And remember, family isn't just the people you're related to by blood. Family is everyone that you touch and all the people who care for and reach out to you.

Be grateful for the stuff that you do have. Of course, we all want a little bit more, but there's something to be said for having a starting point.

Be thankful that you can give a little something back. This is the thing most of us take for granted. No matter how much - or how little - you have, you're still valuable to someone else.

Volunteer at one the city's homeless shelters or spend a little time on Christmas Day helping someone who may not have as much.

Instead of making New Year's resolutions that you can't keep, make a vow to make a difference in the life of a child.

It's easy. Often, all a child needs is a little love and concern from an adult to keep him or her going.

We all have a lot for which to be thankful. What better time than now to show it.

To the Editor,
 My name is Andrew Hagler and I am the executive director of The Mental Health Association in Forsyth County, a non-profit, nongovernmental agency that provides advocacy, outreach and support services for persons with mental illness and their families, friends and loved ones.

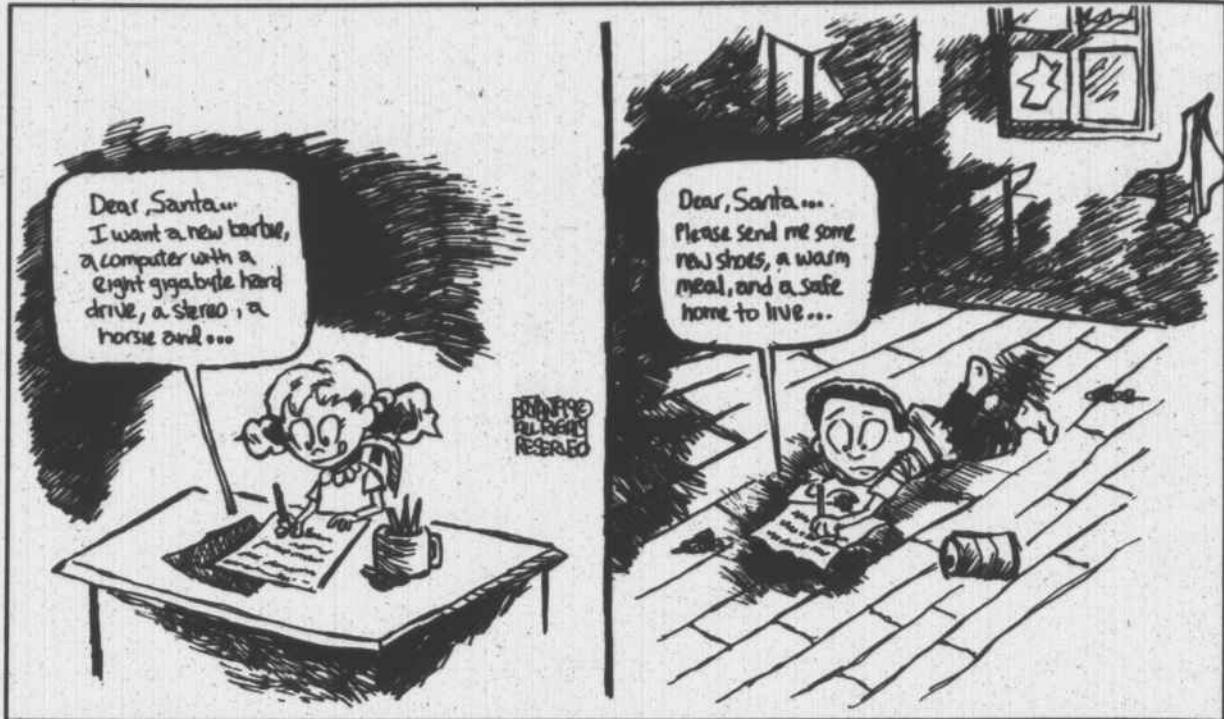
I am aware that Gov. Hunt has ordered all state departments to make some portion of their 1999-2000 budgets available for disaster relief and I am aware that the governor has the authority to shift this funding - without the approval of the legislature - during an emergency.

However, I am writing to ask that you and the entire body of the North Carolina General Assembly seriously consider and urge the governor to weigh (how) the impact his proposed \$830 million in hurricane disaster relief will ... (affect) all persons with mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse needs in North Carolina.

Please know, first of all, that my heart and soul goes out to our citizens affected by Hurricane Floyd. On a personal level, I grew up in Washington, N.C., and I earned my undergraduate degree at East Carolina University.

For five years, I taught second and third grades in Belhaven. I have many good friends Down East and that part of the state will always hold a special place in my heart.

However, if passed, the governor's proposed financial package for hurricane relief will have serious consequences affecting all persons with mental illness, developmental disabilities and substance abuse problems across the state of North Carolina.



To my understanding, \$504 million of the total \$830 million disaster relief package will come from redirecting funds from the current budget. The Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services is facing a \$17 million cut by which half of the cut will come from the state institutions and the other half of the cut will come from area mental health programs, excluding those authorities in the eastern part of North Carolina. Center-Point Human Services, the area mental health program serving Forsyth, Stokes and Davie counties, would be one of the mental health authorities possibly affected by this proposed cut.

Last Monday, Surgeon General David Satcher issued a first-ever report on mental health in our nation and stated that mil-

lions of Americans are currently failing to get the mental health treatment they need due to the stigma placed on mental illness and, more importantly, due to lack of money and access to services. Making additional cuts from the Division of Mental Health to fund the hurricane disaster relief package will only prevent more of our citizens in North Carolina from getting the treatment they need and will contribute to additional social ills such as homelessness, suicide, incarceration and involuntary commitments.

Therefore, I respectfully ask that you and the members of the North Carolina General Assembly seriously consider urging Gov. Hunt not to fund the proposed Hurricane Floyd Relief Package with existing state resources. Rather, I ask that the

General Assembly and the governor work together to consider establishing a separate funding stream for the Hurricane Relief package such as bonds or a temporary tax increase.

Andrew Hagler

To the Editor,
 I live in Winston-Salem and I read The Chronicle. I read a recent column of Nigel Alston in which he talked about a list of questions, and he offered to email those questions. I would like to have those questions. I would also like to thank Nigel for all the positive energy he puts out, the Motivational Moments on WSNC, and for your column. Keep up the great work.

Ouida Patten

Being suddenly handicapped isn't easy

Cheris Hodges

Guest Columnist

Over that last few days I've learned a valuable lesson.

Last week, I had an accident and broke my ankle. The doctor said I will be in a cast for six to eight weeks.

Less than a week into my injury, I've already realized something about being "handicapped" - it ain't easy.

After two days in my huge black cast, hobbling around Winston-Salem on crutches, I noticed a change in the way people looked and talked to me.

Then again, I guess in a way I am helpless.

I have never been in a cast. I have never broken a bone. But there are people who have been born without legs, arms and other body parts we take for granted.

But I'm not taking anything for granted anymore and living life in a cast has forced me to see the plight of people who are

handicapped permanently.

Like most people, the weeks leading up to Christmas are filled with shopping trips to the mall.

But, now that my leg is covered with a hard cast, and I'm on crutches, those trips are made more difficult than I ever realized.

I can't tell you how many times I walked up to information counters and service desks at local stores and have been told that they either don't have wheelchairs or that they only have one wheelchair and it's out.

My favorites are the stores that have wheelchairs and when you get them, a wheel is warped, making it impossible to get down the aisle.

Another pain is stores with aisles crowded with displays. It's tough enough to maneuver a wheelchair, but when you have to duck and dodge pallets of merchandise, it's enough to make anyone frustrated.

Another thing I've come to realize is despite years of political correctness in dealing with people with disabilities, most people still are uncomfortable around people in casts or wheel-

chairs.

The first look people give me is the "Oh bless your heart" look. The person semi-smiles and asks for the ten-thousandth time, "Is there anything I can do?"

While this is nice of people to say, I want to scream that I am not helpless.

Often, people go overboard constantly asking, "Can I help you?" or giving you looks that show that they feel sorry for you.

The worst are the people who look at wheelchairs with disdain. They seem to wonder whether, burdened by a wheelchair, if you have the right to be out in public.

Some people try to be polite and not stare at the big black brace on my leg. But many fail hopelessly and end up staring at my leg.

The last couple of weeks have made me truly begin to think about the plight of people permanently living with disabilities.

I know that in six-eight weeks, my disability will be a distant memory.

With just a week of living with a disability, I've come to understand the plight of the dis-

abled.

These are the people who deserve the parking spaces and wider aisles at the market.

These people worry about whether the stores they enter will have working wheelchairs every day and real aisles without stacks of merchandise.

These are the people whose entire lives are filled with blank stares from passers-by and the eery feeling that somehow you just don't belong.

You really can't empathize with their struggle until you have tried to walk a store in their shoes.

Suddenly, you realize that society has been built for people with two working arms and legs, who can reach the third shelf for the last Furby.

People, including me, are conditioned to think if someone is not able to do something "normal," they are in the way.

It's not true. There's a place for everyone; we just have to make it accessible.

To wheel around a store is an experience. My eyes have been opened.

Cheris Hodges is a staff writer for The Chronicle

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY...

We are asking local residents their New Year's resolutions until the end of the year. Here is what some of them said:



Cedric Young
 "To get closer to God."



Purvis Conrad
 "To marry Janifer McIntyre in the spring."



Janifer McIntyre
 "To marry Purvis Conrad in the spring."



Chandra Holly
 "I don't make resolutions, but what I do want to do is continue to build my relationship with God."



Bruce Cross Jr.
 "To be a better person and to work hard to achieve all of my goals and dreams."