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50 CENTS

INSIDE

Lifestyles

College bound. 8A



Your student is smart as a whip and weighing college choices. But what about your finances? The best way to plan is far in advance.

Entertainment

The music man. 1B



Sonny Moore (rear and on the right) opens his own recording studio in the West Charlotte Business Incubator.

Sports

Trojan warrior. 7B



Two years ago, Olympic High School's football program was a so-so outfit. But that was before Thabiti Davis arrived. Now he is primed to lead the Trojans into the first round of the N.C. 4A playoffs Friday.

Dreams vs. reality. 7B

A study released this week says high school students, especially in urban areas, have unrealistic goals when it comes to making a career as a professional athlete.

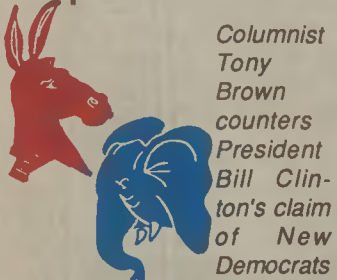
Religion

Conflict in the Bible. 9A

A book alleging errors in the best-selling book of all time — the Bible — is sparking debate and controversy.

Opinion & Editorials

The New Republicans. 5A



Columnist Tony Brown counters President Bill Clinton's claim of New Democrats

INDEX

Opinion/Editorials 4A-5A

Lifestyles 7A

Around Charlotte 8A

Religion 9A

Opinion 12A

Entertainment 1B

Sports 7B

Classified 12B

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Getting a gun in Mecklenburg County isn't very difficult for adults. And now, kids are finding it doesn't take much to get

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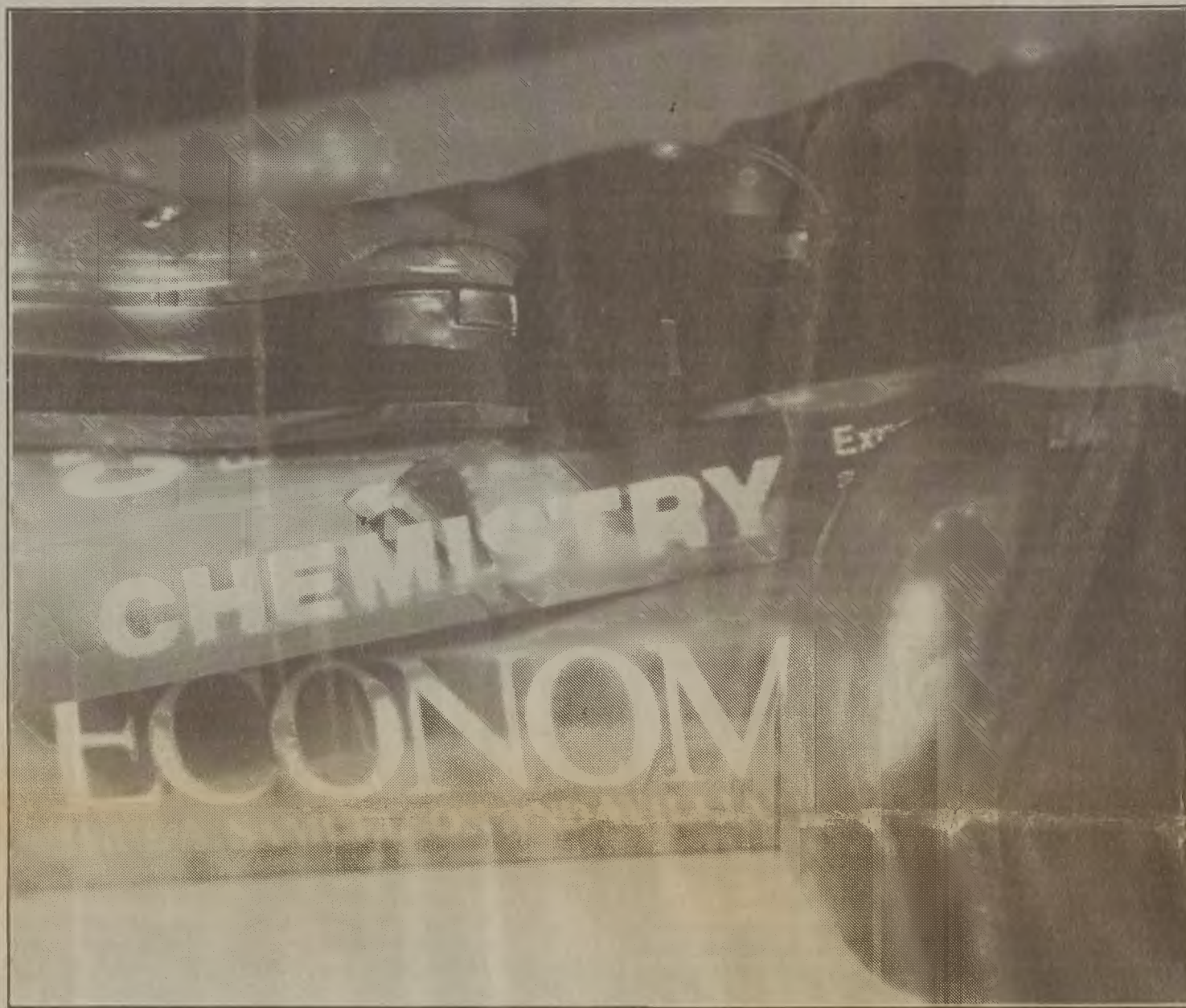


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION/CALVIN FERGUSON

Easy access leads to proliferation

By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Sept. 22. A 15-year-old North Mecklenburg High School student walks up to a fellow student, puts a gun to the back of his head and pulls the trigger.

BAM! Miraculously, because the gun was dirty, the bullet had little velocity, lodging between the student's scalp and skull. The victim was treated and released.

The shooter has been excluded from school and awaits trial.

The aforementioned situation is not an indictment on the school system; it's a problem shared by all of society. Kids are becoming more vicious and more and more of them are carrying guns.

According to the U.S. De-

partment of Justice, the number of teenagers across the nation arrested for murder increased 85 percent between 1987 and 1991. Seventeen percent of all those arrested for violent crime in 1991 were between the ages of 10 and 17 years old.

According to figures from the National Education Association (NEA), an estimated 100,000 kids carry guns to school each day.

In 1993, 65 of those students were excluded from Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. That was up from 52 the previous year.

Bryan Blavatt, court liaison for the school system, says the numbers will grow because of tougher policies and more student cooperation.

"We're dealing with the fact that a lot of people are proactive with this new discipline policy. We're trying to

create an environment that is safe and the kids are helping us," Blavatt said. "They are giving us tips and we're going after them. It's good that good kids are starting to take control. They're saying 'look, we're going to take control.'"

Once a kid is caught on campus with a gun, the school's principal is required to request expulsion. The student gets a hearing and if it's determined he or she had a firearm, the student is expelled from all academic programs for the remainder of year. The student has to petition the superintendent in order to return to school the next academic year.

Only two months into the school year seven students have already been excluded for possessing guns, including the North Mecklenburg shooter. Blavatt said the

system will "go the full extent of the law on this one. If it turns out to be the parent's gun, we're after them too. We've got the full cooperation of the police department."

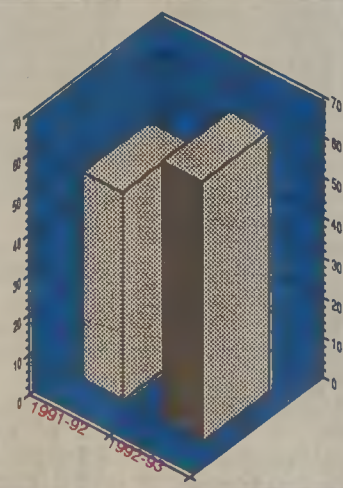
Blavatt is cautious about too much emphasis being placed on students with guns, however.

"Any violence in our society is an alarming trend. One has to remember we're talking about a microcosm of the total society. I'm wondering if there's not a rise in gun possession in society in general."

Captain John O'Hare, commander of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's youth services bureau, says it's the 20 and under population that is showing one the greatest increase in carrying guns.

See CHILDREN On Page 2A

Number of Charlotte-Mecklenburg students excluded for carrying guns.



Building bridges on city council

Blacks have a chance to forge new coalitions

By Cassandra Wynn
THE CHARLOTTE POST

A lot of horse trading and coalition building may be the politics of the four black members of Charlotte City Council.

Blacks, who make up four-fifths of the Democratic minority on council, are now in a strategic position to form a block that could swing — not so much between party lines — but between lines of liberal and conservative or special interests.

While the black community picked up one seat, the Democrats lost a seat and their majority on the 11-seat council. The other Democrat on council is Sara Spencer. All other council members are Republican led by Mayor Richard Vinroot.

"This fortifies opportunities to develop goals as they relate to the over all the community and more specifically to the black community and make Charlotte a world class city that we talk about," said Ella Scarborough, who will start her fourth term later this month.

Scarborough's decision to run at-large allowed the election of Patrick Cannon in District 3, Nasir Majeed (District 4) and Hoyle Martin (District 2) handily won reelection. The result is more bargaining power for blacks.

"We should develop an agenda (for the black community)," Scarborough said. "I'm willing to take a leadership role in that. It is imperative that we build coalitions with colleagues. There are some issues specifically relating to the black community."

The black community at least stayed even after last week's election, reasoned Bill Culp, Mecklenburg County Board of Elections supervisor. "The Republicans are the winners. On some issues, the four black members can make a difference. But all the black members are all different and have different priorities," he said. "Like other politicians, the black members will do a lot of horse trading. The Republicans will set the agenda and decide what's going to happen. There is no question in my mind that public safety is what voters are concerned about. The reason Ella Scarborough won at large is that she was able to articulate a heavy punch on the crime

See COUNCIL On Page 3A

Draft targets 50% reduction in county teen pregnancies

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

A Mecklenburg County group is working to cut teen pregnancy in half by the year 2000.

The Mecklenburg Council on Adolescent Pregnancy (MCAP) Tuesday unveiled a draft to reduce the incidences of teen pregnancy. A drafting team of 14 individuals spent six months putting together the plan, which will include community output before its implementation.

The number of pregnancies in the county has showed a slight decrease over the last three years, from 2,249 in 1990 to 2,064 in 1992. Still, an average of six Mecklenburg girls get pregnant every day.

Fifty-four percent of all Mecklenburg teen births occur in Charlotte's inner city area — area codes 28216, 28208, 28206, 28205 and 28213 — where the population is overwhelmingly black.

Teen pregnancy's cost to the county is about \$30 million a year, said Frank Spencer, executive director of Children's Services Network. If the rate of pregnancy isn't reduced, the cost of care for children through their first five years of life will increase.

"If we don't change the rate at all, our costs will rise to \$42 million in the next six years," he said.

The plan would try to reduce pregnancies through four areas:

- Increasing the number of teens who abstain from sex through edu-

cation starting in kindergarten;

- Protect the sexually active from pregnancy and sexually-transmitted disease;

- Prevent additional pregnancies among teen mothers and;

- Prepare the children of teen mothers and other high-risk kids for success in school and life to make abstinence attractive.

Even in the sexually-active '90s, abstinence should be the cornerstone of any program, Spencer said.

"We believe increasing the percentage of young people who choose abstinence is a realistic goal," he said.

"We think that is the best choice, the healthiest choice, the one that is consistent with the standards of the community."

Along with the push for absti-

nence, the draft also calls for contraceptives for sexually-active teens who feel saying "no" isn't for them. Distributing Norplant, a controversial birth control method used in some N.C. counties and nationally, could be among the options used in Mecklenburg. Some African Americans consider making Norplant available to poor women and teens an attempt to control black birth rates and too great a health risk.

The procedure, which lasts about five years and costs about \$500, would be covered under Medicare.

"We feel very strongly our youth need access to condoms and contraceptives," said Jo Kelly, MCAP's executive director. "We can't fail to make (Norplant) part of the plan."