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Congressional redistricting brings heartburn

Rulings hinder black representation, some say

By Paul Shepard
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

On Beatties Ford Road, not far from the glimmering skyscrapers that loom over this Southern boom town, rests McDonald's Cafeteria. There, black movers and shakers gather to chew on spicy stewed turkey, tangy side dishes and the news of the day.

But of late, pickled peppers aren't the only things causing heartburn — especially when the discussion turns to the impending congressional redistricting in North Carolina.

"It's like those folks in Washington are telling all us black folks down here to go to hell. Why do they need to take away our congressman?" asked patron Roland White, a military contractor. "If we need some help on the federal level, who are we

supposed to turn to — Jesse Helms?"

Forget scholarly debates of constitutional interpretations and theories about majority block voting on Beatties Ford Road. Here, the issue is a lot less abstract and quite a bit more personal.

It looks to blacks that they are losing, as the result of court decisions, something valuable and newly won — representation in the nation's capital by people who know what it is to grow up black in the South.

North Carolina's 12th Congressional District is among eight mostly minority districts in Florida,

Louisiana, Georgia and Texas that have been disbanded by the Supreme Court or federal district courts since 1993.

Seven of the eight seats are held by blacks. The eighth — Texas' 29th which is 60 percent Hispanic — is held by Rep. Gene Green, who is white.

At least four other districts, all currently held by minorities, are threatened by federal judges who have ruled that race played too strong a factor in drawing up the district boundaries.

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Putting things together

Combined government affects representation, services in black areas

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Leroy Hill, owner of a firm which sells mid-range computer systems, lives in Brantley Woods, where homes begin at about \$250,000. Most of the other African Americans in the community are professionals: doctors, lawyers and the like.

Economically, they have more in common with their white neighbors than with many residents of west and northwest Charlotte, where most African Americans live.

And with that comes a different set of priorities when discussing consolidation of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County governments.

"I think it is senseless to have two governments," Hill said. "One government can save a lot of taxpayers' dollars. It makes more sense to have one set of people and one management group that will be responsible for all city and county employees."

Charlotte City Council will vote Monday on a consolidation plan.

County commissioners approved a plan two weeks ago which would set up a 13-member council, with eight district seats and five at-large seats. Three of the districts would have African American majorities.

However, some African Americans say they will oppose consolidation, no matter which of several plans put forth by a charter commission is finally accepted by the two bodies.

If council approves, a referendum could be added to the November ballot. Sept. 3 is the deadline.

Those opponents, most from among the traditional westside communities, say consolidation, even with three majority black districts, would not be fair to African Americans.

"I plan to campaign against it," said Bob Davis, chairman of the Black Political Caucus. "If the caucus goes with me, fine. If not, I plan to do it individually. I will stand up and say this is wrong."

Davis said the county commissioners' vote to add a third black district was done to appease African Americans.

"In my district there are a lot of Asians, Mexican Americans...there's no guarantee in this current plan that black folks will have anything other than lost seats," Davis said.

"Just as black folks begin to learn how to govern, they want to change the rules. It's the same thing that happened to us 100 years ago. I believe this is part of a larger design by the Republican Party to reduce government and eliminate black representation.

"I notice they are not saying anything about how much money they are going to save. There is no evidence they are going to save a lot of money with the new consolidated government."

But outside the westside and northwest corridor, there lives a growing number of African Americans not as tied to the decades old competition upon which much of today's black-white politics in Charlotte is based.

These African Americans — upwardly mobile middle- and upper-middle class professionals — favor the efficiencies some say will be the product of merging governments.

While they too value having African Americans on the new governing body, their concerns are different from westside interests.

Ike Heard Jr., former member of the joint city-county planning commission and director of the Northwest Corridor Community

See CONSOLIDATION on page 3A



If Mecklenburg voters approve the consolidation plan, three majority-black districts (color shading) would be created. Consolidation also must be approved by the General Assembly to allow a united government to assume debts amassed separately.

GRAPHIC/MECKLENBURG BOARD OF ELECTIONS



Leroy Hill supports consolidation of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County governments.

Let Freedom ring

Grant to help Westside area improve image

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Residents and businesses along Freedom Drive have banded together to change the image of their much maligned neighborhood.

The westside community's image is one of economic stagnation fueled by a loss of businesses to more affluent neighborhoods and crime. Now a group made up of community leaders is taking steps to change that perception.

"Our neighborhood has a negative image," says Wynne Parker, founder and residential chair of the Freedom Drive Task Force. "We want to give the area a more positive image."

The task force, which formed in an effort to increase the visibility of the Freedom Drive area, recently was awarded a \$15,000 grant that will be used to lure businesses and residents to the area. The drive will be led by Charlotte public relations specialist Mary Hopper.

"Mary is helping us to deal with getting the (Freedom Drive) name out," Parker said. "We want people to be aware of us. Mary will put together a newsletter that will inform people of meetings and new businesses."

Already on tap for the area is a new park as well as a new free standing satellite of Central Piedmont Community College located at the corner of Allegheny and Ashley roads.

"The park will be really good for people who live and work in the area," Parker said. "There are a couple of community centers, but nothing like this."

The park, which will have a covered shelter, is slated to open in the fall.

'Good work' at Fairview in ashes

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

It was just a wall, a stand of wood about 6 feet high and 15 feet long.

But it was a special wall, part of a play area built last winter for the children of Fairview Homes by members of Leadership Charlotte's Class XVII and UNC Charlotte architecture students.

The wall was severely damaged by a fire last month, a fire which destroyed the climbing wall. Only blackened ashes, enclosed in an area defined by wood beams, remain.

Other parts of the play area remain, including wooden benches, gazebo/school bus stop, a picnic area, landscaping.

"It was a lot of good work,"

said Cynthia Smith, director of the Anita Stroud center in Fairview Homes.

She said the wall burned on the weekend of June 20.

"They caught the fellows that did it," Smith said. "They were just some young boys from the neighborhood."

Smith said parents and children in the Fairview Homes area helped police find the arsonists.

She said many of the young people in the community had joined in to help erect the play area.

"It was just a prank or something," Smith said. "A lot of parents and residents were very upset and very hurt by this."

Former Leadership Charlotte president and current Anita Stroud Foundation board mem-

ber Anthony Fox said he was disappointed and angered that part of the play area was destroyed.

"I am just finding out about it," Fox said. "I'll probably bring it up to both boards. That (Leadership Charlotte) class may be willing to go back out and repair some of the facility."

The project was organized by Deb Ryan, a UNCC architecture faculty member and member of Leadership Charlotte's Class XVII.

Fox joined other Leadership Charlotte members, UNCC students and Fairview Homes residents in building the play area late last year. Materials were donated or paid for with a \$23,000 grant from City of

See FAIRVIEW on 2A



Shamone Black, 8, (left) and Jessica Barrett, 11, (right) play in front of the charred remains of Fairview Homes' amphitheater. No one has been apprehended in connection with the blaze.

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