

S.C. redistricting suit can proceed

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A federal judge refused to delay the Sept. 2 trial on a lawsuit challenging the racial makeup of South Carolina's 6th Congressional District — the state's only one with a black majority.

Both sides had asked for more time to continue settlement discussions, but their request was denied this week by U.S. Circuit Judge Karen Williams.

That leaves Williams and U.S. District Judges Matthew Perry and Ross Anderson with plenty of time to redraw the district before next year's elections if they agree with the

challenge.

U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, a black Democrat, is the only person to hold the 6th District seat since the sprawling boundaries were redrawn in 1992. Clyburn, the first black South Carolina congressman since Reconstruction, has said he could win even if the district had a white majority.

Attorneys for the state and two Florence Republicans challenging the district said last week they had been talking about a settlement for almost two months — not preparing for trial.

"While the parties have not yet reached a settlement, they

have made significant progress in narrowing their differences and are continuing to take positive steps toward a mutually acceptable resolution of this matter," the motion said.

John Chase, who is challenging the district after losing to Clyburn in 1992, wouldn't comment about settlement discussions, but said the ruling does not preclude further negotiations.

An out-of-court settlement would require agreement by Clyburn and any other congressmen whose districts were affected. It also needs approval of the state Senate, House and governor.

Legislative leaders acknowledge that in redrawing the lines, they set out to create a district in which most voters are black. Such an acknowledgment often spells the end for such districts, because the U.S. Supreme Court has severely restricted the instances in which it is constitutional to make decisions based on race.

The state can pass that test if it shows it drew a majority black district to correct past practices of stringing those same black voters out among other districts to keep them from electing a candidate of their choice.

Beach community seeks new investors

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. — Atlantic Beach, one of the last predominantly black beach towns on the East Coast, has died slowly since segregation ended. Now it hopes a consulting firm working for \$1 a year can attract black stars and athletes to invest in the community.

"We're out to bring home the black doctors and lawyers and other professionals to lend something to Atlantic Beach," said Daniel Blue, a partner in the consultant, Omega International.

"It is time for Atlantic Beach to stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the Grand Strand, and we need everyone involved," he said.

Blue grew up in Dillon and now lives in Mullins. He remembers visiting the area as a child when even the ocean was segregated.

"There were big ropes in the water on either side, and if you crossed the ropes into North Myrtle Beach you'd be arrested," Blue said. "I'll

never forget those ropes."

Omega will analyze and screen investors and developers interested in bringing businesses such as hotels and restaurants to town. The firm can make recommendations, but the town council will have to make final decisions on targeting prospects.

"The \$1 a year makes our work official, but we aren't out to make money from the town. We're looking to help them get on the right track," Blue said. "If we are successful, other resort towns might see our success and be willing to pay us to come help them."

Blue, 58, founded Omega International Inc. two years ago as a management and consulting firm that helps businesses, school districts and governments become more organized and efficient.

He and partners Bob Butler and Benjamin Bell said they think Omega can help Atlantic Beach change its image of a dying town to one that can help itself.

Test scores use subject of federal lawsuit

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — Teachers and principals in Johnston County are illegally using standardized tests to hold back students, according to a federal lawsuit filed by a civil rights group.

The lawsuit, filed this week on behalf of 14 unidentified parents, claims that tests to ensure that elementary and middle-school students have learned basic skills are unfair.

The lawsuit contends that minority students in general did not perform as well on the tests as white students and will be held back at a higher rate. It also says provisions were not made for students with handicaps that entitle them to such things as extra time for testing.

Attorneys for the N.C. Justice and Community Development Center and the New York-based NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund plan to ask for a temporary restraining order. They want to prevent school officials from using the scores to keep any student from rising to the next grade when school resumes this month.

The complaint stems from Johnston's efforts to meet new state requirements that all schools demonstrate that they are teaching students the basic skills they need.

Beginning with the past acad-

emic year, Johnston County began giving standardized, end-of-year tests to measure the mastery of those skills in grades three through eight. Comparable end-of-course tests are given to high school students in five core classes.

Stephon Bowens, an attorney for the plaintiffs, said the tests should not be used to decide whether an individual student passes or fails.

"The test should not be the threshold," Bowens said. "We're not sure the test indicates whether the student has learned the material."

Johnston educators say they are pleased with the results of their Student Accountability Program. Superintendent Dr. James Causby said students made their best showing ever this year in grade-level proficiency.

Causby denied the lawsuit's claim that end-of-grade tests are the only factor in deciding whether a student moves to the next grade.

Students who have done well throughout the year but don't pass the test after the three tries can have their case reviewed by the principal, who consults with the student's teacher and looks over samples of the student's work, Causby said. The principal then makes

a recommendation to a committee, which decides whether the student moves on.

Early in the year, teachers tried to identify students who might have trouble passing the tests and offered remedial programs, including before- and after-school tutoring and Saturday programs.

As a result, Causby said, all students — especially minorities — have shown considerable improvement on proficiency

exams.

It isn't known how many of Johnston County's nearly 18,000 students will be held back based on their scores from the 1996-97 school year. Between 2,000 and 3,000 students did not pass their end-of-year or end-of-course tests the first time they took them, officials say, but about half of those passed after getting intense tutoring and taking them again two weeks later.

Friendship College reunion

Continued From 10 B

Roddey said the two-year college prepared students to go on to four-year schools in the Carolinas such as Benedict College, Allen University, Livingstone College, S.C. State and Johnson C. Smith.

The small community setting of Friendship was also positive. Classes were small enough for professors to foster personal role in the lives of students. The one-on-one nurturing and familiarity offered something extra that many institutions couldn't match.

"We probably had about 300 students and the president would know every student by their first name," Massey said.

Friendship was more than a blessing to the African American community. It provided Rock Hill and the area with well-educated graduates.

"First of all it was an asset to Rock Hill because blacks gained verbal and mathematical skills that helped the city overall," Massey said. "It prepared us for college, the military and work."

Friendship's past is like any individual's life, full of positive and negative images. The college closed in 1982 due to financial and leadership problems. The Baptist Convention of York and Chester counties hope to begin stronger fund raising campaigns and promote serious commitment to future projects tied to the Friendship property.

Roddey, who is also a member of the Friendship Board of Trustees, wants to look beyond the mistakes of the past that brought a premature end to the college.

"It's sad that our forefathers built this institution out of nickels, dimes and faith and to see what's been done," he said. "It's a sad testimony...a sad state of affairs."

Massey added that Friendship made a mistake by choosing poor leadership.

"The ship went down...financial hard times came because we sometimes choose leadership that we ought not to choose," Massey said. "It's difficult to discuss."

Fund raising for the future of the Friendship begins with the reunion. Roddey hopes the hundreds of people who have registered for this event along with others will be motivated to give generously to a cause that could bring back more than just memories for Rock Hill's black community.

The weekend reunion lineup is as follows:

- Registration — Hampton Inn, Friday evening
- Memorial Service — Friendship site (Allen St.), Saturday morning
- Picnic — Cherry Park, Sat. (11 a.m.)
- Banquet — Baxter M. Hood Center/York Technical College, Saturday 6 p.m.
- Sunday morning worship — New Zion Baptist Church

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