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• Shepard's play explores family life
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Wordsmith

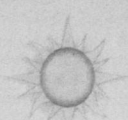
Local author Lee Smith discusses her novel, which was 35 years in the making, with area fans.
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Career Day

NCSU's Julius Hodge scores 30 points in win over UNC.
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Weather

Today: Sunny; H 31, L 13
Tuesday: Cloudy; H 43, L 28
Wednesday: Cloudy; H 52, L 27



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Party Switch Adds Twist to Speaker Fight



Rep. Michael Decker said he supports Democrat Jim Black for speaker.

Decker causes Republicans to lose 1-seat edge

By JENNIFER SAMUELS
Assistant State & National Editor

A state representative stunned officials Friday morning when he switched his party affiliation from Republican to Democrat — throwing an already tumultuous race for N.C. House speaker into further disarray. Forsyth County Rep. Michael Decker filed an application to switch his party about 10 a.m. Friday, said Kathie Cooper, director of the Forsyth County Board of Elections.

Decker's switch leaves the House divided equally between the two parties, erasing a razor-thin 61-59 majority held by Republicans after the Nov. 5 elections.

It also highlights the chaotic race for the House's top position. Several legislators have expressed their disapproval of the Republican caucus's choice for speaker, House Minority Leader Leo Daughtry, R-Johnston. House Speaker Jim Black, D-Mecklenburg, the Democratic nominee, also is having difficulty gaining support from all House Democrats.

Decker said his decision to change parties was fueled by a desire to see Black win reelection. He said that while there are many things in both parties that he does not agree with, his actions were the best way to ensure Black's victory. "I support Speaker Black for speaker, and I felt the best way to achieve that goal was to switch to the Democratic Party."

But Decker's 18-year staunch Republican record has many legislators and party officials speculating that he was offered a leadership position in exchange for his switch.

"Given Mike Decker's conservative voting record in the General Assembly, I find this to be irrational and bizarre behavior," said Bill

Cobey, chairman of the N.C. Republican Party, in a statement released Friday.

"Does all of this mean that Jim Black or (Gov.) Mike Easley have made some type of promise to Decker? Could that promise involve the speaker pro tem position ... or some promise of a job in the Easley administration?"

Decker refused to comment on allegations that he was offered a top leadership position in exchange for his switch.

Black issued a statement Friday welcoming Decker to the Democratic Party and praised his integrity and courage for putting his values above partisan politics.

House Speaker Pro Tem Joe Hackney, D-Orange, said that he is pleased with Decker's decision and that it was wise under the circumstances. "(Decker) was not getting along all that well with the leaders of his own party. He can find a home with the Democrats."

But the decision by Decker to switch parties demonstrates the need for a bipartisan coalition that can elect a consensus speaker, said Rep. Richard Morgan, R-Moore, a vocal Daughtry critic who has also considered running for the speaker position. He said legislators must figure out how to prevent internal

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County to Consider Merging Schools

By BILLY CORRIHER
Assistant City Editor

Orange County will begin studying the feasibility of merging the county's school system with the better-funded Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools.

At a planning retreat Saturday, Orange County Commissioner Moses Carey suggested that the board — as one of its goals for the year — merge the two school systems.

Instead, the commissioners opted to gather more information on a possible merger before making a decision.

Carey, whose proposal came as a surprise to other commissioners and school

"If it would benefit the children economically and academically, I would support a merger."

MOSES CAREY
County Commissioner

"The reason it was proposed is that there's a large funding gap," Carey said, adding that many in Orange County have characterized the funding difference as unfair or even unconstitutional.

"It doesn't allow for an equal opportunity for county students," he said.

Residents of Chapel Hill and Carrboro pay an extra district tax to fund schools that Orange County residents do not. If the systems merged, the district tax would be eliminated and the tax burden spread out evenly across the county.

Carey said this could present problems because of an income gap that exists between Chapel Hill and Carrboro residents and the rest of Orange County.

"That would be the biggest problem, because the northern part of Orange County is much poorer than the southern part," he said.

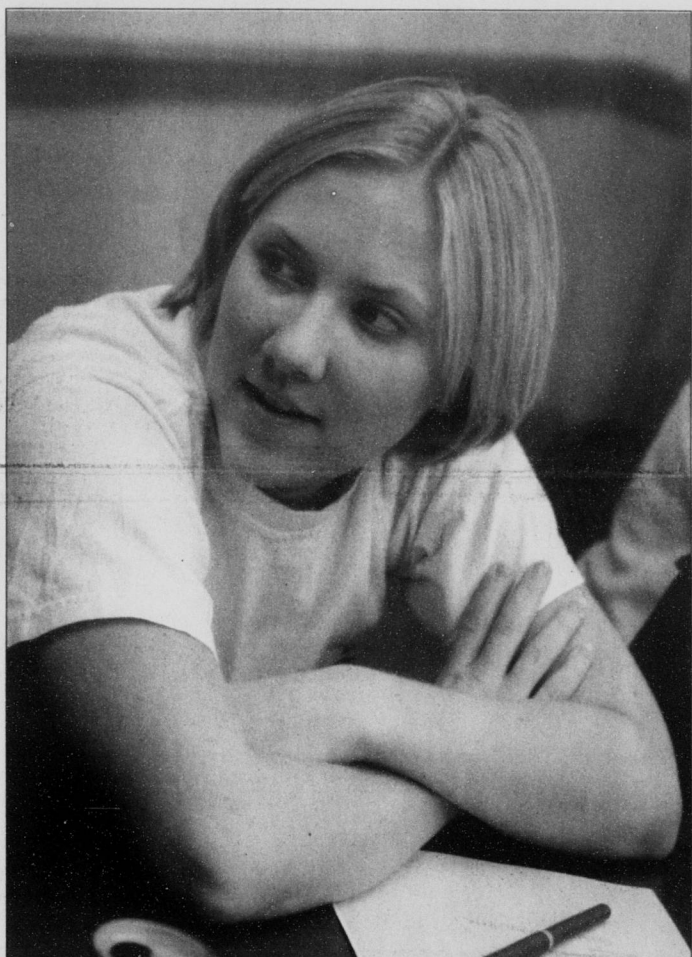
CHCCS board member Gloria Faley said although a merger has been discussed in the past, more emphasis has been placed on collaboration between the systems in recent years rather than on a complete merger.

Faley said past merger studies have revealed problems with implementation.

"There's a lot of discussion where we'd have to look at the past problems and ask, 'Have these problems gone away?'"

Delores Simpson, Orange County

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DTH/JOANIE TOBIN

Student Body President Jen Daum, who leaves office in April, is using the final months of her term to try to fulfill promises she made when she took office (below).

DAUM REFOCUSSES FOR FINAL MONTHS

By SHELLEY WALDEN
Staff Writer

This time last year, Student Body President Jen Daum was publicizing her campaign platform.

Now, as new candidates campaign for her job, Daum is trying to deliver on those promises made one year ago.

"It's been a great year so far — I'm feeling pretty good about it," Daum said. "But we still have a ways to go and a full plate to finish everything by April."

To date, Daum has delivered on numerous campaign promises: She has revived the Student Advisory Committee to the UNC Board of Trustees, upgraded security during exam weeks, supported the creation of a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Center and worked for drop-off child care in the proposed student services building.

She also has taken steps to improve public service efforts on campus, most recently through the



DTH FILE PHOTO

encouragement of the Service North Carolina program, a UNC-system-wide day of service that will be held April 4.

In addition, Daum has tried to strengthen the student voice and interaction with faculty through student representation on groups such as the Task Force on Tuition and the Advisory Committee on Transportation.

But Daum's administration still has a lot it wants to accomplish before her term ends April 1.

"I think we've reached a point where we realize there is way too much to do in just three months," said Aaron Hiller, student body vice president.

One of Daum's priorities is to get enrollment growth into the continuation budget for the N.C. General Assembly. On Feb. 4, UNC will send a bus of students, including members of the Daum administration, to Raleigh to show that students care about tuition increases and enrollment

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Vote Could Reshape Town Development

By BILLY CORRIHER
Assistant City Editor

After two years of public input, several revisions and five different drafts, the Chapel Hill Town Council expects to finally pass its Land-Use Management Ordinance tonight.

Council members said reworking the ordinance, which will regulate all development in town in a way that preserves its pedestrian-oriented, village atmosphere, took so long because of the enormous size of the project.

Drafting a set of regulations that will govern all development required a lot of the council's time and resources,

council member Dorothy Verkerk said. "It's going to determine what Chapel Hill will look like for at least the next 20 years," she said.

Some of the ordinance's most controversial stipulations have been the restrictions on building height and expanding the Resource Conservation Districts to prohibit development on land within 150 feet of a stream or river.

Verkerk said that because the council sought so much input in the revision process, it was difficult to decide what provisions to include in the ordinance. "Nobody in Chapel Hill could

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ANALYSIS

Ordinance Gets Interest Of Businesses, Chamber

By SUN KIM
Staff Writer

Today's Chapel Hill Town Council vote on the farthest-reaching development ordinance in town history carries greater weight for the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce than any other group.

The chamber has been the most vocal group in the process of drafting the Land-Use Management Ordinance because businesses will be impacted heavily if the more restrictive ordinance is passed.

Appearing in large numbers at all of public hearings and workshops, chamber officials said they have been "pretty effective" in influencing the

final draft of the ordinance.

"We've been effective in demonstrating our concern," said Virginia Knapp, who is the chamber's expert on the ordinance. "(Our effectiveness) is 50-50 — depends on who you talk to."

"There have been disagreements, but we've been receptive to their ideas and they realize that we need some of our provisions to stay in there," said council member Dorothy Verkerk. "I'm surprised everything's been this cordial."

Council member Jim Ward said the chamber was effective in getting its ideas across. "Their suggestions have been welcome and, I think, have

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Development Ordinance Timeline

•May 2000
The Town Council approves the Comprehensive Plan with a provision that calls for revising the town's Development Ordinance.

•January 2001
The council begins work on revising the Development Ordinance, later renamed the Land-Use Management Ordinance.

•March 2001
The town staff releases the first draft of the new ordinance and schedules a series of public hearings.

•October 2002
The council, in response to neighborhood complaints, bans duplex construction until the issue is addressed by the new ordinance.

•January 2003
The council expects to pass the fifth and final draft of the Land-Use Management Ordinance.

ATTENTION WAL-MART SHOPPERS



DTH/MEREDITH HILL

Jaime Ostendorf (right), marketing chairwoman of Dance Marathon, and volunteer Stephanie Taylor raise money outside Wal-Mart on Sunday for the Dance Marathon.

Men do not repudiate the doctrines to which they have sworn loyalty. They ... re-interpret them to fit new needs.

J. William Fulbright