

Huff ends 45-year educational career

BY MILES LAYTON
Chowan Herald

EDENTON - Now that Elizabeth Huff has retired, she no longer needs to get up early each morning as she has done for the past 45 years as either a teacher or guidance counselor.

"I start my day at 5 a.m. but the night before my last school day, my husband (Joe) said, 'hand me the alarm clock because this is the last time I'll have to set it,'" said Huff, 68, of Windsor. "Being retired, I think it may take some time to adjust, I don't think I'm going to get up early."

Huff worked in Bertie County Schools for 30 years before crossing the Chowan River for a job at John A. Holmes High School in 2006.

"I mostly taught fifth and sixth grades, so coming to the high school was an adjustment," she said. "Making the leap from being a teacher to a guidance counselor was easy because I could still interact with children. A lot of times, educators who get a master's degree, people go to the central office, but I was still daily working with children which is what I wanted to do."

Huff earned her bachelor of science degree in elementary education and her master's degree in guidance counseling from East Carolina University.

Huff grew up in Gates County where her father, Ernest Askew, was the first principal of Gatesville High School, where he served for many years. Her mother, Ethel, was a kindergarten teacher.

"I come from a list of educators," she said. "What drew me into education? My parents, and I really like children a lot."

Huff taught many years at Windsor Elementary and later as a guidance counselor for Bertie High School. Alice Pittman was principal at Windsor Elementary School where Huff taught and served as a guidance counselor. Later, Pittman and Huff would cross paths again when Pittman was the assistant principal at Bertie High School while Huff was a guidance counselor.

"Mrs. Huff was a wonderful asset to Bertie High School and Windsor Elementary School," said Pittman, who



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After 45 years of service as either a teacher or guidance counselor, Elizabeth Huff has retired. She began her career as a teacher at Windsor Elementary before moving to Bertie High School and later, John A. Holmes High School.

retired in 2005 from Bertie County Schools. "She was an outstanding teacher. I am often with her when her former students, who are now grown with children, come up to chat. She obviously loved her students when she was a teacher. I did not teach with her, but we had children very close in age, and I was very aware of what her classroom was like. I was teaching then and we would often talk about classroom activities."

As a guidance counselor, Huff helped legions of students apply to colleges near and far.

"She was instrumental in assisting one young lady 'do what was necessary' to become eligible to apply for college and scholarships," Pittman said. "This young lady had extraordinary obstacles to overcome to accomplish this task, but Mrs. Huff was with her every step of the way. This young lady attended Meredith College. This was her dream. Mrs. Huff's life has been spent helping students achieve their goals."

During the past 11 years, Huff served as a guidance counselor at John A. Holmes High School. Not only did Huff make sure students had

the classes they needed to graduate, but she assisted them with their college and scholarship applications.

"They've had some really successful students at John Holmes and they still do," Huff said. "I've felt loved here at John Holmes. I've had parents and students come to say goodbye. It's just been great. I've had a really good career here. This was a good way to end my career to be at Edenton-Chowan schools."

Retired Edenton-Chowan Schools Superintendent Allan Smith paid Huff a visit as she was cleaning out her office and boxing up memories.

"From the first day Elizabeth joined the Edenton-Chowan Schools family she has been a driving force in ensuring our students receive the highest quality guidance program possible," said Smith, who served as superintendent between 1998 and 2014. "Through her dedication and leadership, guidance and counseling services at John A. Holmes are second to none."

Smith said his friend and colleague has made a difference in the lives of many whom she has assisted during her long tenure as an educator.

"Elizabeth is a staunch advocate for students, always there to listen, advise, and support them whenever necessary," he said. "Because of her belief in the potential of young people, hundreds of students have realized their dreams following graduation. She has assisted countless students pursue higher education, many who were the first in their family to attend college."

As a guidance counselor, Huff helped students realize that a college education is within their grasp.

"Mrs. Huff helped them recognize they are not only academically capable, but that college is also financially feasible," Smith said. "Each year hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants and scholarships are awarded to deserving students, due in large measure to Elizabeth's tenacity in helping them reach for their dreams. Elizabeth has helped create a culture at John A. Holmes that ALL students can obtain a college degree."

Smith's visit illustrates the ties that bind friendships together don't end when the school bell rings for the last time.

"I'm going to miss my friends and the students the

most, but I am determined to keep in touch," Huff said. "There are so many good people here. It is going to be hard for me. I talked to Dr. Smith about retiring. I'm worried. I've worked all my life. He said it really takes some getting used to."

Given the opportunity to go back in time, Huff might have taken a different career path.

"I don't know if I would do it over again in education," she said. "I think I probably would, but when I was in high school about to graduate in 1967, there were two choices for women, mainly, because we were right on the cusp, that edge when things just opened up for women. You were either going to be a teacher or a nurse. I definitely did not want to be a nurse, so I chose teaching. I've always liked to write, so I wonder if I would've liked journalism."

Huff's last day was June 30. Looking back, Huff said she has no regrets.

"I don't know, but I don't have any regrets about my career," she said. "I don't think teachers are paid or appreciated enough, but it was a rewarding career."

Sonya Rinehart, a longtime colleague and JAH history teacher, offered fond memories of her friend.

"Elizabeth will be remembered for her passion for the school and students of John A. Holmes," she said.

"One of my greatest memories will be her work in developing the international school partnership with Gribskov Gymnasium," said Rinehart, who is now the N.C. Department of Instruction's regional education facilitator. "She and her husband, Joe, were instrumental in the academic student immersion exchange each year that we traveled abroad to the school with our students. Their love for travel and adventure have opened the world to many of our students and staff. The duo was often noted to be the Lewis and Clark of our school."

Huff believes that her time as an educator was time well spent.

"I hope I have made a difference" she said. "I see students who are good citizens and contributing to society, so yes, I think I have made a difference. I hope I have."

Funding

From A1 times in the past 17 years. We realized how difficult and frustrating the past year has been," added Trent. "For those who experienced Hurricane Floyd and Tropical Storm Julia, this must seem like a never ending nightmare."

According to Trent, it has been less than 30 days since Bertie County Commissioners and the town of Windsor met to adopt a joint resolution to assist with the hazard mitigation program.

"Today the commissioners will receive a briefing on the process, the anticipated schedule and the distribution of funds for the impacted properties," said Trent.

"The money is still sitting in Raleigh and there are a few more steps that are necessary for the funds to be distributed. This process is likely to take a few more months, and require a little more patience for our citizens," he added.

Next, a presentation was made from Holland Consult-

ing planner Chris Hilbert.

"\$6 million has been allocated for Bertie County by the state after their review of the town's application. There were 102 properties submitted. They did not fund any of the 29 commercial properties," said Hilbert.

According to Hilbert, 55 properties are eligible and 35 are priority.

"We have reviewed the files and they did not provide Benefit Cost Analysis, which is a complicated program that Federal Emergency Management Assistance (FEMA) requires before funding is released," added Hilbert.

At the time of last month's joint meeting between the town of Windsor and Bertie County commissioners the data were not available. A joint decision was made at the meeting to in the absent of the data to look at the flood levels as the basis of the priority.

The question for each house was to measure the flood water height above

floor level.

"This is how we determined the highest flood levels and came up with a list of the top 20 properties," Hilbert added.

"What is the break up of houses within Bertie County?" asked Trent.

"There are seven properties within the town limits and 13 properties outside of the town limits. Some of them were in a particular mobile home park," Hilbert replied.

According to Hilbert, the \$6 million is a substantial allocation and he feel like in the initial application the \$6 million should provide for the 35 houses.

That money spent by those who have flood insurance proceeds, would be deducted from the buyout price because if not it would be considered a duplication of benefits.

"We may not be spending the full appraisal amount to acquire some houses because they may have received money from FEMA or

flood insurance. With this amount of houses, you can run into a lot of duplication of benefits. It will free up more money for more houses," Hilbert said.

According to Hilbert, it appears the state is using the flood maps and expedited applications filed before March 31.

"Based on the maps and based on first come, first served nature of the applications, the state is looking at expediting some properties," said Hilbert.

Hilbert added, "Some of the hardest hit areas received substantial funding and Bertie County was one of them. There is going to be state money on top of this."

"Those houses that were not included, there is hope for them," asked Vice Chairman Ernestine Bazemore.

"It depends on Congressional allocations and state allocations," replied Hilbert.

"So it is not certain," asked Bazemore.

It is not certain. My understanding is there is about

\$100 million in hazard mitigation grant programs for right now and there may be more money allocated at a federal or state level later," responded Hilbert.

According to Hilbert in terms of a timeline, the state is going to put these properties along with all the other properties and then submit the formal process.

"I don't know how long this is going to take, but the state is saying they want to expedite and submit the application next month," Hilbert added.

"Everyone please understand even if they expedite, it could take several months," said Trent.

"Until the town has a grant agreement from the state, no money can be spent. It still has to go to the federal level," said Hilbert.

"Who is involved in the selection of the properties and the funding," asked Lee.

"The North Carolina Department of Emergency Management. It was none of us," replied Hilbert.