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School Officials Mum On Opinion Results

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK

Several local school officials contacted last Thursday and Friday had little, if anything, to say concerning the results of the Public School Opinion Survey conducted by The News Record between Sept. 3-10.

David Wyatt, principal at Madison High School, and school board member Ed Gentry both said they had no comments to make regarding the survey results. Dr. Bobby Jean Rice, supervisor of county schools, also declined comment, saying she "doesn't like to be quoted by newspapers."

J.C. Wallin, principal at Hot Springs Elementary School, said, "no comment really, other than it was a weak smattering of responses." He said he didn't feel 139 responses were enough to have an accurate assessment of the public's opinion.

Marshall Elementary Principal Fred Haynie said he had no comment to questions about the public's attitude toward the local schools, and added, "From the survey, I really can't tell what the attitude of the public is."

School board chairman Bobby Ponder, Superintendent Robert L. Edwards and board member Gerald Young had the most to say about the survey per se, and a little about the public's attitude and concerns regarding the school system.

Referring to the 139 respondents to the survey, Ponder said, "There's real-

ly not enough percentage there to give you much of an idea" about the public's opinion. He said he considered 139 responses "not very much participation."

Commenting on the public's concern about "unqualified teachers and substitutes," Ponder said, "I wonder who they think we've got that's not certified. Out of 103 (regular classroom) teachers, they've all got A certificates or better. Only one has a B certificate." Ponder said he would "put our teachers above any."

When asked if he, as a school official, planned on addressing or investigating any of the problems the public mentioned in the survey, Ponder said, "I don't really see that there is anything to investigate. We're always striving to do better, and in the past few years we've come a long way."

Ponder concluded with, "It's sort of funny that out of the five board members, the only one that received a decent rating was the one that didn't have time, or didn't take time, to go vote a few years ago when we had a school board referendum." (According to the survey, Young received the highest rating based on the public's opinion of his performance over the past two years.)

"I really have no comments on it," said Edwards, but the superintendent went on to say hearing from "about .04 percent" of The News Record's 3,500

circulation was "not really a true evaluation." (It was pointed out to Edwards that the correct figure was 3.9 percent of the total circulation.)

Edwards noted that the survey showed 81 of the 139 respondents had attended school board meetings, and "a lot of these people didn't get what they wanted, so you can count that in the negative position," he said.

When asked if he thought the public had an accurate assessment of the problems in the schools, Edwards replied, "No. We rate better than they're giving us credit for, according to people in the education field."

Why, then, did the people respond as they did? "Maybe for not getting their children released to Buncombe County is one thing," Edwards answered. "They've probably had some run-in with the previous boards of education, such as (the issue of) building the Marshall School on the island. People have even blamed me with it, and that happened before I was born," he said.

Asked if he planned to investigate any of the problems mentioned in the poll, Edwards said, "I think when I have a principals' meeting we certainly will not ignore what (The News Record) has printed. The principals can also run a survey in their schools and see what the children think about it. The children are the ones who can tell you more about what's going on in the school system, but the parents are the ones that pay the taxes."

He said results from tests given to students were an indication that the local system didn't deserve the rather low rating placed on the system by survey respondents. "When you start looking at the many phases of the system, we're certainly not on the bottom," he said.

"I have no qualms with the poll — it's just an opinion," Edwards said. "The present board of education was elected by the people and when the election comes, if this (survey) is a true

analysis of it, then they have the privilege to change it."

Board member Young said he thought the survey "made a lot of people think about some things, and some people got to say some things that maybe they've been wanting to say for a long time."

"I wasn't surprised at the things people thought about our schools," he said. "They may not have covered them all (problems), but they have said what they think. And, I think we have some

problems or I would never have run for the board of education," he added.

Young said he would like to see the school board discuss some of the problems mentioned in the survey with the schools' administrative staffs, "and I would personally like to look more in depth at some of the things the people said about our school system."

"But I'm just one board member, and whether we can, or will, do anything I don't know," Young said.

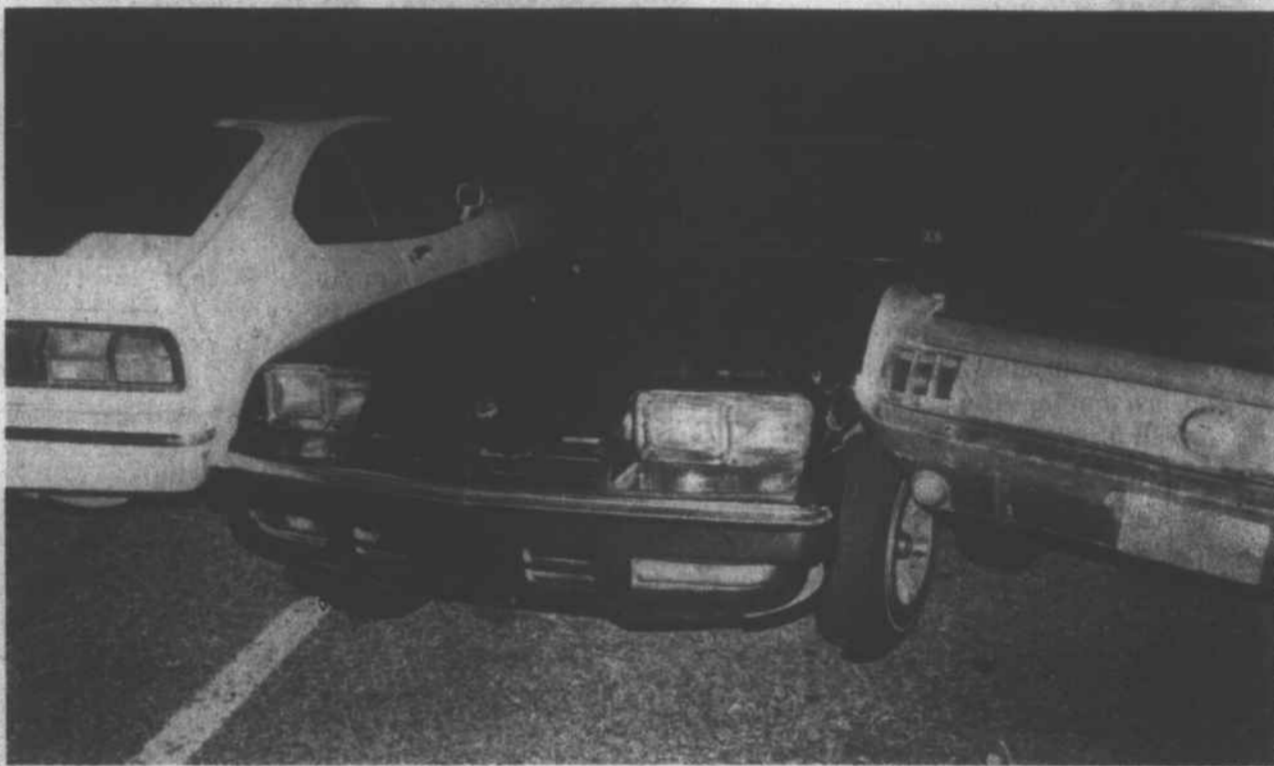


Photo by N. Hancock

Three Of Four Vehicles Damaged Friday

Vandals Damage Four Cars In High School Parking Lot

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK

Four automobiles belonging to Madison High School students were damaged late Friday afternoon in what appeared to be an act of vandalism in the parking lot of the high school.

Madison County Sheriff E.Y. Ponder said the vehicles belonged to Larry Howell, Keith Kramer, Chris Wilde, and Marlon Franklin, all students at the high school. The cars had been left in the parking lot at the school when

the football team traveled to Rosman for a game.

Investigation at the scene of the incident revealed that someone had apparently rammed the cars with another vehicle. A 1976 Mustang owned by Howell was hit in the right rear and slammed into the left front of Kramer's 1976 Chevrolet Monza which was shoved into the right rear of the 1979 Mustang owned by Wilde. It appeared the Volkswagen owned by Franklin had been hit separately.

A note, thought to be written by the vandals, was left on the windshield of Howell's car.

Sheriff Ponder said Saturday he had no estimate of the cost of repairing the damage done to the vehicles, and his investigation of the incident was still underway.

Madison High School Principal David Wyatt said Sunday he didn't know if the vandalism was perpetrated by "students, outsiders or what," and he added that in the future, the school administration "will do whatever is

necessary to stop such things" from happening on school property.

A passer-by, who had been jogging at the high school, reported seeing the damaged cars at 5:30 p.m. Wyatt said the football team left for Rosman on activity buses about 4 p.m. Friday. Howell, Kramer and Wilde are members of the football team.

A high school janitor, Ovie Ammons, told Ponder he heard no unusual noises outside the building while he was still in the school.

Who Participated In Survey?

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK

The "typical" respondent to the Public School Opinion Survey conducted recently by The News Record was a 42-year-old woman with three years of college education, according to statistical information requested at the end of the survey.

However, construction of a model representative from statistical figures gives only a limited picture of the 139 persons who participated in the public opinion poll.

In all, 80 women and 59 men took part in the survey which indicated Madison County residents are less than happy with their local school system and would make some changes regarding "politics in the schools, poor quality of teachers, and poor administrative leadership" if they were in a position to do so.

The youngest respondent was 19 and the oldest was 75. The majority of the respondents were in a 30 to 45 age bracket.

Two of the respondents indicated having less than a ninth grade education, but 39 percent said they had some high school (grades 9-12) with 33 percent saying they had completed the 12th grade. Thirty-three percent indicated having some college education and 20 percent said they completed four years of college. One quarter (25 percent) of the respondents said they had completed one or more years of post college study. (Two respondents did not indicate their education level.)

The survey, designed to determine the public's attitude toward the local public school system, was conducted by The News Record Sept. 3-12.

Hundreds Enjoy 'Riverfest'

Hundreds of people turned out in near perfect Saturday weather to celebrate the Marshall's "Riverfest" on Blannhasset Island.

Kids and adults of all ages wandered through the flea market booths and participated in the dozen or so fair-like activities planned for the culmination of the annual French Broad River Week celebration.

Mrs. Helen Rudisill, local chairman of this year's "Riverfest," said she was well pleased with the large number of people who had shown up at the island as early as 10:30 a.m., shortly after the festivities began. Mrs. Rudisill was given one of the morning's first rides in WLOS-TV hot air balloon by Channel 13 television personality "Mr. Bill."

Debbie Ricker, 16, and Jonathan Bullman, 9, were announced as winners of the French Broad River essay contest sponsored by the Madison Central Optimist Club. Warren Bishop, representing the Optimist Club, presented Miss Ricker with a certificate for a free river rafting trip on the French Broad provided by Smokey Mountain River Expeditions of Hot Springs.

Young Bullman received a \$25 U.S. savings bond from First Union National Bank in Mar-

shall as first place winner in the junior division of the contest. (See photos on Page 3).

Flea market booths reported doing brisk business during most of the day. The Unaka Center of Hot Springs was kept busy making and selling personalized photo buttons to spectators, and the mothers of the Marshall Hillbilly Cloggers seemed to be having much success selling fudge and cupcakes to raise money to help the dancing team go to the N.C. State Fair in Raleigh in October.

Other "Riverfest" activities included a juggling act performed by Captain Slow (Louie Zeller of Laurel), an afternoon softball game, canoe and raft trips by Smokey Mountain River Expeditions and French Broad Rafting Co., dancing by the Hillbilly Cloggers, country music by The Desperados, and free balloons distributed by Marshall Boy Scout Troop 522 and Smokey The Bear and Woodsey Owl from the N.C. Forest Service.

Mrs. Rudisill and Mrs. Ruth Gregory of the River Improvement Committee both said the "Riverfest" had established itself with Saturday's turnout, and they felt the Marshall Merchants' Association now had a firm base on which to build an even bigger event for next September.



Photo by N. Hancock

"RIVERVEST" Chairman Helen Rudisill takes a ride in "Mr. Bill's" Thirteen Balloon from WLOS-TV at Saturday's river celebration on Blannhasset Island in Marshall. Hundreds of adults and children turned out for the festivities and to meet the well-known television personality.

Public Meetings

A series of public meetings will be held Sept. 28 through Oct. 1 for the purpose of discussing the sewer system construction project for the Town of Marshall.

It is requested that the residents attend the meeting for their area as follows: Monday, Sept. 28 — Walnut Creek and Hill Street area; Tuesday, Sept. 29 — Rollins area; Wednesday, Sept. 30 — Rector Corner area; Thursday, Oct. 1 — Redmon Road — Roberts Hill area.

All meetings will begin at 7 p.m. at Town Hall and will be attended by the mayor, board of aldermen, the town engineers and town attorney. Your attendance is very important.

J. Davis Files

Jackie Davis, incumbent Marshall alderman, filed as a candidate Thursday to seek his third term on the town council.

Davis, 46, and a Marshall native, said he felt "it is important at this time" to run again for one of the three council seats up for grabs in the Nov. 3 election.

"Many things need to be finished out," Davis said referring to completion of work projects funded with a HUD grant and the town's sewer and water line projects. "Besides, it's one of the things I like to do," he said.

He said he feels progress in the town is going along fine, and "it is important to keep good public relations between



Davis

the town and its citizens." The self-employed contractor and his wife, Natalie, live on Rollins Road. They have one daughter, 11, who works in Asheville and attends college.

Ponder Files For Mayor's Office

Marshall Mayor Lawrence Ponder filed as a candidate for re-election last week and announced he is seeking his third consecutive term as mayor of the county seat.

Pointing out his 11 years of background in "trying to help improve Marshall and Madison County economically," Ponder, 42, said he is running for re-election because "there's much work to be

done. We've got to pass the sewer bond issue and continue the work on the town's water system and water lines.

"We need to continue to recruit industry and jobs for the people of Marshall," Ponder said, indicating his personal goal is to secure 1,000 industrial jobs for the Marshall work force.

Another top priority project

Ponder listed for the mayoral office is that of "working with the French Broad Electric Membership Cooperative and existing funding agencies for the approval of the Urban Development Action Grant to rehabilitate the Captain dam for electric energy production. The town will gain much needed revenue if this project is completed," he said.

Ponder said he wants to con-

tinue to work on expanding the town's recreational facilities for the youth of the community. He cited the need for renovating the recreation building at the municipal pool for roller skating, dances and other youth functions.

Ponder, who is still unmarried, and his wife, Mary, have one son, 10, in high school.