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Laurel Group Seeks Principal's

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK
Editor

Forty-five "discontented" parents of children at Laurel Elementary School converged on the Madison County Board of Education Monday night to register complaints about the way the school has been run over the past few years and to request the removal of the principal beginning with the 1982-83 school year.

Citing various complaints about the school facility itself and the manner in which Principal Vernon Ponder has been carrying out his duties, spokesmen for the group said they called for Ponder's removal and specifically requested that the board hire Charles

Cutshall, a native of the Laurel area and a teacher in the Asheville city schools, as principal for the coming school year.

Board members took no action on the requests, which were heard in a 45 minute executive session from five representatives of the group, and they declined to make any public comments about particular complaints voiced by the parents. However, board chairman Bobby Ponder said he told the group that "regardless of whether it was Vernon Ponder or whoever went over there (at Laurel School) with all the people cooperating together, they could have a good school over there next year."

The parents, most of whom live in the Sodom community, descended on the

board which had scheduled a called meeting Monday night at the courthouse. The board met to have a closed executive session to discuss personnel and approve recommendations for hiring teachers for the 1982-83 school year.

Leonard Gosnell, a spokesman for the group, told The News Record after the meeting, "We came here because of our discontent with the way school is being conducted at Laurel Elementary School."

Gosnell said the group's discontent had been prompted over the past several years by "actual child abuse, unsanitary conditions of the bathrooms and the lunch room, deplorable food that the children have been given, and use of the school for entertainment ac-

tivities for individual gain."

Mrs. Sonnie Gosnell, who said her son had been abused by a teacher three years ago, said she had been to Superintendent Robert L. Edwards about the matter, but was referred back to the principal. She said she wrote a letter to the principal about the incident and was subsequently referred to Owen Fish, who sent her to Edwards, who sent her back to the principal, who sent her back to Fish, who sent her to Bobby Ponder. "They did nothing," she said.

The group said they complained to the board about numerous incidences and situations at the school and presented the board with a petition signed by 73 parents which stated they are "dissatisfied with the job Vernon Ponder is doing as principal at Laurel School," and "we are asking the board of education to remove him as prin-

cipal." The group said the 73 signatures represent about 60 percent of the total number of parents with children at Laurel.

Mrs. Gosnell said the board's first remark to the group was that the principal is tenured. "I told them I'm not interested in tenure; I'm interested in my two children, and that's what everybody else here agrees with," she said.

Other members of the group complained that the situation at Laurel School has bothered them for the past five years or more and that they had banded together to seek a remedy. "It's a sore that's getting festered," one group member said.

The group said they specifically requested the hiring of Charles Cutshall as principal because he is originally from the Laurel area and had indicated a willingness to move back to the com-

munity should he be hired. Vernon Ponder lives in the Ebbs Chapel community, they said.

Leonard Gosnell said board chairman Bobby Ponder told the five representatives in executive session that he couldn't tell them exactly what the board would do, but that the board would assure them that they would have a good school next year.

The board declined an offer to comment about the group's complaints and requests after adjournment, but school board attorney Larry Leake made a brief statement saying the board is proud of Laurel School and invites the news media to visit the school, unannounced.

"The board is sure that the news media will find the administrative staff of Laurel School more than happy to show them around the building and answer any questions about the operation of the school facility," Leake said.

Madison County Library
Marshall, NC 28753 9/81

Farm Credit Service Elects 3 Directors

Stockholders of Farm Credit Service of Asheville met in Mars Hill Friday night and re-elected three directors to serve on two subsidiary association boards at the company's annual meeting.

Wade Huey of Marshall and Roy Browning of Canton were re-elected to serve three-year terms as directors of the Mountain Production Credit Association.

Huey, Browning and Max Waldroup of Hayesville in Clay County were re-elected as directors of the Federal Land Bank Association of Asheville.

The two associations form Farm Credit Service, an organization of western North Carolina farmers which lends money to farmers.

Directors retaining seats on the land bank board are W. Mack Rogers, Buncombe County; Lon Sluder, Madison County; and Foy Hill of Henderson County.

Directors retaining production credit association boards seats are Hill, Waldroup, Sluder and Rogers.

The land bank and the production credit group make short, intermediate and long-term loans to farmers, growers and ranchers in 14 western North Carolina counties, according to Jacob F. Grigg, president of Farm Credit Service.

Farm Credit Service serves over 4,000 farm members with a loan volume of more than \$100 million, Grigg said. The 14-county area is served with branch offices in Asheville, Burnsville, Franklin, Hendersonville, Marshall, Murphy and Waynesville.

Entertainment at the annual stockholders meeting, held in Mars Hill College's Moore Auditorium, was provided by Archie Campbell, veteran star of CBS-TV's "Hee Haw" and by The Pilgrims, a country/gospel group from Lincolnton that now works out of Nashville.

Rest Home Operator Named In Son's Paternity Suit

By RON DUBOIS
The Asheville Citizen

Rest home operator Mildred Graham has been named a defendant in a bizarre paternity suit involving her mentally incompetent son and a childless couple who reportedly used him as a surrogate father, court records show.

The Buncombe County Child Support Agency claims in its lawsuit that Mrs. Graham was negligent in allowing her son to father a child born in 1981, and seeks reimbursement from all four defendants for allegedly failing to support the child.

Last week she was found guilty of operating her Madison County rest home without a license, and three lawsuits stemming from the operation of the rest home seek about \$350,000 damages from her.

A Madison County Superior Court jury declared her son, Ronnie Lane Graham, 29, mentally incompetent in 1979, records show, and made Mrs. Graham his legal guardian.

The lawsuit said that Montague and Glada Herndon "desired to conceive a child but were biologically unable to do so." They "procured defendant Ronnie Graham for the purpose of conceiving a child with the defendant Glada Herndon," the lawsuit said. Herndon, 29,

received a vasectomy in 1977, records said.

"Mildred Graham was negligent in that while serving as guardian for defendant Ronnie Graham she failed to exercise any effective control or supervision over him," and allowed him to be a surrogate father for Mrs. Herndon's child, the lawsuit said.

Mrs. Herndon, 23, gave birth to a girl on Feb. 15, 1981, according to a birth certificate. The birth certificate names her husband as the father.

For an undisclosed time since the child's birth, the lawsuit said, "the defendants have refused to adequately contribute to the support" of the infant.

The agency's lawsuit attempts to accomplish several actions.

First, it seeks to establish legal and biological paternity of the child. The first preference on both counts is Graham, the lawsuit said. As an alternative, it said Graham should be judged the biological father and Herndon the legal father.

Then the lawsuit seeks reimbursement of state public assistance funds paid for medical expenses during the mother's pregnancy, for the birth of the child and the continued financial support the child receives.

The Buncombe County Department

of Social Services had paid \$508 to support the child as of March 31, the lawsuit said.

The lawsuit contends that the defendants "are amply able to pay reasonable sums for the support" of the child.

Three lawsuits filed on behalf of three former residents of the unlicensed rest home seek about \$350,000 in damages from Mrs. Graham.

Her son is a defendant in one lawsuit in which he is accused of beating a woman who lived at the Graham Boarding Home in the Sandy Mush area of Madison County. Court records show that Graham reportedly helped his mother run the unlicensed rest home.

Asheville rest home operator Wayne Wells is a co-defendant with Mrs. Graham in another lawsuit for allegedly transferring one of his rest home residents to Mrs. Graham's unlicensed rest home.

In yet another lawsuit, in which Mrs. Graham is the plaintiff, she seeks an annulment to her son's 1980 marriage to a 16-year-old girl. Mrs. Graham acknowledges in that lawsuit that her son was mentally incompetent and "did lack capacity...to engage in a marital obligation."

That lawsuit is set for trial May 26 in Buncombe County District Court.



Photo by N. Hancock

MOUNTAIN TOYS — Wayne Davis, 10, of Marshall, plays with one of the many handmade toys on display at the French Broad EMC Annual Meeting Saturday at Madison High School. The toys were carved and crafted by Lloyd Fish of Betsy's Gap at the head of Spring Creek.

EMC Directors Re-elected

Three directors were re-elected to the French Broad EMC Board of Directors without opposition at the Annual Meeting of the Members Saturday, April 17.

Elected were Novile C. Hawkins of Madison County, Warren Buchanan of Mitchell County and Carl Ramsey of Unicoi County, Tennessee.

The grand prize winner of the \$200 credit on electric bill was Ida Lee Bishop of Route 2, Marshall.

Charles Tolley, Coop Manager, gave his report on the year's activities. In a slide presentation, he showed how each dollar of revenue was spent, with the largest amount going to purchase power from CP&L. This figure in 1981 was 63 cents.

"So many of our expenses are fixed amounts that we

Helms Defends Falkland Position

Jesse Helms came to Asheville for lunch Saturday. On this leg of the rubber chicken circuit, he defended his stance in the Falklands crisis and exhorted the Republican faithful to keep being that way.

Addressing approximately 100 of the Republican faithful at Asheville's Sheraton Motor Inn, Helms echoes his remarks as outlined in a self-authored article in "The Spotlight," a Washington weekly tabloid, copies of which were circulated at Saturday's luncheon.

In the article, Helms declared that "U.S. Diplomacy has failed in allowing even a highly regarded European Ally (Great Britain) to display force in the South Atlantic, thereby polarizing the Americas."

Helms has championed the Argentine position in the crisis, saying that that country "was history on its side" in the dispute, and that "...the best policy is to recognize Argentine sovereignty over the islands."

Also liberally circulated during the pre-luncheon confabs were copies of the Mountain Lakes Shopper, a right-wing tabloid where Helms'



Helms

report to the people column shared billing with editorials from the president of the American Pistol and Rifle Association and a private columnist calling for abolishment of the Federal Reserve System.

In a question and answer session following lunch, Helms was asked "What's going to be our (the GOP's) game plan for 1984?"

"That's a good question," said Helms, declining to answer in detail.

The People Ask

The People Ask is a weekly feature of the News Record. The public may submit questions on any local subject by calling 649-2741 or by mailing them to The People Ask, The News Record, P.O. Box 369, Marshall, N.C. 28753.

QUESTION: If the information such as names of homeowners whose houses are repaired or renovated by HUD is public information, where do you get this information? What criteria does a homeowner have to meet to qualify for HUD benefits?

ANSWER: Sam Parker, director of the county HUD program, said persons wanting information about homeowners receiving HUD benefits in the county program should feel free to call him at 649-3366. Parker pointed out that he could answer only questions dealing with the county HUD program. Questions concerning the Marshall or Hot Springs HUD projects should be directed at the directors of those programs, he said.

There are three basic criteria which must be met before a house can be considered for rehabilitation by HUD, Parker said. The house must be in the defined "target area." Persons living in the house have to meet defined income limits which vary with each individual Community Development Block Grant program. And, the dwelling must qualify for HUD benefits by first being considered an economical to rehabilitate and secondly, by determining that rehabilitation actually needs to be done.

Weaverville Man Shot Sunday During Laurel Softball Game

LAUREL — A Buncombe County man was shot during a softball game Sunday at the White Rock School, according to Sheriff E.Y. Ponder.

L.C. King, 38, of Weaverville, was shot in the neck and shoulder with a

handgun about 5 p.m., the sheriff said.

Ralph Cantrell, 34, of Route 3 Marshall, was arrested Monday morning and charged with assault with a deadly weapon and inflicting injury

on King, Ponder said.

King was listed in satisfactory condition in Tacoma Adventist Hospital in Greenville, Tenn.

Cantrell posted a \$2,000 bond and is scheduled to appear in district

court on May 5, Ponder said.

Ponder said the shooting, which occurred near the site of the softball game, was not connected with the game itself.