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Additional Petitions Seek Ponder's Removal

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK
Editor

Two additional petitions requesting the removal of Principal Vernon Ponder from Laurel School have been presented to the Madison County Board of Education, and petitioners say they will be heard at the ballot box, and may go to the governor and other state officials, if the board denies their request.

Leonard B. Gosnell, representing the petitioners, handed the petitions to the board Wednesday and said he and the four parents with him "are here to continue to ask the board of education for a principal of our choice at Laurel School."

The board put off answering the group for the second time in as many months saying "our hands are tied" in hiring and assigning principals in the school system until the N.C. General Assembly adjourns its current summer session. School Superintendent Robert L. Edwards said the board has been given only a tentative state allotment for personnel.

"WE CANNOT HIRE anybody new until the legislature adjourns and we find out for sure what we've got," board chairman Bobby Ponder said.

Board members also indicated they didn't appreciate anyone making demands and telling them who to hire or who not to hire.

The movement to oust the Laurel principal began in April when 45 parents attended a school board meeting with a petition signed by 73 parents calling for Ponder's removal. The group contends Ponder has not provided proper leadership at the elementary school for several years and has allowed unsanitary conditions and other problems to exist there. They point out that they are asking for Ponder to be removed from Laurel, not fired from the system.

Supporters of Ponder later presented a petition, with 110 signatures, approving his performance as principal.

ONE OF THE PETITIONS presented Wednesday contained 119 signatures of parents with children in Laurel School, Gosnell said. The petition also asks the board to hire Charles Cutshall as principal for the 1982-83 school year. Cutshall is a county resident who teaches in the Asheville city schools. The petition represents 103 Laurel School students, about 45 percent of the total number of students according to Gosnell.

The second petition, containing 222 signatures of "voting-aged concerning citizens," asks only for Ponder's removal.

"I've checked the signatures very carefully, and there are no duplications of names on the two petitions," Gosnell said.

Chairman Ponder urged total community support for the principal saying that was the route to take in improving conditions at the school, but the disgruntled petitioners remained intent on pressing for the principal's removal.

Gosnell and another parent raised questions about the principal's absence during activities at the school and his apparent refusal to allow kindergarten and eighth grade graduations "like the other schools have."

"How can you get behind a man when he's not there?" asked one parent.

"A LOT OF THE PARENTS have been wanting to have an eighth grade graduation and this sort of thing, but they're refused. Why?" Gosnell asked. The town board offered no answer.

"We don't want to have anybody fired. We just want to have what we want at Laurel School for a change," Gosnell said. "The attitude that we get

here is that the school board is it and you can do as you please. This is the way it comes across to us. I don't know if we've misunderstood you or not.

"I think the citizens up in the Laurel area should have something to say about who is hired for their school. It's our students — our children — that are there. And when there's not a good job done they are the people that are going to have to pay for it in the years to come," Gosnell said.

Chairman Ponder told Gosnell, "This is a problem that we have given you an answer on several different occasions. You're demanding that somebody be hired that's not within the system."

Ponder said the board still has eight people that will have to be rehired "before we can possibly bring in any new blood."

BOARD MEMBER Gerald Young

reminded Gosnell and the parents that the board was elected by the people to "try to do the best we can for all the children of Madison County."

"We have to consider all the people. And you come in here and ask us to hire one certain person. Suppose every disgruntled group in the county came and said 'We want so-and-so at Mars Hill,' or 'We want so-and-so at Marshall.' If it were meant for groups like

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Locating The Next Elvis

It's just in the talking stages now, but the Madison County school system may be a party to discovering "the next Elvis Presley" if the board of education goes along with a proposal by R.D. Williams of Hendersonville.

Williams, president of World of Clothing, Inc., is offering the board \$10,000 to set up a stringed instrument music program in the schools. And, he said he would provide an additional \$500 per month to be used as prize money to be awarded at monthly music contests to encourage youngsters to take up playing stringed instruments, according to Robert L. Edwards, school superintendent.

Edwards told to board Wednesday that Williams said he believes there is another Elvis Presley waiting to be discovered in Madison County and that he is willing to foot the bill for a special stringed instrument program in the

schools in order to encourage the preservation and promotion of traditional mountain music.

The \$10,000 would be used for the rental or purchase of stringed instruments — guitars, banjos, fiddles — but, the board would be responsible for hiring someone to teach music lessons on the instruments, Edwards said.

The board would also hold monthly music contests for which Williams will donate \$500 each month to be awarded to the contest winner, several contestants, or "anyway we want to use it" in the contests, Edwards said.

Board members appeared interested in Williams' proposal, but agreed that the matter needed more discussion and consideration before taking any action on it.

Williams recently donated \$10,000 to Madison High School for the Senior Honors Scholarships for needy and deserving students.

Service Corps Gets Go-ahead

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK
Editor

The Madison County Volunteer Service Corps took a giant step toward becoming a reality Friday night when the county commissioners adopted a motion to ask Jerry Plemmons and Dr. Don Anderson to proceed with organizing the corps and agreed to provide an office, including equipment and telephone, for the corps by July 1.

Anderson went before the commissioners with a resolution outlining three steps in the corps' initial organization. The commissioners agreed that an advisory board for the corps would be made up of department heads of county agencies including the Department of Social Services, Agricultural Extension Service, mental health clinic, the child development program, Council on Aging, the Madison-Buncombe Opportunity Corporation and the Hot Springs Health Program.

In addition, the advisory board would include a representative from each community development club, the Hot Springs Jesuit Center and the Southern Appalachian Center at Mars Hill College.

Anderson, a staff member at the college, and Plemmons, energy auditing director with French Broad EMC, will report to the commissioners within six months on progress made in developing the Volunteer Service Corps.

The corps was proposed some months ago as a means of continuing to fill basic

human service needs in the county as human service agencies face state and federal budget cuts.

The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation of Winston Salem recently provided a \$30,000 grant to the Rural Life Demonstration Center at Mars Hill College to aid in setting up the VSC.

Plans call for the corps to consist of county students and residents who will volunteer time and services to various human service agencies and organizations.

In other business, the commissioners:

• Approved a request from Sam Parker, Madison County Housing Authority director,

for permission to apply for community development block grant funds.

• Approved a request from Luanne Roberts, county day care director, to close all day care centers on July 6 so that day care staffs can attend a workshop.

• Approved the signing of a contract for \$10,000 with the Hot Springs Health Program which will provide medical consultant and other medical services to the county health department.

• Approved the appointment of Dr. Otis Duck, of Mars Hill, to the health department board.

• Approved a motion to allow the articles of incorpora-

tion of the Madison Manor Convalescent Center, Inc. to be amended to incorporate the use of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 202 funds to provide housing for the elderly.

• Approved the appointment of three persons to the county transportation advisory board. Appointed were Joe Martin of Blue Ridge Mental Health Clinic; Dr. Bobby Jean Rice, supervisor of schools; and Dorothy Arrington, director of the Madison Opportunity Corporation.

• Appropriated \$500 to the Marshall Recreation Department to help with the summer recreation program.



INVASION OF THE BAG PEOPLE — Actually this group of unidentified World's Fair visitors were caught recently in a thunder-shower, an almost daily occurrence at the

fair in Knoxville. Fair grounds keepers were kind enough to provide plastic garbage bags for many of the fair goers. (Photo by Jon Rosenblum of The Mountaineer)

School Board Votes To Repair Roofs At Madison High, Marshall

The Madison County Board of Education voted unanimously to spend \$29,311 to repair leaking roofs at Madison High and Marshall Elementary School Wednesday at its regular monthly meeting.

Superintendent Robert L. Edwards told board members that he had contacted several roofing companies with W.H. Author Co. being the "only one which would nail down a price." The company submitted a bid of \$19,119 for work on the Madison High gymnasium roof, \$5,500 for repairing part of the high school roof and \$4,692 for repairing the Marshall School gymnasium roof.

Edwards said the repair work should begin immediately and that the money would come out of the current 1981-82 budget.

In other business actions, the board:

- Approved the use of the schools as polling places for the June 20 primary elections.
- Accepted a resolution from the Madison County School Principals' Association to have a permanent plaque

members went on record in support of Vernon Ponder as principal of Laurel Elementary School.

• Approved the 1982-83 School Food Service budget submitted by Deborah Ponder Baker, director. Mrs. Baker said the budget showed a \$39,850 increase over the current budget. The increase, she said, would go toward salaries and would be pending on N.C. General Assembly budgetary actions. The board also approved a \$7,000 1981-82 budget amendment to provide benefits for School Food Service employees for the rest of this fiscal year.

• Approved a request from Edwards for an expenditure of \$2 per pupil for new library books. The approximately \$17,000 will come from local school expense funds.

• Agreed to send a letter of appreciation to Abner Wild for his voluntary work in building the rock wall and stairway in the Madison County Court House. Ed Norton was elected Chairman of the group and Vencie Penland vice-chairman and secretary.

made to honor Wild for his contributions.

• Reported that no action had been taken regarding the proposed expanded band program for the elementary school board chairman Bobby Ponder said the proposal "rests entirely upon the amount of money to be appropriated to the board by the county commissioners."

• Agreed to send a letter of appreciation to Principal Sidney Harrison of Walnut

School recognizing and complimenting the parents and citizens of the Walnut community for their efforts and work done on grounds improvement at the school.

• Read a letter from Dr. Craig Phillips, state superintendent of schools, congratulating the school system for recently receiving its state accreditation.

• Approved changing the July board of education meeting from Wednesday, July 7 to Friday, July 2.

County EMS Advisory Board Holds First Meeting

Madison County Emergency Medical Service Advisory Council held its organizational meeting June 1 at 7:30 p.m. in the Madison County Court House. Ed Norton was elected Chairman of the group and Vencie Penland vice-chairman and secretary.

The EMS advisory council was established to review the performance of the ambulance service and report its

findings and suggestions to the Madison County Commissioners.

Director of the Madison County Ambulance Service Mildred West and North Carolina Office of EMS Region B Coordinator Mike Morgan were on hand to explain how the ambulance service operates and what state regulations for operation are. Gone are the days when am-

bulance service was, "you call, we haul, that's all," Morgan said.

Morgan has been instrumental in establishing a continuing education program for Madison EMS personnel through A-B Tech. Six training sessions cover topics such as emergency childbirth, vehicle operation, splinting, triage, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and poisoning.

The council asked Ms. West for additional information concerning ambulance operation so they would be better qualified to make recommendations to the commissioners.

Much of the data Ms. West will provide comes from Ambulance Call Logs. These ACR forms give a breakdown of the number of calls Madison County's three ambulance units receive each month,

miles covered, type of run, hours to complete the run and other information.

Council members were told of the purchase of new equipment paid for by a matching grant from the county commissioners and Region B. Equipment bought was fracture packs, child seats, bags and drawers, valve resuscitators. The demand valve resuscitators are

especially helpful in delivering high concentrations of oxygen to CPR patients.

Advisory council meetings are scheduled for the first Tuesday of each month at Madison County Court House. Jackie Davis, Dr. Clayton Jones, Lloyd Moore, Ed Norton, Vencie Penland and Dr. William Walker are council members.