

Ledford Enterprises' County Business Nears Yearly Legal Limit

By ROBERT KOENIG
Second In A Series

County commission chairman James Ledford's business dealings with Madison County agencies is again nearing the legal limit in the current fiscal year. State law prohibits public officials in small counties from conducting more than \$5,000 in business in any 12-month period.

A check of invoices submitted in the current fiscal year shows that Ledford-owned businesses have received payments totalling \$4,260.07 through the end of February. The current fiscal year ends on June 30.

North Carolina General Statute 14-234 prohibits public officials from making contracts for personal benefit with agencies of state or local government. An exception to the law allows public officials in towns with fewer than 5,000 residents or counties with no towns with populations of more than 5,000 to conduct business with government agencies on a limited basis.

The amount of business is limited to \$5,000 in any 12-month period, except in the case of medical services, where the limit

is extended to \$10,000 in any 12 months.

During the previous fiscal year, Madison County business with Ledford-owned businesses totalled \$5,247.35.

In the current fiscal year, Ledford-owned businesses have done \$4,260.07 in business with county agencies, primarily the Madison County Transportation Authority and the Emergency Medical Service. Of that total, \$2,775.88 has been billed through Exxon, U.S.A. credit cards held by the agencies. An additional \$1,484.19 in payments have been made either directly to James T. Ledford or to his business, Ledford Enterprises.

In the annual audit of county finances, auditor Jim Skidmore noted that the commissioners have failed to vote on doing business with Ledford Enterprises and have also failed to publicly post the amount of business being done with Ledford Enterprises.

Last week, Ledford produced minutes of the board's September 1, 1978 meeting at which a motion was made allowing Ledford Enterprises to make repairs to county-owned vehicles. The motion was made at that time by Ervin Adams and seconded by Virginia Anderson. As required by state law,

Ledford himself did not vote on the motion.

Although the commissioners approved Ledford Enterprises to make repairs to county vehicles, a check of Exxon, U.S.A. invoices for the current year indicates that much of the county business with Ledford's Exxon stations consists of fueling the Mars Hill EMS ambulance.

At least \$808.85 in gas and oil have been purchased at Ledford's Mars Hill stations since July, 1984. The remaining \$1,967 in charges billed through Exxon, U.S.A. have been for repairs to vehicles.

Although the Madison County Transportation Authority does not purchase gasoline from Ledford-owned stations, repairs totalling \$1,757.60 have been charged at Ledford-owned stations in the current fiscal year.

Transportation Authority director Delba Jean Roberts defended the decision to allow Ledford's stations to make the repairs, saying she obtained other estimates before going to Ledford.

In July of last year, the Transportation Authority charged some \$1,566 in repairs on their Exxon credit card. The repairs

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Report From The Speaker

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Community Calendar

GOP Committee To Meet

The Republican Executive Committee will hold a meeting on March 21 at the Courthouse at 7:30 p.m. All interested persons are urged to attend.

Beech Glen Tobacco Meeting

A meeting on use of tobacco chemicals will be held at The Beech Glen Community Center, March 25. The free meal will begin at 6:45 p.m. Call Wiley DuVall at 649-2411 for reservations.

Softball Registration Set

Sign-up for the Mars Hill Girls Softball Program will be held Saturday, March 23, from 10 a.m. until 12 noon at the Mars Hill School Gym. This program is for girls 9-12 and 13-15 years of age. Registration fee will be \$20.

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Greater Ivy, Mars Hill Take Top Beautification Honors

Two Madison County community development clubs took top honors in awards ceremonies held Monday in Raleigh. The Mars Hill and Greater Ivy Community Development Clubs were awarded first place in their respective division in the annual competition sponsored by Keep North Carolina Beautiful, Inc.

Mars Hill CDC was awarded first place among towns with populations

of up to 5,000, while Greater Ivy took top honors among communities with more than 150 families.

The Sandy Mush 4-H Club of Buncombe County was awarded first place among youth organizations.

The awards were presented by Dollie Martin, wife of Gov. Jim Martin, during a luncheon ceremony at the Research Triangle.

Hot Springs Wreck Kills Truck Driver

A Michigan truck driver was killed late Monday night when the rig he was driving on U.S. 25-70 went off the road and down a steep embankment. William C. LaMotte of Belleville, Mich. was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident, one-half mile south of Hot Springs.

Police investigating the accident said it appeared that the rear wheels of the tractor-trailer left the road in a sharp turn. LaMotte was thrown from

the cab of his tractor and pinned beneath the wreckage.

The Monday night accident is the second in recent weeks in the Hot Springs area. Earlier, another trucker lost his kneecap in an accident near the scene of Monday's fatal wreck.

The collapse of a tunnel on Interstate 40 near the Tennessee state line on March 3 has caused truckers to detour through Madison County to reach Knoxville.

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FBEMC Announces Five Percent Rate Increase

By ROBERT KOENIG

Madison County electric customers will see an increase in their monthly bills in April when the first bills under a new five percent increase in rates will be delivered. French Broad Electric Membership Corp., suppliers of power to most Madison County homes and businesses, announced the rate increase last week in the company's monthly newsletter.

FBEMC general manager Charles Tolley said the latest increase is necessitated by a 10.2 percent increase in wholesale rates charged by Carolina Power and Light Co. (CP&L) that went into effect on Feb. 15. The 10.2 percent increase in wholesale rates is the first part of a 15.6 percent increase request CP&L has filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the federal agency which oversees co-operatives.

Tolley said the second phase of the increase, a 5.4 percent hike, will be placed in effect on July 15 if a negotiated settlement isn't reached between the co-operatives and CP&L.

The current increase is being collected under bond, should a FERC judge rule against CP&L in the rate case, the increase would have to be refunded to the co-operatives. Tolley said any rebates received would be returned to FBEMC customers.

Tolley said FBEMC and other co-operatives have filed suit to block the increase in an attempt to negotiate an out-of-court settlement of the dispute. The administrative judge who will hear the case has asked the co-operatives and CP&L to reach a negotiated settlement on the increase. The local company used a similar strategy last year in negotiating with the supplier.

Tolley told The News Record that CP&L has asked for a \$33 million increase. The co-operatives have offered considerably less in early negotiations. Tolley said the co-operatives have offered \$19.3 to settle the rate dispute. The general manager said he expected the case to go before the judge sometime this summer, probably in August.

FBEMC served customers throughout Madison County, except for a portion of Hot Springs served directly by CP&L.

FBEMC also serves customers in Yancey County and Unicoi County, Tenn. Tolley said wholesale purchases account for 60 to 65 percent of FBEMC's budget.

Tolley said the local company will be able to absorb a portion of the latest increase in its costs because of good growth in 1984. FBEMC sales of power rose nine percent during the year. The general manager said he anticipates similar growth in 1985.

Much of the 1984 increase came from new industries locating in Yancey County. Tolley said, "OMB in Burnsville and Avondale Mills have had a significant impact on our service. They both use power 24 hours a day."

FBEMC purchased 230 million kilowatts of power in 1984. FBEMC will soon begin generating a small portion of its power needs with the opening of the Capitola Dam hydroelectric plant in Marshall. Tolley said the dam is currently undergoing testing and he expects it to go on line shortly.

When it does begin operation, the Capitola will produce an estimated 16 million kilowatts per year. Tolley said the dam's productivity will be dependent upon rainfall conditions. While production at the Marshall plant will initially cost 6.5 to seven

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District Court Hears DWI, Food Stamp Cases

District Court Judge Phillip Ginn presided over two sessions of the court last week in Marshall.

On March 13, the court conducted probable cause hearings for Ronnie Ball and Mike Surret.

Ball, a former Marshall Elementary School bus driver, is charged with two counts of abduction of children, two counts of contributing to the delinquency of a minor and one count of taking indecent liberties with a child in connection with the disappearance of two Marshall Elementary School students in February. The court found probable cause for all five charges and sent the case on to Superior Court for trial.

Surret is charged with two counts of larceny. After a hearing, the court found probable cause and remanded the case to Superior Court for trial.

The court also heard a number of cases involving food stamp fraud during the March 13 session.

Margaret Bradford entered guilty pleas to four charges of food stamp fraud. She received a suspended three-year jail sentence and a \$500 fine and was ordered to make restitution in the amount of \$1,500.

Virgie A. Rice entered a guilty plea to a single count of food stamp fraud and was ordered to make restitution in the amount of \$200 and pay court costs. *Continued On Page 2*

State Unemployment Rate Declines

Unemployment decreased in North Carolina in February according to figures released last week by the N.C. Employment Security Commission (ESC).

ESC chairman David Fishery said the February rate fell eight tenths of a percentage point during the month to six percent. January's monthly adjusted rate stood at 6.8 percent.

The North Carolina rate was the second lowest among the 11 largest states, Fishery said. Nationally, unemployment remained unchanged during the month, standing at 7.3 percent.

The ESC estimates that 1,378,000 North Carolina workers are currently employed, while 82,000 workers are unemployed.



SNOW COVERED THE DAFFODILS in winter made one final return to the garden. Daily begins tomorrow.