



All Bundled Up

A group of Madison football fans traveled to Mt. Airy on a chilly Friday night to cheer the Patriots on in the opening game of the state

2-A playoffs. The Patriots, in their first-ever state playoff appearance, lost in a 27-21 squeaker to Mt. Airy. See Page 8.

McElfresh Guilty; Chandler On Trial

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

A 32-year-old Georgia man pleaded guilty in Madison County Superior Court Monday to two counts of attempted murder in what authorities contend was a botched attempt to collect on an insurance policy worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

James K. McElfresh, a lay minister at a Brunswick, Ga., church, entered the pleas during the early phases of his trial on charges of setting fire to a car -- with two people in it -- and pushing it over a cliff on the Laurel River on June 17.

The unexpected plea allowed 24th Judicial District Attorney Tom Rusher to begin another trial Tuesday -- that of Everett Chandler, 28, charged with murder in the March 22 shooting death of a Weaverville man.

Chandler is charged with shooting his friend and roommate, Stuart Lane Ballard, 21, during the early morning hours of an all-night birthday party at Chandler's home on Chandler Creek.

Authorities contend the shooting was the result of a dispute over a girlfriend. Chandler has said that the gun -- a 16-gauge sawed-off shotgun --

went off when he and Ballard scuffled over it.

Ballard died of a gunshot wound to the neck and upper chest.

In testimony Tuesday, a string of seven witnesses who attended the ill-fated party took the stand and told of the events surrounding the shooting.

Donald McCall testified that he had gone into the kitchen to get a refill of beer when he saw Chandler walk into the bedroom. Then he heard a shot, and seconds later Chandler came out of the bedroom with a gun in his hand, McCall testified.

"He said, 'I just shot Stuart. Everybody's got to leave,'" McCall said.

Phillip Ballard, father of the victim, testified that he wanted to go to Chandler's home after learning that his son had been shot. When he got there, he waited for rescue workers to come back outside. When they did, he asked if his son was OK, he testified.

"They says no," Ballard testified. "They says there's nothing we can do."

At several times during Tuesday's testimony, Superior Court Judge John R. Friday became visibly upset

with frequent objections by Chandler's attorney, Joseph Huff.

"I said overruled, Mr. Huff, can't you hear," Friday said at one point.

Testimony in the Chandler case was continuing at presstime Wednesday, with pathologist John McCloud on the stand.

Assistant District Attorney James Baker said the state should rest its case Wednesday.

In Monday's case, McElfresh told Judge Friday that he was "a pawn" in an insurance fraud scheme originating in Georgia.

After McElfresh entered his pleas, Friday sentenced him to 10 years in prison. Friday also delayed sentencing on two counts of assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill inflicting serious injury, pending McElfresh's testimony in a related case in Georgia. Charges have not yet been filed in that case, authorities said.

McElfresh faced up to 60 years in prison on the four charges.

The two victims -- Gail Young and Roy Mitchell -- testified Monday. Ac-

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Error Hurts Steen's Vote Total

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

A faulty lever on a voting machine may have cost Reese Steen the honor of being the top vote-getter in Nov. 4 balloting for the Madison County Board of Commissioners.

But no one will ever know for certain.

Steen, a Mars Hill dentist, trailed high vote-getter Robert G. Capps by 46 votes, according to unofficial election night results.

A voting machine in the Hot Springs precinct was not working properly for several hours on election morning, however, according to Madison

County election officials.

And 74 voters used the machine before the problem was noticed. Election officials say they have no way of knowing how many of those 74 voters may have cast ballots for Steen.

"All we know is that 74 people voted on the machine prior to the time the malfunction was discovered," said Sherry Ray Lewis, supervisor of elections.

The lever on one of the voting machines in Hot Springs was bent so that when a person voted a straight Democratic party ticket, votes for Steen were not counted, said William Powell, chairman of the Madison

County Board of Elections.

Election officials say they do not know the cause of the malfunction, but they are not ruling out the possibility of human tampering.

"I am positive that there wasn't anything done on the inside of the machine," Powell said last week. "Anything could happen on the outside of the machine. It could be an accident, or not. A stronger person could have jammed it."

Because the Hot Springs machine was the only one to have that kind of problem Nov. 4, Powell said he believes it was an accident.

Steen said he is inclined to believe

that it was not an accident.

"According to what I was told, my lever was bent up. That indicates to me that somebody had forced it up. I would hope that no one would try to rig or jam a machine or make it miscalculate," Steen said last week.

"I do wonder about that," he said. "You feel bad when somebody goes to vote and they're not able to vote for you if that's their wish."

Because Steen won election despite the problem, election officials say there is no need to take any corrective measures.

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Probe Continues

North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation agents will spend the next several days wrapping up their probe of possible voting irregularities in Madison County.

That's the word from Charles Chambers, director of the SBI's regional office in Asheville.

A pair of two-man teams is scheduled to be in Madison County this week, and maybe some of next week, to put the finishing touches on what will be a monthlong investigation.

SBI agents are in Madison County at the request of Thomas Rusher, 24th Judicial District at-

torney, and William P. Powell, chairman of the Madison County Board of Elections.

The two Republican officials asked SBI agents to conduct an investigation into potential voting irregularities during the May primary and the Nov. 4 election.

Several SBI agents observed balloting and vote-counting proceedings throughout the day Nov. 4, also at the request of Rusher and Powell.

Chambers said he could not comment about what agents may have learned.

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Weaverville Delays Annexation Of Facility For Retarded

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

The Weaverville Town Council heard a proposal for annexation inside city limits from Blue Ridge Mental Health Retardation and Substance Abuse representatives Monday evening.

The proposal calls for annexation to provide town sewer and water service for a planned 30-unit residential facility to house 60 retarded residents.

The site of the proposed facility is located near Dogwood and Reems Creek.

Developer representative Kenneth Gummels said that there is a need for a residential facility to decentralize the retarded and bring them back to their own community. The proposed

facility will provide 24-hour care at a lower cost than the state, according to the group.

Council members voiced concern that until an ongoing town water study is complete it would be difficult to add new customers to the water line.

The council voted to hold a special meeting on Monday to consider the proposal. The meeting will be held at 5:30 p.m.

Weaverville officials also heard several concerned parents needing clarification on the town's new bike ordinance.

The recently adopted ordinance states that no bikes, roller skates or skate boards will be allowed on the sidewalks on Main Street between Moore and Brown streets.

The parents said they felt that the ordinance might prohibit the children from riding their bikes to the library.

The council moved to hold a public hearing to modify or amend the ordinance on Dec. 8 at 7 p.m.

Other items on the council's agenda included the zoning of Wildwood Acres into residential lots and phase two of the Lake Louise project. City Manager Charles Horne recommended the council accept and proceed with a bid from the Huntley Construction Company for \$145,500 to complete the project.

The recreation committee reported that the Christmas parade will be held Dec. 6 at 2 p.m. Local businesses have already contributed more than \$1,800 for parade costs.



It's tobacco time again. Burley warehouses in Asheville opened last week, and sales are scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. Monday.

Tobacco Sales Begin Monday

Madison County tobacco farmers are getting ready for the opening day of burley sales.

Sales are scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. Monday.

The four major tobacco warehouses in Asheville opened their doors last Friday, and have been accepting burley all week.

The warehouses include Days, Dixie Big Burley and Planters, all located on Riverside Drive, and Farmers, located on N.C. 81-Swannanoa River Road.

Bill Woody, sales supervisor for the warehouses, said this year's drought-

afflicted crop is expected to be smaller than the 11.5 million pounds of burley leaf sold at the warehouses in 1985.

Last year, the gross average price was \$1.5788 per pound. Estimates of the prices for this year's crop won't be available until sales get under way, Woody said.

Tobacco sales in Asheville grossed more than \$18 million last year, he said.

The warehouses in Asheville are the main sales outlets for burley tobacco grown in Western North Carolina, although some WNC

farmers use facilities in Greeneville, Tenn.

This year's sales schedule consists of 20 sales days.

Sales open at 9 a.m. Monday and continue Tuesday and Wednesday until they are suspended for Thanksgiving holidays.

Sales will resume on Monday, Dec. 1, and continue every Monday through Thursday for the first three weeks of December.

Following a Christmas break, sales will resume on Jan. 5, finally coming to a close Jan. 9.

Mars Hill Annexes Property

The town of Mars Hill passed an ordinance earlier this month annexing businesses along Big Branch Road.

The non-contiguous annexation takes into the town the Western Steer and Pizza Inn restaurants, and business properties owned by Carl and Louise Eller. All three properties are along the north side of Big Branch Road.

Property on the south side of the street is residential, and the town does not plan to annex that property unless requested.

The three businesses petitioned for annexation into the town limits after the Mars Hill Board of Aldermen refused to extend sewer service outside town limits.

The Board of Aldermen also received some good news and some news Monday night. The good news was the announcement that the Madison Board of County Commissioners had allocated \$50,000 to the town to enable Mars Hill to begin work on state-mandated repairs to the town sewer.

Community Calendar

Young Republicans To Meet

The Madison County Young Republicans Club will meet Thursday at 7 p.m. at the Madison County Courthouse to organize the club.

Parade Planned

The town of Hot Springs will sponsor a Christmas Parade on Dec. 13 beginning at 2 p.m. For more information on entering the parade, call 622-3227. Everyone is welcome to enter and attend the parade.

Holiday Dinners Planned

The American Legion Post 317 will hold its Thanksgiving and Christmas supper on Thursday beginning at 6:30 p.m. All members are urged to attend.

GOP Women Gather

The Madison County Republican Women's Club will meet Monday at 7 p.m. at Mars Hill Town Hall.

Marshall Given Deadline For Sewer Work

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

State and federal officials have given a handful of deadlines to Marshall officials trying to solve several problems with the town's wastewater treatment facilities.

Marshall Mayor Anita Ward met last week with officials from the N.C. Department of Natural Resources

and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to discuss the long-standing problems.

Monthly tests of discharges from the wastewater treatment plant into the French Broad River have shown that the town is out of compliance with state standards more often than not.

State and federal environmental officials came to Marshall last week

armed with suggestions on how to solve the problem and get the treatment plant back in compliance with state standards.

The officials left Ward -- and water and sewer supervisor Heath Dobson and assistant Jim Quinn -- with a list of five problems that need to be solved before the end of the year.

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