

Residents: Politics Behind Firing Spree

By BILL STUDESC
Editor

The attrition rate for county employees rose again last week as the Madison County Board of Commissioners fired tax supervisor Wesley Staude, leading to charges that the commissioners are hiring and firing on the basis of politics.

Staude joined finance officer David Caldwell and transportation director Debra Jean Roberts on the list of county employees fired by the new commissioners during their first two weeks of office.

Staude's firing, which came during a special meeting Friday afternoon, resulted in a barrage of accusations aimed at board Chairman Robert Capps and Commissioner John Hensley, who voted in favor of the firing. Commissioner Reese Steen, as

has often been the case early in the new board's term, cast the lone no vote.

Steen also delivered a stinging criticism of the county's hiring practices.

"The people feel like if you want to get hired (for a county job), you either go up to the funeral home and see Bobby Capps or go up on the hill and see (Democratic Party leader) Zeno Ponder, or go downstairs and see (county school superintendent) Bobby Edwards," Steen said toward the end of a temper-filled meeting. "Three people are doing all the hiring."

Steen has advocated the hiring of county employees after advertising job openings and interviewing applicants before selecting the most qualified person, rather than on the

basis of politics.

Critics of the board have blamed the firings on Madison's so-called political machine and its leader Zeno Ponder.

Capps denied that politics were involved in his decisions, and pointed out the hiring of Eddie Fox, a Republican, as director of the county's ambulance service.

Bob Phillips, an unsuccessful Republican candidate for county commissioner, was among the several people at Friday's meeting who agreed with Steen.

Phillips asked Capps why Staude was being fired. The discussion prior to the termination of Staude took place in a closed, executive session.

"I think Mr. Staude understands," Capps said.

Phillips told Capps that he believed

the hirings and firings of county employees has been based on politics, rather than on the qualifications of employees and applicants.

"I'm not the only person here who thinks the bulk of decisions made here are made on the basis of politics," Phillips said. "I assure you that I'm not the only one. Time will tell."

Capps denied that politics played any role in the board's decisions.

"Are you telling me that no political pressure was brought to bear to hire Ashley Ball," Phillips said.

"No, sir. No, sir," Phillips said.

The county rehired Ball, a former sanitarian in the Health Department who was let go by the previous board of commissioners for "budgetary reasons."

Ball had filed a lawsuit against the county seeking back wages and attorney fees. The county agreed at a Dec. 8 special meeting to rehire him if he would drop his lawsuit.

Mrs. Ball, employed by the Madison County Department of Social Services, was also fired in July for budgetary reasons.

The new board agreed Friday to rehire Mrs. Ball, if she would also agree to drop her lawsuit against the county. The move will cost the county \$7,816 for the rest of the fiscal year.

The decision to rehire the Balls prompted additional, and often-heated, discussion.

A former ambulance service employee, Tubbie Deaver, had asked Dec. 1 to be rehired, saying he had been fired without reason. Capps told Deaver that he would look into the re-

quest.

Deaver appeared at Friday's meeting to ask if he would be rehired or not. Capps told him that he could not be rehired because there were currently no openings.

Deaver said Capps did not say he would be rehired "when you have an opening," and said that Capps had told him prior to the Nov. 4 election that, if he was elected county commissioner, he would see that Deaver was rehired.

"You can't tell him that before an election. That's illegal," said Ann Ryder, saying that promising a county job to a voter is a form of vote-buying.

"I'll have to along with Mr. Phillips," Deaver said. "It's all political."

-Continued on back page

Outlook Bleak For Facility In Weaverville

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

The Blue Ridge Mental Health group surprised Weaverville residents and city officials by withdrawing a proposal for annexation of property on Dogwood Drive during the town council meeting Monday evening.

In an eleventh hour effort to salvage available funding for a facility to house 30 mentally retarded adults, Blue Ridge attorney David Matney withdrew the original request for annexation.

Matney then submitted an alternative plan for a new site between Monticello and New Stock roads.

The new tract of land would be purchased through a N.C. Community Development Block Grant to build on to existing water and sewer lines.

"We'll be providing a mile of sewer and water lines the city can tap into," said Matney.

Weaverville Mayor Reece Lasher said the city would have to lift a

moratorium on new water lines. That would require another public hearing.

"Others have asked us to lift the moratorium and we have consistently refused," said Lasher.

The future of the proposed facility rests upon whether project developers can find a suitable site by Dec. 31, at which time the industrial revenue bonds will expire. The other option would be to find alternative financing through government sources.

"I don't know what more we can do. The community has to have their say," said Lasher. "Other than rescinding the moratorium, the only option would be petitioning for satellite annexation."

The council voted on lifting the moratorium on water lines and the motion failed 5-0.

No more was said about the group's proposal until later in the meeting

-Continued on back page



Photo by Randy Cox

Pageant Scene

The annual Marshall Christmas Pageant was held Friday and Saturday nights on the lawn of the Madison County Courthouse. Hundreds of pageant-goers braved below-freezing weather to take in the festivities, which included a live nativity scene.

Marshall Board Member Costs Town \$1,600

By BILL STUDESC
Editor

A decision apparently made by one Marshall aldermen acting without the stamp of approval of the full town governing board may have resulted in \$1,600 in unexpected expenses.

Alderman Faye Reid apparently had construction workers lay a new water line from on the side of the road opposite her Island Road home, instead of across her property as originally planned.

That's according to Gary McGill, an Asheville engineer hired in November by the Marshall Board of Aldermen as the town's engineer.

McGill said Monday that Reid, during a March pre-construction conference concerning the Island Road water project, told him that she would like the line to be moved to the north side of the road.

Reid owns property on the south side of Island Road.

According to town board minutes, the relocated water line was not

discussed in a public meeting until July 14.

Reid, when contacted for comment Tuesday, said she did not authorize the changes, but simply suggested that the water line be moved to the north side of Island Road so that several brick walls -- including walls on her property -- would not be damaged by construction.

But McGill says he specifically asked Reid at the pre-construction conference where the water line should go.

"I recall asking her specifically, 'Is that where you want it?'" McGill said. "She said that's where she wanted it."

The reason Reid gave for the change was that construction of the lines might damage brick walls in front of her house, he said.

"We didn't think that concern deserved merit because, if we did, we would have put the line on the other side," he said.

-Continued on back page

Landfill Alternatives Debated

By BILL STUDESC
Editor

Madison County could find itself without a place to dispose of its garbage this spring, and may be forced to transport its trash to another coun-

ty. And that is one reason county officials need to start looking at alternatives to landfills for disposal of Madison's garbage.

That was one of the points of discus-

sion during a recent meeting held in Marshall to address the problem of the county's rapidly filling landfill.

Jim Brown, director of the county landfill, told about 20 interested residents, environmental group members and regional officials that Madison's landfill is fast approaching capacity.

"Right now, it doesn't look like we've got over three or four months left," Brown said at the Dec. 8 meeting.

Adding to the problem is the fact that state officials have not approved several tracts of land that county officials have considered for a new landfill.

It takes about six months for a site to be prepared for a landfill, once approved by the state, Brown said.

With only three months remaining at the current landfill and no replacement in sight, that will mean that Madison County won't have a place to dump its garbage, perhaps as soon as April, he said.

"We may be out of a landfill site for a certain period of time until we do get something worked out. If we got a landfill site approved today, it would take five or six months to even get

one permitted before we could implement anything, and that's if we really hurried everything," Brown said.

Preparation of the property for a landfill, including the building of roads and dikes, would take about three months, and could not begin until after winter.

"I feel sure we will get a landfill permitted for Madison County. Just when, I don't know," Brown said.

"It's very possible that we will have to work out some other alternative for a period of time," he said. "If possible, we could work something out with another county, even if for a maximum of just two or three months."

The Madison County Board of Commissioners is aware of the landfill problem, and has written letters to the towns of Marshall, Mars Hill and Hot Springs.

In those letters, the county is informing the towns that they may have to assume responsibility for the disposal of their own garbage.

"According to state law, towns have to provide residents with garbage disposal. The county does not,"

-Continued on back page

Community Calendar

County To Hold Hearing

The Madison County Board of Commissioners will hold a public hearing at 1:30 p.m. Thursday on the proposed issuance of bonds for a center for the mentally retarded. Also on the agenda for Thursday's special meeting is a meeting with Madison County Sheriff Dedrick Brown. A second public meeting has been set for 1:30 p.m. Monday in the Madison County Courthouse.

Holiday Contest Sponsored

The Walnut-Brush Creek Community Development Club is sponsoring an outdoor Christmas lighting contest within the club's boundaries. Judging will be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Friday.

Donations Needed

The Marshall and Walnut Boosters clubs will sponsor an Old Fashion Christmas for Needy Families on Tuesday at Walnut School. All donations of money, clothing, toys and canned goods will be appreciated. Donations can be left at the Burger Parlor, Pizza Place and both the Walnut and Marshall elementary schools.

Fruit Cakes For Sale

The Walnut Creek Community Development Club will be selling Claxton fruit cakes until Christmas. To order, call (704) 738-1111.



Photo by Bill Studenc

Jim Brown, director of the Madison County landfill, points to a already full area of the landfill, which is fast approaching capacity.

Madison High To Get Fire Hydrants

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

The Madison County Board of Education agreed last week to install three new fire hydrants at Madison High School.

The board made that decision during its monthly meeting, held last Wednesday.

Fire Chief Jimmy Ramsey said the town of Marshall will pay for the manpower to install the hydrants, if the school board will supply the materials.

The total estimated cost of the three hydrants is \$3,382.

"The hydrants are necessary," said Ramsey. "If the school burns, that's it."

The single hydrant now located at the bottom of the hill at Madison High School does not have sufficient water pressure to supply the entire school with enough water to effectively fight a fire, Ramsey told the board.

The school board also discussed the replacement of two water tanks at Laurel and Spring Creek elementary schools.

The board at Marshall Elementary School will also have to be replaced over the Christmas holiday, board

members learned.

Madison High School Principal David Wyatt requested that the board consider transferring all student records to microfilm.

Wyatt said the N.C. Department of Archives will provide this service at no charge to any county with fewer than 800 students.

The cost of transferring student records would be between \$1,500 to \$2,000 for a microfilm reader and printer.

Wyatt also said that the school board should consider purchasing a new copier for the school office.

resigned from her position as of Dec. 31. Franklin has worked for the school board for five years, and has recently taken a position as county finance officer.

Dr. Bobby Jean Rice reported that the Madison High School 11th grade students 1 and 2 were above the state average in reading and math tests.

Miss Alice said that the school board should consider purchasing a new copier for the school office.

Photos by Ann Franklin