

Merry Christmas

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Photo by Ann Kitchell

A truck loaded with tobacco pulls into an Asheville burley warehouse during last week's leaf sales, prior to the closing of the warehouses for a Christmas and New Year's break.

Christmas Not As Merry For Area Burley Growers

By ANNE KITCHELL
Staff Writer

Burley tobacco farmers in Western North Carolina don't have a great deal to be merry about this Christmas.

For the past several years, tobacco growers have been plagued with falling prices. That problem was coupled this season with the worst drought in more than 100 years.

The Madison County tobacco quota of 4.5 million pounds is down by 15 percent, according to agricultural experts. The Madison County allotment is also down by 3 to 4 percent.

According to the county's Agricultural Extension Office, the drought affected the quantity and quality of the crop, resulting in lower prices to the farmer. Tobacco is graded by the quality of the color, length and texture of the leaves. The government support price is based on the grade.

Madison County tobacco farmer Woody Ammons said the mood is quite pessimistic among many farmers this year.

"For the last two years a lot of people had trouble getting their money out of their crops," said Ammons. "A

lot of people got into growing when prices were escalating. It was easy to get cheap money back then and some farmers over-extended."

As of last Thursday, the last day of leaf sales before Christmas break, Madison County farmers had sold approximately 80 percent of their crop. The support price is the same as last year with most tobacco selling for 9 to 10 cents above the support price. To date, the top price for quality tobacco was \$1.61 a pound.

Many farmers remember when they could get nearly \$2 a pound for

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Sheriff Requests Additional Funding

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

The Madison County Board of Commissioners agreed Thursday to give new Sheriff Dedrick Brown a yet undetermined amount in additional funding to hire extra help.

That agreement came after Brown met with the commissioners Thursday and told them that he will need \$27,075 more than budgeted for the sheriff's department for the 1986-87 fiscal year.

That's in addition to the \$139,680 allocated by the previous board of commissioners to former Sheriff E.Y. Ponder.

"I need \$90,000 to operate for the next seven months," Brown said. "I have \$77,925 left in the budget, and I'll need another \$12,075, plus, for the month of December, about \$15,000."

And that comes to about \$27,075, he said.

Brown's figures were as of Dec. 1, and did not include December's expenses, he said.

Brown's presentation came following a line-item by line-item evaluation of the budget and his anticipated needs.

"I don't think we need an increase in anything except deputies," he said.

Brown said he has three deputies in the current budget, but only has two deputies now working. He said that he wants to add another one as soon as possible.

"We're kind of short-handed. We wouldn't be if we can get two more men, which is what I've figured into the budget I've asked for," he said.

"It's hard to cover this large a county with just two deputies, one at day and one at night," Brown said.

Commissioner Reese Steen asked Brown if he could wait until commissioners have a chance to see how much money is remaining in the county's budget.

"I'd like to hire somebody by the

first of the year," Brown said.

Steen then said that the commissioners could let him know Monday how much additional money they could allocate to his department. But the commissioners did not discuss the request at Monday's meeting.

During Thursday's meeting, Brown outlined other departmental needs to the commissioners, holding a special meeting in the courtroom of Madison County Courthouse.

"The law says we have to have a

jailer on duty and awake 24 hours a day, seven days a week," Brown said. "We haven't had this. A cook has been serving as jailer, matron and everything. That's fine, if nothing happens, but it leaves us open for a lawsuit."

Brown has arranged with Buncombe County Sheriff Buck Lyda to transport female prisoners to Buncombe County Jail, which could save

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Ponder: "I'm Not Behind County Firings, Hirings"

Madison County Democratic Party leader Zeno Ponder denied being behind a rash of hirings and firings of county employees.

"I am not meddling in the affairs of the county commissioners," Ponder said during Thursday's special meeting of the Madison County Board of Commissioners. "If you want my help, you can call me. I will do anything honorable to help the county progress."

Opponents of recent hirings and firings by the county commissioners have suggested that Ponder, a longtime Democratic Party strongman in Madison County, is calling the shots.

Critics have said that Ponder is telling the county commissioners who to fire and who to hire.

Ponder said he wanted to "set the record straight."

"I work pretty steady, about 60 hours a week, and I stay at home," he said. "I've not had a visit from any three of you, which is fine."

Ponder said he had not ap-

pointed anyone to speak for him at meetings of the county commissioners.

"At the last meeting it sounded like a duet between Bob Phillips and (Commissioner) Dr. Reese Steen quoting my agenda and what I was doing," he said.

"If I ever get around to appointing anybody to speak for me, it won't be Robert Phillips. That won't happen until after Jimmy Carter is appointed by Ronald Reagan to be secretary of state," Ponder said.

Phillips is an unsuccessful Republican candidate for county commissioner.

Ponder also said his opponents would not be able to lessen his influence on Madison County.

"Regardless of what any of my enemies might say, they'll have a hell of a time erasing my name from the history books of Madison County," he said.

Ponder listed new highways, a high school and a shopping center among his accomplishments.

Retarded Facility Rejected

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Plans for a care facility for the mentally retarded, proposed for construction in Madison County, failed to win approval from county officials and residents last week.

Blue Ridge Center representatives had requested that the Madison County Board of Commissioners sponsor a \$1.55 million bond to build the 30-unit facility.

But after hearing several negative comments from residents during a public hearing Thursday, the commissioners rejected the request.

"I am very sympathetic to these people, and I feel like personally they do need a place like this," said board Chairman Robert Capps. "But right now, I don't believe, being a new commissioner and not knowing that much about it and knowing the feelings of the people, that I could go with sponsoring a bond."

The board took no action on the Blue Ridge Center request for resolutions setting up a non-profit corporation to operate the facility and to show the county's intent to sponsor the bond.

An additional hearing had been scheduled for January 1987.



Photo by Elizabeth Squire

Former Madison County Sheriff E.Y. Ponder recalls some of his more memorable moments from his 32-year career in law enforcement as a deputy and later as sheriff. Ponder, a legend with only a few years left to serve in the whole state, Ponder, arrived last summer, holding a job above

Former Sheriff 'Ponders' His 32-Year Career

By ELIZABETH D. SQUIRE
Feature Writer

It took the defeat of an unhelpful governor, the discovery of a jail toilet telephone system and three and a half years of hard work to solve the most fascinating case of the 32-year career of former Madison County Sheriff E.Y. Ponder.

The case in question was the late-1960s Rothchild-Garner-Kimes case, which Ponder recently recalled for The News Record during his first days out of office following his defeat by Republican Dedrick Brown.

Ponder, who was Madison County sheriff longer than any other man, handled more than 100 murders, he estimates, in addition to the normal duties.

The Rothchild-Garner-Kimes case called on all the skills Ponder learned over the course of his career. During that lengthy career, he solved all but one of those 100 murder cases to his own satisfaction.

In a few cases the jury did not agree with Ponder. But "if you argue with a jury telling you're a damned fool and a 19th juror," Ponder said, in a system based on "majority," you have to give the verdict of the jury.

Ponder was the winner of his most interesting case.

Each of the cases, Garner, Lyden and

his mother, who lived and ran a store in the Shut-in section, were tied up and robbed. In the process of the robbery, Lawson died of a heart attack, leading to charges of murder.

The first big break in the case came with the help of an out-of-state sheriff, which is not unusual, Ponder said. Sheriffs help each other much like neighbors help each other, he said, and he had a network of sheriff "neighbors."

A sheriff in Nebraska called Ponder and described "our murder in Madison County." A prisoner, apparently hoping for a reward, had told the Nebraska sheriff about the case, Ponder said.

Ponder, who did a lot of traveling in his role as sheriff, set right out for Lincoln, Neb. On that trip Mrs. Ponder went with him. "I was the navigator," she explains.

Ponder stayed up talking with the prisoner all of Saturday night, but the man wouldn't say who committed the murder. "We didn't get anywhere."

But persistence paid off: On Sunday morning the prisoner identified Charles Rothchild, George Garner and Jimmy Kimes.

Ponder already had information obtained -- in ways he still has to keep secret, nearly 20 years later -- that Rothchild had said something in an Arkansas prison possibly connecting him to the murder of a postmaster in Georgia. A man was already on death row for that murder, and would later be released as a result of the solution of the Madison County murder.

But the problem was to extradite the three suspects. By that time, Rothchild was in prison in South Carolina. And Garner, Ponder said, "had every bootlegger in Cairo, Ill., testifying that Garner was with him at the time of the crime."

Rothchild had an impressive background. He had been youth director for the state of Illinois and a police officer in Cairo before he turned to crime, Ponder said.

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on Thursday & Friday, December 25 & 26