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## Water Project Would Cost \$10.5 Million

### Mars Hill, Weaverville Study Plan

By BILL STUDENC  
Editor

ASHEVILLE - Officials from the towns of Mars Hill, Weaverville and Woodfin learned last week that a joint municipal water system, to utilize the Ivy River, would cost an estimated \$10.5 million.

The proposed system, designed to meet the three towns' water needs through the year 2010, may also require a drastic increase in water rates for customers in the towns.

That was the word Thursday from engineer Gary McGill, Asheville, who gave an often-discouraging report during a joint meeting of officials from the three towns at Land-of-Sky Regional Council in Asheville.

"We don't want to mislead you," McGill said. "We don't want to lead you down the primrose path."

The total cost of the project, designed to help the towns alleviate water supply problems experienced in years past, comes to \$10,530,400,

McGill said. That price covers the water treatment plant, the water lines, and construction, engineering fees.

"You heard me right - \$10,530,400," McGill said. The cost estimate is inflated and is based on 1990 dollars because it will take at least three years of preliminary work before construction could actually begin. The system, if approved, would be ready in 1992, at the earliest.

Last summer's long drought forced Weaverville and Woodfin to purchase water from the Asheville-Buncombe Water Authority. Both the town of Weaverville and the Woodfin Sanitary District rely on Reems Creek and its tributaries for water. Weaverville has had a moratorium on new water lines outside the town limits since 1974 because of its supply problems.

Mars Hill draws its water from Big Laurel Creek. The town currently has sufficient water to meet its needs, but

officials are also concerned about where they'll get water in the future.

Mars Hill also faced problems during last summer's drought, and asked residents to observe conservation practices.

Weaverville officials suggested last March a study of the Ivy River, near the Madison-Buncombe county line, as a source of drinking water.

Studies of the river indicates that the water flow in the Ivy is more than sufficient to meet the towns' needs, McGill said.

"With the flow the river has, we feel that this is a good source of water as far as quantity goes," he said. "Our impact on the river will be very minor."

The system could produce 3.1 million gallons of water a day.

Preliminary samples taken from the river show that its water exceeds drinking water standards, he said.

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Mars Hill Mayor Owen Tilson (left) and Weaverville Mayor Reese Lasher listen to a report on a study of the Ivy River as a potential

water source for their towns and neighboring Woodfin.

BILL STUDENC PHOTO

## Marshall Board Hears Proposal On New Prison

By BILL STUDENC  
Editor

The Marshall Board of Aldermen heard a suggestion Monday night that the town join forces with other municipal and county officials to bring a medium-security prison to Madison County.

The board, while appearing somewhat receptive to the idea, fell short of endorsing the plan without first receiving some input from Marshall residents.

"We should meet with others in the county first to see how they feel about it," said Marshall Alderman Faye Reid. "We've got a lot of retirees in this county and a lot of widows who might think they'll be scared to death if this thing comes here."

Richard Kingston, a Marshall man who has been pushing to locate the prison in Madison County, presented his suggestion to the Marshall board at its regular meeting Monday. The proposed prison is to be a replacement of the aging Craggy Prison located in Woodfin.

The N.C. General Assembly has appropriated \$7.1 million for the construction of a new medium-security prison in Buncombe County. N.C. Department of Corrections officials have located a handful of potential sites for the new prison, including a tract of land near Weaverville, but

have met strong opposition from nearby landowners at those sites.

Kingston has suggested petitioning the General Assembly to amend the law so that the prison could be built in a county other than Buncombe - specifically in Madison.

"We should look into the possibility of bringing this to Madison County," said Kingston, a member of the Marshall Planning Board. "It seems almost a certainty that it won't be coming to Buncombe County."

Prison officials met opposition to a proposed site near Enka, as area residents complained because of the site's proximity to churches and schools.

Weaverville area residents expressed opposition to another proposed site on Goldview Drive, citing the prison's potential negative impact on property values in the surrounding vicinity.

But Kingston gave the Marshall town board a rundown of what he said are the advantages of locating a prison facility in Madison County.

Those advantages, according to Kingston, include:

- \$5.6 million in construction funds alone would be spent on the prison.
- Some 125 new jobs would be created when the facility is completed.

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BILL STUDENC PHOTO

SBI Agent R.L. Knowles sifts through the remains of a Monday night fire in the Meadow Fork section of Madison County. Two men died in the blaze, which is still under investigation.

## Late Night Fire Claims 2 Lives In Meadow Fork

By BILL STUDENC  
Editor

Two residents of the Meadow Fork section of Madison County died late Monday night when a fire raged through their one-story farmhouse.

Authorities have tentatively identified the victims as Dale Balding, 62, and his son Jimmy Balding, 32.

Those identifications are tentative until the N.C. Medical Examiner's Office in Chapel Hill can examine the remains for positive identification, authorities said.

The cause of the fire, which destroyed the Balding house, is still under investigation by local fire officials and the N.C. State Bureau of Investigation.

SBI arson investigators Mica Elliott and R.L. Knowles were at the scene of the blaze all day Tuesday, sifting through ashes and charred wreckage for evidence.

"The cause of the fire is undetermined at this time. The house was totally consumed by fire," said Bill Matthews, assistant director of the SBI's regional office in Asheville.

It may take investigators some time to determine the cause of the fire, Matthews said. All that remained of the house was a rock foundation, a chimney, a tin roof and metal objects from inside.

"The problem with a fire like this, when the house is totally consumed,

is that it makes it real hard to establish points of origin and find out exactly what might have caused the fire," Matthews said.

Elliott and Knowles were interviewing friends and family members Tuesday, trying to learn information that might help in their investigation.

The victims' bodies were burned beyond recognition, authorities said. Arson is not suspected in the fire; nor has it been ruled out, Matthews said.

Much of Elliott and Knowles' work Tuesday centered around the fireplace area of the house.

Bobby Clark, chief of Spring Creek Volunteer Fire Department, said the fire apparently began sometime around 11 p.m. Monday.

"We got the call at about 11:15 Monday night," Clark said. "The house was completely gone by the time we got there. Nothing was even standing."

Clark estimated that 90 percent of the home was burned in the fire.

Fire fighters arrived at the scene at about 11:30 p.m., and worked until 3:30 a.m. Tuesday to extinguish the blaze.

Subfreezing temperatures hindered the firefighters' efforts, Clark said.

A tired Clark was still at the scene late Tuesday afternoon as SBI agents sifted through the charred debris.

## Cable Rate Hike Legal, Company Says

By BILL STUDENC  
Editor

Several disgruntled customers of CenCom, the cable television company serving the Marshall area, stormed Marshall Town Hall Monday to complain about a nearly 21 percent increase in rates.

But Paul Dezendorf, regional manager for the cable company, told a group of about 20 residents that federal deregulation of the cable television industry allows his company to charge whatever rates it deems necessary.

Dezendorf traveled from Bakersville to Marshall at the request of Marshall Mayor Anita Ward to field questions from angry customers, who have been asking town officials about the rate increase.

CenCom's basic cable rates increased from \$16.75 a month to \$20.25, a hike of 20.5 percent.

Ed Ehler was one of several customers on hand to ask Dezendorf if CenCom's franchise agreement with the town of Marshall did not require governing board approval of rate increases.

"According to this, monthly rates can't increase more than a year without the governing board's approval," Dezendorf said.

town board," Ward said, reading from the franchise agreement with CenCom.

"That, under federal law, doesn't stand, and hasn't for some time," Dezendorf said.

Congress in 1984 approved legislation stripping municipalities of much of their control over cable companies. The regulation of rates is one of those controls that towns no longer have, Dezendorf said.

Ehler then criticized CenCom for failing to provide its customers with advance warning of the rate increase.

"We got our bills from you in the middle of the month stating that our bills would increase, retroactive to the first of the month," Ehler said. "It seems to me common courtesy to tell the people ahead of time, not after the fact."

Also adding to the consumers' ire is the "fact that the cable system stinks, and only works half of the time satisfactorily," he said.

Other customers complained that CenCom has not picked up any new customers in several years, including several would-be customers who live adjacent to people who do have cable service.

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## Economic War Brewing In Madison County

### Marshall Merchants Form Association

By ANNE KITCHELL  
Staff Writer

It is no secret Madison County is financially troubled.

On any given day, one can stand on the U.S. 25-70 Bypass and watch potential retail and industrial dollars head for Buncombe County.

Over the past five years, the fatality rate for businesses has tripled, with very few new businesses to take their place.

A less-hearty community might simply give up. But that's not the case in Madison County. Concerned people on both ends of the county are in the process of doing something about the county's seemingly bleak economic future.

In Marshall, a group of concerned citizens has joined forces with the newly formed Marshall Merchants' Association to consider ways to promote the town.

A similar effort is under way in Hot Springs (See related story).

The Marshall group, headed by Ed Fender, has met five times since January to discuss positive ways citizens can help the town grow.

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### Hot Springs Reactivates Chamber Of Commerce

By ANNE KITCHELL  
Staff Writer

The movement to save Madison County businesses is spreading throughout several communities.

In Hot Springs, more than 30 area businesses and individuals have banded together to reactivate the defunct Hot Springs Area Chamber of Commerce to promote industry and growth.

For more than a month, the steadily increasing number of concerned citizens have met to discuss what can be done about Hot Springs' faltering economy.

The group has done more than discuss. So far it has elected a new 17-member board of directors, sought the advice of an industrial commission expert and formed an industry committee.

Hot Springs Mayor Kenny Ramsey and Industrial Commission advisor Ann Payne will meet with House Speaker Lister Ramsey of Madison County next week in Raleigh to discuss ways to promote the entire Hot Springs area.

According to newly elected chamber Chairman Bobby Funder, the main thrust of the initiative is to

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## Chandler Hearing Postponed

A hearing to determine the location of the second trial of Andrew "Junior" Chandler, charged with sexually abusing seven pre-school children, has been rescheduled to Friday.

A Madison County jury was unable to reach a verdict in the two-week trial of Chandler, 29, last week. Superior Court Judge James A. Beatty Jr. declared a mistrial, and prosecutors immediately asked for a new trial, but in a different county.

Beatty had scheduled a hearing on the prosecution's motion for a change of venue Monday in Yancey County Superior Court in Burnsville. But the hearing on that motion will now be held Friday in a special session of Madison County Superior Court.

That session will be held at Marshall Elementary School, said Jim Baker, assistant district attorney for the 26th Judicial District.

The reason for postponing the hearing is so that Beatty can rule on the motion, rather than another judge, Baker said.

"The judge is familiar with what happened during the trial, and would be more familiar with the arguments

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