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WNC Digs Out From Snowstorm

From Staff Reports

Western North Carolinians are still digging out in the wake of the winter's first major snowstorm, which dumped up to a foot of snow on Madison and Buncombe counties last week.

The storm, despite its intensity, seemed to cause few major problems - thanks at least in part to advance warning from weather forecasters.

Grocery stores were jammed all day last Wednesday as residents geared up for the big storm that was rolling across the nation's midsection on a collision course with the South. Those shoppers, who stocked up on staple items including milk, eggs and bread, weren't to be disappointed.

Snow started falling on Madison and Buncombe counties in the early morning hours last Thursday, and it didn't let up until dark, leaving a ton of the white stuff covering everything.

Although there was a ton of it, the snow didn't prove to be particularly slippery, as temperatures in the teens apparently resulted in a drier snow. Roads became more slippery over the weekend, after some of the snow began to melt during the daytime hours, only to refreeze at night.

The heavy snowfall and subsequent thawing and refreezing kept many workers and customers at home - and off the roads - late last week.

Law enforcement agencies reported only a few minor accidents during and after the snowstorm.

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BILL STUDENC PHOTOS
Road crews fought a losing battle Thursday to keep the streets clear of snow (top), while Scott Studenc, a snowbound visitor from Greenville, found walking the best way to get to town (bottom).

Mars Hill Considers Fire District, Tax

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Mars Hill officials are hoping residents of Beech Glen, East Fork and Grapevine townships will agree to a fire tax to help pay for the continuation of fire protection currently provided by the town at no charge.

If residents in those townships don't agree to the special tax, Mars Hill officials say they may be forced to stop providing fire protection to areas located outside the town limits.

"The town's financial situation is just like everybody else's - tight," said Eddie Fox, Mars Hill fire chief. "In a matter of time, the town is going to have to cut out fire protection

outside the city limits unless we get assistance in funding from somewhere."

That "somewhere" may be from residents of unincorporated townships who currently receive free fire protection from the Mars Hill Fire Department.

The Mars Hill Board of Aldermen, during its regularly scheduled meeting last week, unanimously agreed to endorse a proposed fire tax district for Beech Glen, East Fork and Grapevine townships.

Although the proposal had already won the approval of the previous town administration, Fox asked the newly elected board to show its support for

the plan before he takes steps to establish a fire district.

"We are hoping to obtain funding from the people outside the city limits for the fire department," Fox said this week. "The town has been paying all the department's expenses, other than the small amount we raise through fund-raising events and donations."

The town of Mars Hill has allocated about \$35,000 a year for the operation of the Mars Hill Fire Department, he said.

But, during the past four years, the majority of fire calls received by the Mars Hill Fire Department have

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Water Quality Problems Continue In Marshall

By BILL STUDENC
Editor

Marshall officials say they are not particularly pleased with the results they've seen so far from a filtration system designed to remove impurities from the town's water supply.

The system was installed late last summer at a cost of about \$50,000. Although many Marshall residents said they noticed some improvement in the water quality a few months after the installation of the filters, water quality has declined in recent weeks.

"I've been disappointed with the water," said Alderman Ed "Doc" Niles. "We got these filters in and we've not seen the improvement that

I expected."

The problem, said town clerk Linda Dodson, is that employees of the town water department have not been flushing water lines and fire hydrants on a regular schedule.

"We need to do that," Dodson said. "If we do that on a regular basis, that will really clean it up."

The Marshall board agreed last year to spend \$50,000 on a filtration system to help remove the iron and manganese that has historically given Marshall's water supply an unpleasant taste, odor and color.

Town officials told residents not to look for any improvement in water quality for up to three months - that's the estimated length of time it would take for the filters to clean out the en-

tire system.

During the fall, many Marshall residents called Town Hall after the system began to work, resulting in cleaner water. Residents have recently started calling Town Hall again - this time to voice complaints about water quality.

"It (the water) looks like watered-down tea," Dodson said. Regular maintenance of water lines and fire hydrants should take care of the problem, she said.

When the lines and fire hydrants are not flushed, iron and manganese get into the water lines, she said.

Town officials agreed to instruct town water department employees to

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Movie To Be Filmed In Marshall; Extras Needed

From Staff Reports

If you've always wanted to see your smiling face grace the big screen, you may soon get your chance.

"Trapper County," a major motion picture to be produced by Noble Entertainment, Inc., will be filmed beginning later this month in the Marshall and Asheville areas.

And producers are looking for "hundreds of extras" to be used during the on-location filming.

Not much information has been released about "Trapper County," described by film producers as "an action-packed adventure." The names of the stars of the film, to be directed by Ed Murphy, have not yet been released.

Film crews will be in the Asheville-Marshall area for about five weeks to shoot the movie.

Location casting calls for people of all ages and types will be held this

weekend in Marshall and Asheville.

"The people of Asheville and Marshall are gracious enough to allow us to be their guest here, and in return we would like to use as many people from this area as possible," said Pam Plummer, location casting director for Fincannon and Associates casting company, based in Wilmington.

A casting call for Madison County residents will be held Saturday from

10 a.m. until 6 p.m. at Madison High School. Open casting calls are also scheduled for Friday, Saturday and Sunday at the Asheville Mall. Registration for the casting calls will begin in Asheville at 1 p.m. each day and last until 6 p.m.

The film's producers are seeking local residents "with flexible schedules," Plummer said. Some roles will require only a few days of work while others will require

several weeks, she said.

No acting experience is necessary, she said. All roles as extras are paying roles.

Those interested in a role in "Trapper County" should attend one of the casting calls and take a recent Polaroid-size photo to accompany the application.

A photographer will be on hand to

take photos of those who do not have a recent picture. There will be a \$2 charge to cover the cost of the film and the photographer's time.

Plummer, who recently was on location near Banner Elk for the filming of "The Winter People" starring Kelly McGillis and Kurt Russell, said she is looking forward to working in the Marshall area.

U.S. 25-70 Project To Begin

From Staff Reports

The N.C. Board of Transportation has awarded a \$212,051 contract to a Skyland firm to begin work on the first phase of improvements on U.S. 25-70 near Hot Springs.

The contract, awarded to Blue Ridge Structure Co. by board during its Jan. 8 meeting, calls for the clearing of brush and timber from a 2.5-mile corridor between Tanyard Gap and N.C. 208 to be excavated for construction of the redesigned U.S. 25-70.

The clearing of land at the intersec-

tion of N.C. 209 and U.S. 25-70 at the Laurel River is the first step in the first phase of a proposed \$31.5 million project to modernize U.S. 25-70 through the Hot Springs area.

The entire 10.8-mile project, to be built at an average cost of \$3 million per mile, is expected to be complete by the autumn of 1994. The project is designed to remove hairpin turns and steep grades, making U.S. 25-70 a safer highway, state transportation officials say.

The first step - the clearing of land along the first phase of the project -

will allow the Department of Transportation's photogrammetry unit to obtain clearer aerial photographs of the region, said Bill Jones, public relations officer for DOT. The photos will be used to determine how much earth must be moved during the grading of the highway, Jones said.

Aerial photographs are the best way of obtaining data needed for construction of a highway in a mountainous region, said John R. Sutton of Candier, the transportation board's representative from Division 13,

which includes Madison County. The best time to photograph the region is in May, Sutton said.

Clearing of the area should begin later this month.

A contract for grading and paving of the cleared section is scheduled to be awarded in the fall.

Work on the second phase of the project, a 5.8-mile section of U.S. 25-70 from Hot Springs to the Tennessee state line, should begin in 1990, while work on the portion of U.S. 25-70 from the top of Tanyard Gap to Hot Springs is expected to start in 1991.

2 Convicted In Federal Tobacco Fraud Case

ASHEVILLE - A U.S. District Court jury has convicted the owner of a Tennessee burley warehouse and a warehouse employee with violating federal tobacco marketing laws.

A third man involved in the charges - Roy Yates Ammons of Mars Hill, president of the WNC Burley Tobacco Growers Association and a member of the board of directors of the Tobacco Growers Association of North

Carolina - pleaded guilty in November and agreed to testify against the other two defendants.

The jury returned verdicts of guilty against Glen Samuel Martin Jr., owner of Big Burley Tobacco Warehouse in Johnson City, Tenn., and Maynard Don Cody of Marshall, who hauled tobacco to Martin's warehouse from Madison County.

The jury, after about an hour of

deliberations Monday, found the two men guilty of charges of conspiring to illegally market tobacco in violation of federal tobacco regulations.

All three men, indicted on the conspiracy charges in September, will be sentenced today (Thursday) in U.S. District Court in Asheville.

Ammons agreed to plead guilty and to testify if the U.S. Attorney's Office agreed to make no recommendations

concerning the sentence he will receive.

Ammons testified last week that he offered to Martin, through Cody, excess allotments remaining on his U.S. Department of Agriculture tobacco marketing cards in January 1986.

Federal tobacco marketing regulations prohibit the use of marketing cards by anyone other than the grower who produced the tobacco.

Ammons testified that he received \$6,911.26 from Martin, again through Cody. That amount represented 50 cents for each of the 13,823 pounds of tobacco Martin bought, he said.

Martin then drew up phony bills of sale and checks to cover the sale, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Ammons and Martin never discussed the transaction with each other, according to testimony.

The men could be sentenced to up to five years and could receive up to a \$25,000 fine.

Madison Authorities Investigate Rape

The Madison County Sheriff's Department is investigating the alleged rape of an Asheville woman in the Panhandle section of the county Sunday morning.

The woman, 36, told authorities that she was kidnapped in the Asheville area and taken across the Madison-Buncombe county line where she was raped of about 20

and raped.

The woman said she had been at a party in Asheville when she got in an argument with her boyfriend, said Dal Peak, Madison County chief deputy. The woman left the party and was walking along a street when a man offered her a ride, Peak said.

The woman told authorities that the man, driving a tan or light-colored

Mustang, drove her into Madison County where he raped her.

Authorities are searching for a man, about 3-5 or 3-6, with a small build and brown, wavy hair.

Authorities say they do not have any suspects in the crime.

Anyone with any information is asked to contact the Madison County Sheriff's Department at 525-3723.

Contel, Southern Bell To Reduce Rates After State Ruling

From Staff Reports

Telephone customers can look forward to a reduction in their monthly telephone bills, thanks to action taken last week by the N.C. Utilities Commission.

The commission has ordered that five investor-owned public telephone companies - including Continental Telephone Co. of North Carolina and Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Co. - reduce their rates.

Continental Telephone customers will see their rates reduced by 5.44 percent, while Southern Bell customers' rates will fall by 9.02 percent.

The rate reductions result from the federal Tax Reform Act of 1986, which lowered corporate income tax rates by 12 percent. The Utilities Commission, after a lengthy investigation into the impact of tax reform on public utilities, has ordered that the telephone companies pass along those savings to their customers.

The commission began its investigation on Oct. 23, 1986, and concluded it Oct. 20, 1987, with an order calling for telephone companies to file tariff reduction plans. The commission approved those plans last week.

For Continental customers, the 3.44 percent rate reduction will mean a savings of 36 cents per month (\$11.40 per year) for residential users - down from \$17.35 a month to \$14.91. Business

customers should save \$2.41 per month (\$28.92 annually), a decrease from \$44.30 to \$41.89 in the monthly charge.

The 9.02 percent rate reduction for Southern Bell customers will mean a \$1.24-per-month savings for residential users. The monthly rate will drop from \$13.75 to \$12.51 for an annual savings of \$14.88. Business customers will see the monthly rate fall by \$3.41, from \$37.30 to \$33.89, for a yearly savings of \$40.92.

Other telephone companies affected by the Utilities Commission action are ALLTEL Carolina, Inc., Sandhill Telephone Co. and Lexington Telephone Co.

In a second order proposed last week by commission officials, statewide telephone services standards would be established.

The commission has proposed a set of 19 requirements for local telephone companies, and is now awaiting comment from telephone company officials.

Those suggested standards include:

- Answering 95 percent of directory assistance calls within 10 seconds.

- Having no more than 10 percent of pay phones out of order.

- Having no more than 4.75 trouble reports from every 100 lines.

- Repairing 95 percent of telephone out of service within 48 hours.