

Around Town

BY SAM C. MORRIS

The weather is still about normal for this time of year and most people would like to see more rain. According to Robert Gatlin, chart maker for this paper, the light rain for last month was not so unusual. It seems for the past few years the April showers haven't been as heavy as one would expect to bring the May flowers.

Gatlin's chart should appear elsewhere in the paper even though it was not in the office as this column was being penned.

Anyway it seems that the winter has moved on and that the oil and gas bills will be reduced for the summer months.

The clean-up campaign a couple of weekends ago in Raeford was well worth the effort by those that were the leaders of the project and also those that participated in it in any way. Many eye sores were removed from Main Street and this makes for a cleaner and more beautiful city.

All of these folks are to be commended and just think what would have happened if everyone in the city would have joined the project and given forth just half of what the ones that worked, put out.

There are still many things to be accomplished and these are in the planning stages at this time. So if you are called on or can give assistance to this project, please do so.

Mrs. Clarence Brown called this week and asked that I mention a need that has come up at the Raeford Children's Center that is located in the Lennon Building of the First Baptist Church. Volunteers are needed from 8:00 to 9:30 a.m. and from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. to help move the children from the van to the building and to help place them out on the playground.

There are nine children at the Center at the present time and most or all of them are pre-school age children.

Also this project needs to be shifted from the church to another location as the Baptists are in need of the space now being used by this group. If you know of a house or building that would be suitable, please contact Warren Pate, chairman of this project. They are not looking for charity and will be willing to pay for the use of the place.

This is a worthwhile undertaking, so if you can give aid to them, please do so. Thanks!

I haven't attended a meeting of the Board of Education, but from all reports a larger conference room could be used. The reason that brings out the crowd is not good but for people to get interested in the elective bodies of the county is very healthy.

Monday night according to reports over 35 citizens showed up for the monthly meeting of the Board of Education. There were no big issues at stake, but still they were at the meeting.

Also Monday night the conference room at City Hall was jammed with citizens and they were there over the controversial one-way Elwood Avenue. This is also a good thing.

Being a member of the City Council, I know how the members of the Board of Education feel when the citizens show up in numbers. You look out and see friends, or people you thought were your friends, and you say to yourself, "why is he or she out there?" Yes, it makes the night somewhat longer, but think from another viewpoint. "It is good to see citizens take an interest in the way the city or schools are run."

We asked for these offices by putting our name before the people. We must realize that we must be accountable to them for our actions.

So maybe it would be easier on elective officials if a number of citizens turned up at every meeting instead of just when a big issue is to be voted on.

Now for the people who show up at these meetings to have a chip on their shoulder and don't want to see but one side, then you should run
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School Board Shifts Principals, Public's Criticism Continues



MOTHER'S DAY -- Mrs. Charles L. McDonald displays photographs of her six children, Ann Herndon, Charles McDonald, Agnes Covington, Patricia McDonald, George McDonald, and Virginia Morgan. Mrs. McDonald, 67, who resides in the Open Arms Rest Home in Raeford, is expecting a big celebration this Mother's Day with many of her children, six grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. (Photo by S.H. Aplin)

Edwards: 'Not Over'

Principal Allen Edwards, visibly shaken by Wednesday night's board of education decision, said he will accept the new assignment to the junior high but that he is retaining his legal counsel and intends to "explore any options" left to him.

"As long as I stay in Hoke County school system I'll support the board, I do not agree with their decision but I'll continue to work with the board as long as I am employed in Hoke County", he said.

Edwards said he wouldn't make up his mind about re-applying for the high school post but would re-assess his position at the end of the year.

Edwards said no other charge, except the four outlined by the superintendent publicly, were brought to him and he declined to discuss any details of the private sessions he has had with the board.

The principal also said he suspended nine students last week in connection with a demonstration planned at the board of education offices on Wooley St. The demonstration, intended to show support for Edwards, fizzled out.

Edwards said the nine were suspended for leaving school grounds without permission. Six of the students had been re-admitted as of this Monday and the other three had not, he said. A parent conference is required by the school before suspensions are lifted.

Amid growing protests from parents and students, the board of education last week ordered Allen Edwards transferred to Upchurch Junior High and an organized group, Citizens In Support of Education in Hoke County, has sprung into existence to oppose the board's recent actions.

The decision to transfer Edwards came during a special meeting of the board Wednesday night last week which drew as many as 40 persons at one time. The board went into an executive session which lasted until shortly after 11 p.m. On a 3-0 vote, with board members Bill Howell and Riley M. Jordan absent, Edwards was ordered transferred to the junior high as principal on a one-year basis with the opportunity to re-apply for the high school post at the end of the year. As a career status employee, his salary cannot be downgraded and he will continue to draw \$23,788.

Earl H. Oxendine, the Upchurch principal, will go to the high school as principal on a one-year basis.

The Wednesday night announcement was met with a storm of protest from the audience, who lingered after the meeting formally adjourned and challenged chairman Bobby Gibson and Mina Townsend and Ruth McNair with a barrage of questions.

Gibson, fielding the questions directed at the three, failed to give a specific reason for the transfer Wednesday night, however, following the close of the board's next meeting this Monday night, he told the crowd that "we'll wind up in court in a minute if we divulge more than a certain amount of information".

"There are certain things we just cannot divulge. Frankly, we want to take a positive attitude and put it behind us. We're not going to drag the whole thing out in public. It can only harm Mr. Edwards further," Gibson said.

Richard Coker, a retired Army officer who identified himself as temporary chairman of Citizens in Support of Education in Hoke County, asked whether any alternatives to the transfer had been considered.

Gibson replied there were several alternatives but he couldn't explain them without divulging "privileged information".

Monday night, also, the board announced that M.H. Williams, assistant principal at Upchurch, will be transferred to Hoke High as assistant principal, and Joanne Moses, Upchurch guidance counselor, will go to the high school as guidance counselor. School Supt. G. Raz Autry said both moves had been requested by Oxendine.

Coker and others expressed disapproval at the new transfers, saying that the removal of two "key" people at the junior high would further weaken the situation and put both schools in shaky positions administratively.

Coker held an impromptu meeting outside the board building to enlist support for his committee before the board's decisions were announced Monday night. He said his group would try to reserve the courtroom for a 'big' meeting within a week or two. Between 35-40 listened to Coker.

Another executive session was called before 9 p.m. and the three board members, along with attorney Bill Moses and the superintendent, met with high school guidance counselor Bobby Locklear, who was accompanied by an official of the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), B.R. King. Locklear had requested the hearing.

Following the closed door meeting, the board reversed its decision of April 4 and voted to give Locklear 12 months of employment with a transfer to Upchurch.

Locklear, a counselor for the past seven years and a tenured employee, was ordered to cut back to 10 months of employment at the April 4 meeting. The new decision orders him back to full pay with the stipulation that one month of summer employment be at the high school and one month at the junior high.

Autry had no comment on the move but Mrs. Townsend said it was decided earlier that there was not enough work at the high school for two full months.

Locklear, 40, refused comment on his private meeting with the board.

The board also approved a change in the official minutes of their April 4 meeting without comment when the minutes were read Monday night. On a motion from Mrs. Townsend, an entry was ordered made in the record to reflect that the board took final action on the Edwards matter during that meeting.

The school officials came under criticism from news organizations and members of the public after it was disclosed by Edwards that he was notified April 5 of the decision to dismiss him. At that time, the board and superintendent were unaware that he was a tenured employee under state law and could not be dismissed.

Before leaving the Monday night meeting, Gibson explained that the Edwards-Oxendine switch will cost around \$2,500 in local tax dollars, since Edwards' pay cannot be reduced and Oxendine's will increase since he is going to a larger school. Gibson said it was his understanding that none of the other transfers will have any impact on local tax money.

Autry said Oxendine's present base salary at Upchurch is \$19,884, made up entirely of state funds. He is paid no local cash supplement, but has a rent-free residence in place of a supplement. He will continue to get the residence while at the high school, Autry said.

The base salary for the new high school principal will not be known until July 1 when the state approves new scales, Autry said, but it will be \$21,588 or higher.

Mental Health Clinic Asked

Sandhills Mental Health Center officials outlined a plan to establish a separate facility within Hoke County and expand a wide range of mental health services here Monday morning to county commissioners.

V. Paul McDonald, unit director for SMHC, presented the agency's proposed budget for fiscal 1977-78 and requested an additional \$23,957 to establish a clinic separate from the Hoke County Health Center. Hoke County is the only area in the five-county mental health region which does not operate a separate clinic.

McDonald told the group that this plan was preferred to the alternative, which would be to increase space for the mental health staff which currently visits the health center here five days a week. Under the proposal, four full-time positions would be established here, a psychologist, social worker, alcoholism counselor and school psychologist.

McDonald said a suitable house for the clinic has already been located, a two-bedroom rental unit on Palmer St. west of the city. It would be operated on a long-range basis under the recommendation of a zoning exception can be obtained and objections are not made by neighbors.

The overall operating budget for Hoke County for the coming year proposes \$36,935 in local matching funds, not including the cost of the proposed new clinic. Most of the \$36,935 represents county general funds and ABC store contributions.

Commissioners made no decision Monday on the request, agreeing to table the matter until the budget sessions later on.

The current caseload of patients receiving mental health care is 223. SMHC has experienced a 82 percent increase in patients over the past year.

Water System

In other business Monday, the board heard a presentation on the idea of a county-wide water system from Phil Shu of Odell Associates Inc., Greensboro-based consulting engineers.

BI Pay Hike Set

Burlington Industries last week announced a pay increase for production employees, effective June 13.

Burlington officials said the upward wage adjustment will affect about 50,000 wage employees at Company operations in 10 states.

Burlington's last general wage increase was in June, 1976.

Precinct Meetings Thursday

Democratic party precinct meetings for the election of precinct officers and committee members and delegates to the county convention will be held tonight (Thursday) at 8 p.m., chairman Sam Morris announced.

The meetings will convene in each polling place. A quorum is 10 persons and in the event a quorum is not present, the meeting will be re-scheduled for next Thursday night.

Precinct officers are a chairman, three vice-chairmen and a secretary-treasurer. Terms of office are two years. Party rules require that no two officers may be of the same family.

Delegates to the June 18 county convention will be elected. Under the formula of one delegate for each 50 gubernatorial votes cast in the last election, the 13 precincts will have the following number of delegates: Allendale (2), Antioch (5), Blue Springs (5), Buchan (3), McCain (4), Puppy Creek (4), Raeford one (10), Raeford two (7), Raeford three (4), Raeford four (7), Raeford five (8), Rockfish (3) and Stonewall (5).

The School Situation

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