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Faison Flies High As Astronaut Returns Home



WELCOME HOME - Along with hundreds of Duplin County residents who turned out to greet Astronaut William Thornton when he returned home to Faison was North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt. Thornton returned to Faison last Saturday for the first time since the shuttle Challenger landed from its mission in space more than a month ago.

The Duplin astronaut is the oldest man ever to go into space and is scheduled to lift-off again next year in another shuttle mission. The Duplin County Commissioners were present to welcome Thornton home and presented him with a portrait painted by Duplin artist Mark Patrus. Thornton is pictured above with the portrait of himself.

To some he will always be a student. To others, the boy next door. At least one woman claims him as a distant cousin.

But to all people of Faison, Dr. William E. Thornton Jr. is their pride, their friend, their home-grown astronaut.

Saturday was Thornton's homecoming in Faison, with a pig pickin', speeches by politicians, and plenty of pomp and circumstance to honor his successful flight on the space shuttle Challenger.

West Center Street was packed with more than 3,000 people who listened as Thornton recalled his days growing up in Duplin County and his space voyage, which took him around the world 98 times in less than a week.

In his lengthy speech, Thornton's voice cracked at times as he spoke of his mother, his paper route, the local church and "the brick school that no longer stands."

He called Faison's residents "a rich people" who should cherish their thriving traditions and fertile farmland.

"I can tell you by flying over the earth, you just don't know how lucky you are," said Thornton, who is 54. "I looked down on this world and saw the massive deserts and realized many of the people are just striving to keep body and soul together."

In closing, the nation's oldest astronaut offered a bit of wisdom: "I have learned that this is one world, a small world. It is in your hands and in towns like Faison that the future of the world rests."

Gov. Jim Hunt proclaimed Thornton "North Carolina's one and only astronaut" and announced Thornton's next mission, on the Spacelab III in 1984. U.S. Rep. Charles O. Whitley shared the stage with the governor, along with state Sen. Harold W. Hardison.

After the ceremony, the real fun began. Townspeople put on a barbecue boasting 15 hogs, 200 pounds of hushpuppies and mounds of coleslaw, all served in the garage of the Faison Fire Station.

Thornton hardly had time to indulge, however, as well-wishers streamed steadily past his table. Nearby tables were filled with former classmates and teachers who felt a special pride in Thornton's accomplishments.

"Back in those days, we couldn't comprehend going into space," said Elizabeth Matthews, Thornton's seventh grade teacher. "But with all his ideas and initiative, I knew he would get somewhere."

"I am very proud that I can boast having a little part in his education," Ms. Matthews added.

As Thornton moved through the makeshift dining hall, children tugged at his coat and grownups flagged him down, calling out "William, remember me?"

Mildred Kornegay remembered Thornton as her back-door neighbor. Maurice Watts of Tabor City called him "my distant cousin."

Posters on the walls of the firehouse displayed verses of Dixie Shuttle, a song composed by North Duplin Junior High students to be sung to the tune of Yankee Doodle. Chip Stall wrote: Dr. Thornton keep it up, you're our pride and joy. Dr. Thornton we all know that you're our hometown boy."

Other homemade verses referred to Thornton's experiments with weightlessness and one said he had to eat the mice he was testing in space.

Jim Long of Burlington appeared to be the only candidate campaigning Saturday as he shook hands and sought support for his effort to become state insurance commissioner.

Jane Hollingsworth, an organizer of the event, said it was a success. "The feeling of pride that has come from William has just been tremendous," Mrs. Hollingsworth said. "We look forward to him going up and coming back home again."

Thornton now lives with his wife and sons in Friendswood, Texas, near NASA headquarters but maintains a family home in Faison.

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Apparel Industry On Rise In Duplin

Duplin's apparel workers were considered the third largest category of unemployed during January. Last week the opening of a children's wear manufacturing company was announced in Warsaw.

The apparel industry, like textiles in Duplin, has suffered from plant closings and heavy lay-offs during the past three years, which the Kenansville Employment Security Commission Supervisor Dennis Kirby said pushed the two occupations into the first and third categories of unemployed. Construction workers filled the second highest category of unemployed in Duplin. Since early this year, both garment and textile companies have been hiring and Kirby said the apparel industry is currently in full operation throughout the county.

Duplin Manufacturing Company, Inc., makers of children's sportswear, opened last Saturday taking applications at the plant in Warsaw with expectations of immediately employing 50 people. And, while the new job opportunities are available with Duplin Manufacturing, Kirby said, the apparel industry is predominately operated by women, with few employment prospects for men.

The Kenansville Employment Security Commission has approximately 100 active applicants filed as apparel workers. And, an estimated third of the applicants are currently receiving unemployment benefits, Kirby said. Apparel workers are estimated to make up about four percent of all the applicants on file at the Kenansville Employment Security Commission.

"State and federal unemployment benefits and extensions have been exhausted by many apparel workers," Kirby said. "And, if they have not been in the Employment Security office within the last 60 days, their files would not appear with the active applicants." The active and inactive occupations files total about 4,000 at the Kenansville Employment Security Commission.

Duplin's total unemployment has dropped two percent since January, from 14.7 to 12.5 percent in August. A total of 2,455 people were unemployed in January and

August figures at the Kenansville Employment Security Commission show 2,131 unemployed in the county.

Duplin Manufacturing Company is owned and operated by Nick Gambella of Goldsboro. The Gambella family operates similar manufacturing operations in Wayne, Lenoir, Edgecomb and Johnston counties. The Warsaw plant will sew under its own label for distribution to major department stores throughout the country. Applications for sewing machine operators, trimmers, inspectors, service personnel and mechanics were taken at the plant last Saturday. Additional applications will be taken until the plant is in full operation. Employees are scheduled to begin work at Duplin Manufacturing Monday, Gambella said. When in full operation, the manufacturing company expects to employ 175-200 people.

"Business has been picking up for our operations," Nick Gambella, operator of Duplin Manufacturing, said. "We are very optimistic about the coming year and feel like the recession is on the way out. And, even more, I think the public feels the recession is ending because they have begun to buy garments again." According to Gambella, the major reason for locating a manufacturing operation in Duplin is the central location to other family-owned plants and the availability of experienced apparel workers in the area.

Kornegay Gets 30 Months For Embezzlement

The former president-elect of the N.C. State Bar was sentenced to 30 months in prison last week for his convictions on embezzlement and false pretense charges.

Wayne Superior Court Judge John C. Martin sentenced Mount Olive attorney George R. Kornegay to 18 months for the embezzlement charge and 30 months for the false pretense charge, to run concurrently.

Kornegay, who also was given a 30-month suspended sentence for embezzling corporate funds, wept during the sentencing hearing.

Martin disbarred Kornegay, but that action automatically was waived pending the outcome of his appeal. Kornegay was released under \$10,000 bond pending the appeal.

The judgment recommended work release for Kornegay on the condition he pay \$21,000 restitution to a client.

Martin said Kornegay committed serious offenses that were made more serious by the stature and reputation he had enjoyed. He also said Kornegay's actions disgraced the profession.

"This is one of the most important trials over which I've presided," Martin said.

A jury of 11 men and one woman found Kornegay guilty of embezzlement, false pretense and embezzlement of corporate funds Tuesday of last week after deliberating only 30 minutes.

Kornegay was tried on the three charges after Martin dismissed two charges of corporate malfeasance. His sentencing came after 12 character witnesses testified Kornegay had always acted with the highest degree of integrity.

But the prosecutors said Kornegay had violated the public trust and had caused "irreparable" damage to the legal profession.

"It's not like a store clerk who has embezzled," said one. "He's a man who took an oath to take on the responsibility of a profession that is grounded in trust."

The state charged that Kornegay wrote a \$14,500 check on an invalid client's trust fund to make a payment on personal property he was buying. It also accused him of telling a client he had settled a damage suit for her for \$125,000 when he had settled it for \$104,000.

He also was accused of

putting legal fees he received into his personal account instead of the firm's account.

District Attorney Donald

M. Jacobs said he had no comment on 26 embezzlement charges still pending against Kornegay.

Watson Poultry Firm Chief Says Efforts Futile

Final efforts to salvage the bankrupt Watson Seafood and Poultry Co. in Rose Hill are useless because the company hasn't gotten loans to match federal grant money, Ebern Watson Jr., company president, said.

Watson addressed about 150 workers, poultry growers and politicians Friday night at Chinquapin Primary School.



Ebern Watson said he couldn't get enough in loans to match grant money.

Workers and growers convinced town board members in Rose Hill to apply for a \$795,000 Urban Development Association Grant in September. Watson said Friday he asked 12 lending organizations for help, but was unable to make the 2-to-1 fund match required to get the grant.

Watson also said he offered controlling interest in the company to one lender, but was turned down.

When presented with statements showing debts totaling \$5.5 million, lending institutions want to know what the company can do to show a profit, Watson said. No plan presented satisfied them, he added.

Falling broiler prices spurred by an oversupply of chickens have soured the industry outlook for the near future, Watson said.

"We're our own worst enemies. Through genetic research we can double our output most any time," Watson said. "Too much supply means low prices, but that's the way it's supposed to be. That's the American way."

A plan for voluntary liquidation went into effect at the company April 15. Watson has debts totaling \$5.6 million, including \$2.5 million owed to Coastal Production Credit Association of Kenansville.

Poultry operations at the company slowed to a halt this summer. Only the feed mill is still in use, grinding feed for a local hog producer. Bids for the mill will be opened Friday, Watson said.

Company assets will be turned over to a bankruptcy trustee Nov. 21 unless the company can show the court that reorganization plans will make the company show a profit.

Dissolving the company will cost the Rose Hill area about 300 jobs. At worst, that translates to a loss of more than \$2.5 million annually in wages.

Workers who spoke Friday said they needed money to

last the winter. Some said they would have to take their children out of college because of the plant's closing.

Grower Geraldine Thigpen of Chinquapin said she could tend her chickens and care for her blind husband at home. "I'm a grower. Growers get no unemployment. Something has to be done to help us," Ms. Thigpen said.

Southern Duplin County is the center of a huge turkey and broiler chicken industry.

A local natural gas sup-

plier said the shutdown has cut sales at his business 10 to 15 percent.

"It's like a merry-go-round," said Duplin County Commissioners Chairman Bill Costin. "It touches one and another and another and another." Unemployment in Duplin County is 12.6 percent, Costin said.

Workers and growers were silent as Watson, the last speaker of the evening delivered his grim message.

Watson referred to the successful reorganization of

the Chrysler Corp. under its chief executive, Lee Iacocca. "Sometimes a fellow bites off more than he can chew," Watson said. "It pleased me to see him (Iacocca) bite off more than he can chew and chew it."

"Chrysler had a plan. They reorganized. They showed someone that they could pay the money back."

"Under the present situation we cannot survive," Watson said. "You really can't ask the government to give money without a plan."



GUEST PANEL AT WATSON POULTRY HEARING IN CHINQUAPIN - Lewis Wrenn, aide to Congressman Charlie Whitley, Bruce Strickland of the N.C. Department of Agriculture, Katharine W. Davis, staff director, Senator East, Ray Forrest of the N.C. Department of Commerce, State

Senator Harold Hardison, State Rep. Wendell Murphy were on the panel which addressed the issue of reorganization of Watson's and heard and listened to grower and worker problems. The correct steps for reorganization were explained.

Faison Bar Fight Leaves One Dead

Jimmy Lee Harper, of Route 3 in Dudley, was shot to death Saturday night at Frank's Disco in Faison.

Harper was shot in the chest and stomach with a small-caliber weapon at 10:15 p.m. The Faison rescue squad took him to Duplin General Hospital where he

died at 11:41 p.m.

Larry Lee Fryar of 595 Elmore St. in Mount Olive was charged in the killing after surrendering to law enforcement officers Sunday morning, according to Detective E.G. Baker of the Duplin County Sheriff's Department.