

Pros and cons aired on NHRDA funding

By MIKE McLAUGHLIN

Opponents and proponents of a continuation of funding for the Northeastern Rural Health Association's second year of operations in Perquimans, Bertie, and Tyrell Counties took turns expressing their views at a public hearing in Edenton Thursday night.

The Eastern Carolina Health Systems Agency

project review committee had sought additional information for a grant application of \$200,000 turned down in early August and the public was again invited to provide evidence on both sides of the issue.

According to Roy Selby, executive director of ECHSA, more information on need, cost of, and community support for the program was needed before a recom-

mendation could be made as to its continuation.

Proponents of continuation presented a parade of speakers who told the review committee that the health care program is needed because of a shortage of doctors in the three counties, and the inconvenience and danger of traveling great distances to secure medical care.

NRHDA administrator

Andy Martin told the committee that he felt all information had been properly supplied in the grant application, but produced a long list of justifications for the continuation of the program.

He said that community support in Tyrell County (a county from which the organization has been asked to leave by the county commissioners) is evidenced by the patient load of the dental

service offered there.

Some 15 to 16 patients per day have utilized the two day a week service, he said, and NRHDA plans to expand the service to three days per week because of demand.

Martin also said that a petition had been circulated there which had been signed by a minimum of 8 to 10 percent of the county's residents.

"And we could have had more if we had had more time," he said.

In addition, Martin said the organization had letters of support from the Colerain Town Council and the Colerain mayor, as well as letters from the mayor of Hertford and a letter from the Perquimans County Board of Commissioners.

Support from the mayor's office in Hertford, however, was called into question on more than one occasion.

Dr. Robert Lane, a general practitioner with offices in Edenton and Hertford, was the first to take issue with Martin's claim of support from Hertford Mayor Bill Cox.

Lane read from the Dec. 7 issue of THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY, in which Hertford mayor Bill Cox was quoted as saying, "The council endorses

better medical facilities but cannot endorse an organization that we do not understand."

Opposition to the program's continuation centered primarily around charges of mismanagement, an inflated fee schedule, duplication of services, and top heavy administrative costs.

"All of the fees vary from \$2 to \$10 greater than the customary fees in our area," Lane said.

But many persons who favored continuation claimed that the primary opposition came from those in the medical profession.

"Listen to the consumer and not to the person receiving money from the consumer," pleaded Robert Jeffries of Colerain.

A Tyrell County opponent, though, urged that the review committee go through the 117 page project proposal before acting on it. "It's made up of a lot of misleading statistics, half truths, and implied endorsements," he said.

Another Tyrell County resident said that the county is so opposed to the continuation of the program there that another rural health association has been formed

and has already enlisted some 800 members.

NRHDA is supposed to have a 20 member board of caretakers but the board is currently comprised of only 10 members, opponents said. They pointed to this situation as another indication of lack of community support.

R.L. Stevenson of Hertford was the most prolific proponent of a continuation of the medical care program.

Because of a previously unannounced policy in which those persons signed up to speak were allowed to donate their floor time to others, Stevenson was permitted to hold the floor for a greater length of time than any of the other participants.

He used his allotment to weave a strong case of community support for NRHDA in Perquimans County.

He said that in prior times much effort has been expended in attempting to attract members of the medical professions to the county but always with little success.

Stevenson said that the "overwhelmingly noble" work of the organization had been maligned and misrepresented by some members of the press.

"Some news articles would

have you believe that this is a clandestine organization out to deceive and defraud the taxpayer," Stevenson said.

The Hertford banker said he had received 24 letters of support for the organization, including letters from the mayors of Hertford and Winfall, one from the Perquimans County Board of Commissioners, and endorsements from a large number of business and community leaders.

"Let no-one leave this room and say NRHDA has no support in Perquimans County," Stevenson said. "The silent majority has just begun to speak."

Hertford resident Margaret Garrison Stowe, however, stated again that at least one town official has changed his mind about supporting NRHDA.

She said that Mayor Cox had told her he no longer supported NRHDA, but that he could not withdraw the letter of support from the town without formal action of the town council.

If funded, NRHDA plans to open an outpatient clinic in Perquimans County, and move its central offices to the Harris Shopping Center in Hertford.



Dressing up the center

Although the weather outside last Thursday was cold and rainy, the atmosphere inside the Hertford-Perquimans Senior Center was warm and inviting as some 20 area seniors

gathered for an old fashioned tree-trimming and Christmas songfest. Mrs. Callie Spruill is shown here putting the finishing touches on the Senior Center tree.

New ag chairman assumes duties here

By NOEL TODD McLAUGHLIN

If a rather burly guy with black curly hair and glasses rides up to your farm and knocks on your door, chances are that he is W.R. "Bill" Jester, Perquimans County's newly-hired Extension Chairman, who is making the rounds in an effort to meet

every farmer in the county. Although Jester has only taken over his duties as chairman for a little over a week now, he has definite ideas as to what he would like to accomplish.

One of the first provisions Jester plans to put into effect is leadership in the county's agricultural sector.

Jester mentioned several broad agricultural concerns that he would definitely examine, adding that specifics would come later as various problems are identified.

Among general concerns Jester mentioned were the development of new crops and cropping systems for the area, an increased understanding of integrated pest management, chemical controls of fungus diseases, and an intensive evaluation of new varieties of peanuts, wheat, soybeans, and corn.

Swine management systems and parasite prevention were livestock concerns Jester cited.

"The key to success is designing our extension programs to meet the needs of our people," said Jester. One way in which he hopes

to achieve this is by involving local people in both the planning and implementation of extension programs through an Extension Advisory System consisting of volunteers representative of the county's farmers and homemakers and selected at the discretion of the extension office.

Members of the Extension Advisory System would help the extension office identify specific problems in a given area, assist the staff in developing plans for dealing with the problems and aid extension agents in the implementation of the plan.

Jester said he foresees a continuation of the "strong" home economist program, adding that the extension office would concentrate on attracting new participants.

"We would like to design programs relevant to today's working housewives, such as examining the reality of the new family and strengthening family ties in the home," said Jester.

Jester would also like to expand youth involvement in county 4-H programs. He said that the extension office plans to hire two new agents to help develop a strong 4-H program, and that the extension office would also like to tap the potential 4-H leadership available in the area.

Jester, 32, is a native of Salisbury, Maryland, where he was raised on a farm. He has a B.S. degree from the University of Maryland, a M.S. degree from the University of Delaware, and has done further work at Iowa State University.

He has served on the Tyrell County Extension Staff for the past 19 months. Prior to that he was a field representative with Jolly Green Giant, where he was responsible for both field horticultural crops.

His wife, Judith, is a librarian who works in the Roper and Creswell Elementary Schools. They have a 7-year old daughter, Frances, who is a third grader in the Tyrell Elementary School.

Jester said his family would be joining him in Perquimans County in the near future.

"I look forward to a long and profitable relationship with the people in the county," said Jester.

(Editor's note: Look for Bill Jester's column every other week after the first of the year.)

Competency test

Scores high for region

Perquimans High School Juniors taking the North Carolina competency test scored slightly higher in both reading and math than their Northeastern region counterparts, but still fell short of state averages, according to a report released last week.

The state figures included only juniors who were taking the test for the first time. An average of 91.9 percent passed the reading portion, and 88.7 percent passed the math portion.

In Perquimans County the average among first time juniors was 89 percent in reading and 87 percent in math.

There are eight educational regions in the state and Perquimans High School students fared well when compared to other students in Region 1, which is comprised of 17 school systems in Northeastern North Carolina.

Median scores in region 1 were 86.7 percent in reading and 84.2 percent in math.

But high school juniors across the entire state showed some improvement in their basic skills as there was a 2 percent increase in students passing the reading portion of

the test (to 82 percent) and a 4 percent increase in the number of students passing the math portion (to 89 percent).

Perquimans County Schools Superintendent Pat Harrell was pleased with the test results here and attributed them to the efforts of county educators.

"I think we're doing a good job with remedial programs and with basic instruction," he said. Scores at the high school were up 3 percent in the reading category and 2 percent in math.

Several seniors who failed the test last year got another chance this year, and were able to pass. Of 11 students who retook the reading test, 9 passed. In math, 10 of 14 students retaking the test were successful.

Harrell said that the fact that seniors fared well on the test illustrates an important point in education.

"It supports the contention that with a little extra attention, these kids can learn," Harrell said.

He attributed the lower than average scores in the Northeast to socio-economic factors and to the small tax

bases of the Northeastern counties.

Those students who failed either portion of the test will be asked to do a little catchup work.

"Students who failed and are not currently enrolled in a remedial program will be placed in a remedial program to give them more attention," Harrell said.

County jurors to hear Dare case

A Superior Court judge has ruled that 200 Perquimans County residents should be transported to Dare County to serve as prospective jurors in a controversial death by motor vehicle case.

Judge Frank R. Brown ruled last week that Malcolm K. Fearing and C.C. Duvall, both of Dare County, could not receive a fair trial from Dare County jurists because of pre-trial publicity and their extensive ties with the community.

The two men are charged with being accessories after the fact in a hit and run last February that resulted in the death of Cloise H. Creef of Roanoke Island last February.

Fearing's cousin, Charles Fearing, was convicted in Chowan County of failing to report the accident and causing death by motor vehicle.

All three men are prominent residents of the community and Duvall is a former deputy sheriff.

Perquimans County Sheriff Julian Broughton is responsible for getting the prospective jurists to Dare County and said that he would have them transported there by bus.

Two separate groups of 100 persons will be selected, with the first group going to Dare County on Feb. 11, and the second on Feb. 25.



Bill Jester

Holiday schedule

The PERQUIMANS WEEKLY will be operating on special Christmas schedule during the weeks of Christmas and New Years. The Christmas issue should be received in the homes of our readers on Dec. 24. News and advertising deadlines for this issue will be 5 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 20.

The New Year's week paper should be received a day early, on Wednesday, Jan. 2. News and advertising deadlines for this paper will be 5 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 28.

We apologize for any inconvenience these changes may cause, but the holidays fall on our normal production days.