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**Happy
Thanksgiving!**

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Little Rascals trial moves to Hertford

Parents say case is taking its toll on families

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

Parents of children called to testify in the Little Rascals Day Care sexual abuse cases, which have drawn national media attention, say it is taking a toll on their families, especially the children. They spill stories of nightmares and behavior problems, and say they are trying to rebuild their broken lives.

So why did the parents choose to prosecute rather than remain silent? How do they prepare their children and themselves for court appearances they declare heart-wrenching? And how will they get on with their lives after the trials of the adults accused in the case?

Parents share common answers to most of these questions. Silence may have been the easiest option for now, but these parents have staked their futures on dealing with the alleged abuse at the day care center head on. They believe their children will cope better in the long run.

"You can't let it drop," one mother said. "You can't let people get away with it (sexual abuse)."

The parent said it is important for the children to know that the parents believe their stories, stand behind the children and are willing to help get the people who allegedly abused them behind bars, where they can no longer hurt these victims or be free to hurt others.

"Nobody in their right mind would do this unless they truly think that they are right," said a parent.

The decision to step forward and prosecute was not an easy one. Some parents could not face the hours in court. Others said they could not remain quiet and allow other children to be hurt.

Parents whose children are named in the indictments said life has not been easy, even after the decision to move forward was made. Telephone calls, snubs on the street, letters to the editor in newspapers tagging the case "a witch hunt" and media response has combined to make life tough for the families involved in the case.

"It's been a horrible experience," a mother said. "It's put a strain on our family."

But they would do it again, one mother said, because it was the right thing to do.

"I centered on what I had to do morally," one mother said of the ordeal.

As trial dates approach, the parents said, tension begins to build. Preparing children for testifying is the most difficult part.

Parents cannot tell children what to say on the stand or remind them of specific details they should repeat as they are questioned.

What parents can do is tell the children to listen to the questions and tell the truth, even if the answer is "I don't know" or "I don't remember," one mother said.

The children are reassured that their parents and the prosecutors believe them.

Parents must also prepare

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Testimony begins in Dawn Wilson case

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

A mother's strained voice weaves accounts of sexual abuse she believes occurred at the hands of child care providers at the now-closed Little Rascals Day Care Center in Edenton.

Her testimony for the prosecution in its case against Kathryn Dawn Wilson is slowed by occasional tears. She flips through the diary she started when her child's behavior changed in 1989, shortly after enrolling in the day care center.

The mother answers hundreds of questions posed by both prosecutors and the defense, sometimes responding to the same question three or four times before moving on to new ground.

Friends and family scattered throughout the courtroom shake their heads, clench their fists and squint in response to some questions and answers.

Behind a table in the front of the courtroom sits Wilson, jotting notes as the witness talks. Once in a while, she lifts her head, but for the most part, her eyes are downcast.

In the front row of the audience sit Shelley Stone and Betsy Kelly, who await trial on sexual abuse charges also stemming from the Little Rascals case, and a representative from Kelly's attorney's office. They, too, take notes during the testimony. At points, they glance at each other, sometimes shaking their heads, other times smiling.

This scene will play over and over for

an estimated two months as Wilson's trial continues in Perquimans County courtroom No. 2.

Wilson is charged with 22 counts of sexual abuse involving 10 children at Little Rascals Day Care Center. She is the second of six adults charged in the case to go to trial.

Day Care Center co-owner Robert F. Kelly Jr. was convicted earlier this year on 99 counts of sexually abusing a dozen children at the center. He is appealing the conviction, which resulted in 12 life sentences.

Five of the children named in Ms. Wilson's indictment also testified against Kelly in his eight-month trial in Farmville.

A jury of nine women and three men, selected from Pasquotank County, are hearing the case.

Kellys try to prepare for outcome

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

Betsy Kelly smiles and pats her daughter on the back after she gets off the school bus. The 9-year-old smiles as she and her mother slip through the front door.

The two have lived in Hertford at the home of Mrs. Kelly's aunt for almost a year, since Mrs. Kelly was released on bond. There, mother and daughter have worked hard to rebuild a relationship strained by the events that have rocked their lives over the past three-and-a-half years.

Mrs. Kelly is one of seven defendants in the Little Rascals Day Care sexual abuse case. Her husband, Robert, who owned the day care with Mrs. Kelly, was tried earlier this year. He was found guilty on 99 counts of child sexual abuse and received 12 life sentences. He has filed an appeal.

Like the families of the victims, the Kelly family, too, takes each day as it comes and tries to prepare for the trials.

The effects of the case on her family has been the heaviest cross Mrs. Kelly has had to bear.

Her daughter lived with relatives for two years while both she and her husband were jailed in lieu of bond. Mrs. Kelly's bond was reduced and she was released when her family was able to post bond last year. The time spent away from her daughter is something she said she can never replace.

"That is probably in itself the hardest part of all of this," Mrs. Kelly said.

The mother and daughter are together now, but Mrs. Kelly said she cannot give her daughter the security of knowing they will be together after her own trial.

"Our lives are so much still in limbo," she said. "We don't take anything for granted any more."

Her daughter, she said, is amazingly well-adjusted considering what has happened in her young life.

"She's done very well," Mrs. Kelly said. "She's a real trooper."

But the toll has been taken. The child has a new home in a new town with a new school and new friends. She is aware of what her parents are accused of and must face the future, possibly with neither parent. Mrs. Kelly said she worked hard this summer to help her daughter prepare for the challenges that lay ahead.

"I've tried hard to keep her life as much on an even keel as possible under these circumstances," Mrs. Kelly said.

When accusations about abuse at the day care first surfaced, Mrs. Kelly said she felt "a total, total sense of disbelief." She said she couldn't understand where the accusations were coming from or why.

"You feel as though you're in a dark closet and things are attacking you and you can't see them - you don't know where they're coming from," she said.

Mrs. Kelly said preparing to defend yourself against so many accusations is the most stressful thing she has ever lived through. Nothing prepares you for your first experience on the witness stand, she said.

"It's almost as if someone asks you how do you prepare to have a baby," Kelly said. "I don't know that there's any preparation for what you have to put yourself through."

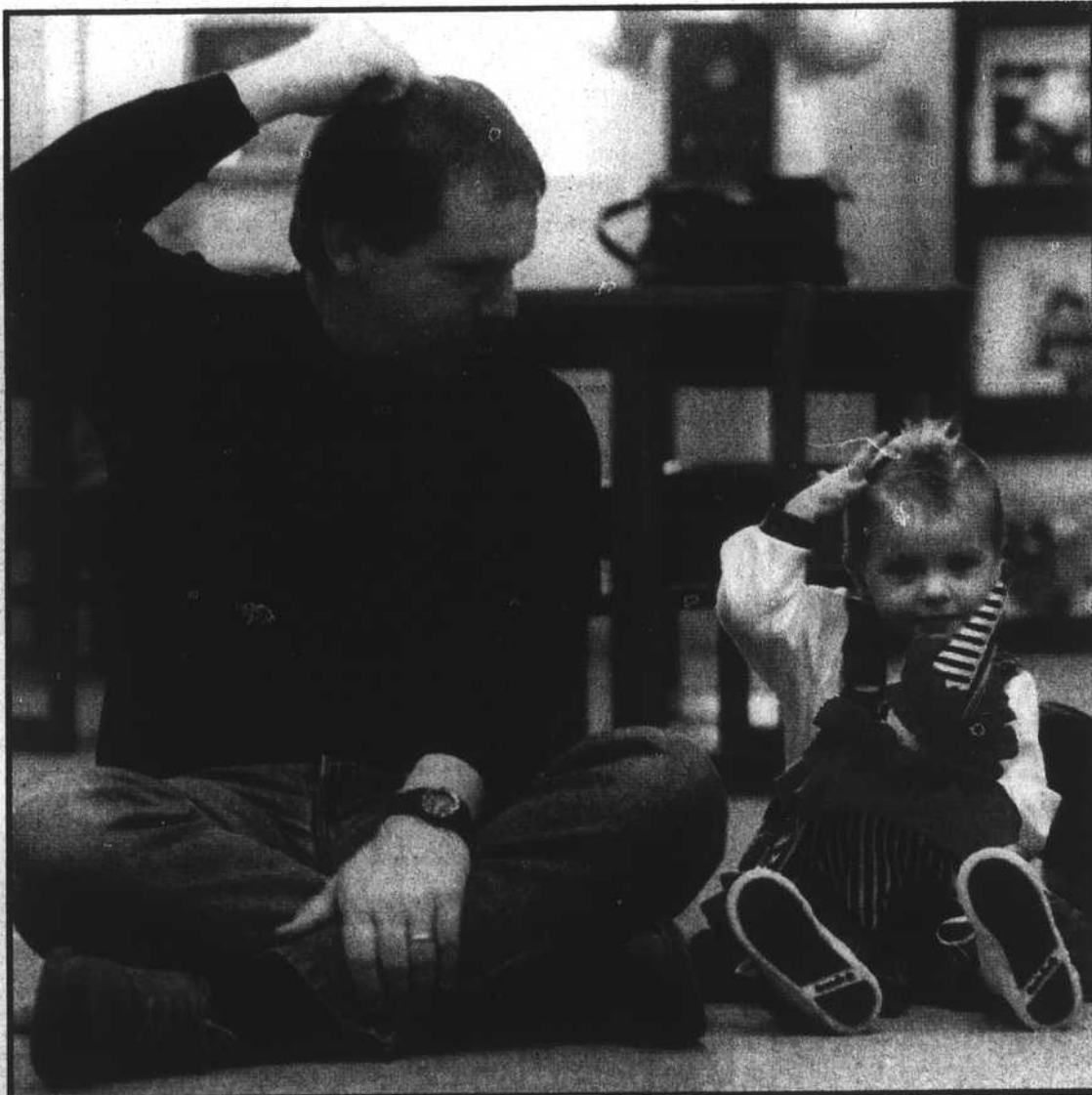
Kelly said attending her husband's trial and Dawn Wilson's trial now in progress have helped her to be prepared for her own trial. Before these two cases, she had no idea what to expect.

As she listened to the testimony of a parent last Thursday, Mrs. Kelly looked over at her attorney's assistant and giggled. To some, the gesture may have appeared to be a sign that she takes the situation lightly. Mrs. Kelly said that is not the case.

"To be able to smile and to be

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Monkey see, monkey do



David Phillips and his daughter, Jamie, enjoy Mother Goose Time at the Perquimans County Library Saturday morning. The innovative program is designed to teach language development skills to infants and toddlers. Songs, nursery rhymes and books are used to introduce the tots to the joys of reading. The next sessions are scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 5 at 10 and 10:30 a.m. Parents interested in learning more about Mother Goose Time or reserving a spot for themselves and their toddlers should call the library at 426-5319. (Photo by Gary Cosby Jr.)

Animal science programs to be offered at Perquimans Library

By TRACY E. GERLACH
Staff writer

Grammar school-aged children in Perquimans County will have the opportunity to meet a reptile, touch a snake, study rocks, and learn about endangered animals through a new program called Grass Roots Science in Small Town North Carolina.

For maybe the first time ever, some of the animal science programs large cities enjoy will be available to youths in the more rural areas of the state.

Six different programs will be offered at the Perquimans County Library during the months of December and January by the N.C. State Museum of Sciences in Raleigh. A \$10,000 grant from the Grass Roots Science Initiative has allowed the museum to offer the programs free of charge.

"We never had the money to afford that kind of programming

and resources before," said Perquimans County Librarian Shelly Fearn. "This will enable us to provide a program for the children that is unlike any we've been able to provide before."

It also provides an opportunity to tie sciences in with the library, she said.

"We do literacy programs, but we don't have the expertise to provide science programs," Fearn said.

The Perquimans County Library is one of eight rural communities chosen for the programs. They will also be offered in Columbia, Warrenton, Louisburg, Pittsboro, Lillington, Rockingham and Wadesboro.

Jesse Perry, director of public programs for the museum in Raleigh, said Hertford was chosen based on its size and remoteness.

"We chose areas that at kind of isolated - that didn't receive a lot of attention," Perry said.

It's an "effort to take our programs to places that aren't getting a whole lot of services from the big cities," he said.

Perry's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Parker Perry, are Perquimans County natives, and have come back to Hertford to retire.

The six programs, the first to be offered Dec. 5, include Endangered Animals, Growing up in the Animal World, Meet the Reptiles and Amphibians, a hands-on, activity oriented dinosaur program, Rocks and Minerals and a program on snakes. No poisonous snakes will be used in the program, Perry said.

The programs will be held at 1 p.m. in the Perquimans County Library on Dec. 5, 12, and 19, and Jan. 9, 16 and 23.

Each program can accommodate up to 30 children. To register, call the Perquimans County Library at 426-5319.

Trial hits Perquimans pocketbook

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

Few Perquimans County residents have a direct relationship to the Little Rascals Day Care trail being held in the Perquimans County courthouse annex. But local property owners will help foot the bill for the costs in the case, and county employees are feeling a manpower pinch.

The trial of Kathryn Dawn Wilson, charged with 22 counts of sexual abuse involving 10 children at the day care, is expected to last six to eight weeks, according to prosecutors.

Chowan County, where the case originated, is providing one deputy for the court sessions, but Perquimans also must provide a deputy. The resignation of former deputy Eric Tilley had already stressed deputy's work schedules. Adding a court session will make it even more difficult, if not impossible, to avoid overtime pay for deputies, County Manager Paul Gregory said Friday.

In addition to the sheriff's department, the clerk of court's office is also being hit for manpower. Gregory said the state hired a retired former employee, Harriett Dail, to help with the burden on the clerk's office.

Adding to county manpower woes will be the murder trial of Vivia Darvis Burke scheduled to begin on Nov. 30 in the main courtroom.

With two lengthy trials scheduled at the same time, Clerk of Superior Court Gail Godwin said she was forced to cancel the county's scheduled Dec. 2 district court and Dec. 7 superior court.

While the state is absorbing the cost of Ms. Dail's salary, the county coffers will be hit for any overtime incurred by the deputies, Gregory said.

Heating, lighting and custodial work for the courtroom during the Rascals trial should not be large expenses, Gregory said.

Gregory said he should have estimates of expenses by the end of November. He said the county could be hit for \$2,000 over the course of the Little Rascals trial if overtime pay stays low. But that cost could approach \$3,500 if the trial stretches out, causing overtime for the deputy assigned to the case to rise.

The Little Rascals case has been tagged the most expensive and longest trial in the state. Perquimans County taxpayers will pay a little extra because one of the cases was heard here.