

Sports:

Pirates post perfect week on baseball diamond: **Page 7**

School:

Central School student takes second in regional contest: **Page 5**



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35 Cents

Smith breaks silence about suspension



Students in Central School enjoy learning geography in the computer lab with the *Where in the U.S.A. is Carmen Sandiego* program. (Photo by Susan Harris)

Central School students enjoy Carmen San Diego Month in school computer lab

The Perquimans Central School 5th grade teachers and Margie Nixon, computer coordinator, have designated the month of May as Carmen San Diego month in the computer lab. Each week three special students from each class will be given one hour of extra computer time to participate in this event.

The application software program called "Where in the USA is Carmen San Diego?" is a social studies program. In the classroom the teachers

have just finished teaching the United States, and this program reinforces what the students have already learned in the classroom. Students have to know their states, as well as locations of different cities in the United States.

The students are hunting down different suspects and have to be very specific with their clues. The students, therefore, are not only doing social studies, but they are integrating reading and writing skills as well. Each time the

students arrest a suspect they get to move up in rank. The first class to receive master detective or the highest rank at the end of May will be our winners.

This event motivates the students to do their very best and teaches the students cooperative learning. One student is responsible for typing all the data in the computer, one student does the note taking, and the third student is responsible for the research. The students use their social studies books,

dictionaries, and the Folder's Guide to retrieve all the information.

In the computer lab there is a "Where in the USA is Carmen San Diego?" poster that enables us to record each classroom's progress. The class that wins will be given an extra hour of computer time, an award, Carmen San Diego badges, and their class's picture in *The Perquimans Weekly*.

PCHS teacher denies misconduct allegations

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

Sharon M. "Sherry" Smith, a teacher suspended for alleged sexual misconduct involving a high school student, was torn between wanting the story of her suspension from her teaching post at Perquimans High School told, and wanting to protect her family from the fall-out of going public.

Tuesday she chose the former.

Smith, a third-year special education teacher at Perquimans High School, said she was suspended with pay for 90 days by schools superintendent Randall L. Henion on March 15. She said the suspension and allegations of misconduct with a student came as a total shock to her. She denied the allegations.

For two months, she has chronicled her efforts to clear her name and get back into the classroom with her students.

According to Smith's notes, Perquimans High School principal William Byrum went to her classroom a little after 10 a.m. on March 15. He asked Smith to go to his office with him, but would not discuss the reason for his request.

Henion was waiting in Byrum's office, and told Smith that he had received allegations of misconduct with a student. At that point, Smith said she requested an attorney. She noted that she made that request four times during the meeting with Henion.

Smith said the superintendent offered her three choices: resign immediately, be suspended with pay for 90 days and have him order an investigation, or face probable non-renewal of her contract at the end of the school year.

The teacher said Henion told her he would not divulge his sources and that he had not talked to her students or fellow teachers about the mat-

ter.

Smith said she was very upset by the time Henion left, and Byrum tried to calm her down. During that time, Smith said Henion called Byrum's office four times. When she felt she had composed herself, Smith said she got up, but fainted. When she fainted a second time, Smith said Byrum called an ambulance to take her to Dr. R.E. Lane's office.

Smith's husband picked her up from Lane's office, took her home and called the North Carolina Association of Educators. NCAE personnel put her in contact with Luke Largess, a Charlotte attorney specializing in public school law. Largess

advised her not to resign or sign any papers until he had a chance to review the case.

Smith received a letter from Henion dated March 18 which confirmed her suspension with pay. In the letter, Henion said that he believed cause may exist for Smith's dismissal, but that additional investigation was necessary. The letter also barred Smith from all school property unless the visit was scheduled through his office.

Henion refused to comment about the case, saying it would be inappropriate for him to discuss personnel matters.

On March 22, Smith said Henion requested a meeting with her the next day to discuss her employment, but Smith said when she asked to bring her husband, Henion said he did not want him there. Smith's attorney was able to fly in for the meeting.

Early on March 23, Smith said she and her husband arrived at the school board office to review her personnel file. Smith's notebook contained an

inventory of her file initialed by a board employee.

Smith said on April 16 her attorney called her and said he had spoken to the schools' attorney, Ken Soo. Soo allegedly told Largess that the school system was not ready to return Smith to the classroom unless Smith would sign a resignation and a waiver to sue. Smith said she refused.

Smith's notebook contained a copy of a letter Largess wrote to school board chairman L. Wayne Howell requesting a hearing before the board at the soonest possible date to review Smith's suspension.

Largess's letter read in part, "Ms. Smith and I met with Dr. Henion and his attorney, Ken Soo, before the Spring vacation to discuss the results of Mr. Soo's investigation into the allegations. At that meeting Dr. Henion asked Ms. Smith to resign from teaching. She refused. Dr. Henion then made an offer that is both bizarre and unethical, given the allegations of sexual misconduct that cloud this suspension. He told Ms. Smith that he would immediately reinstate her if she agreed to resign effective the last day of school and to release the school system from liability over his actions. Such arm twisting is outrageous."

Largess went on to write that Henion abused the purpose of the state statute which allows superintendents to suspend teachers with pay "when the circumstances are such that the teacher should be removed immediately". The attorney said that Henion's offer to return Smith to the classroom "clearly has determined that the circumstances no longer require her removal from the classroom." Largess said the action was contrary to law and had, "a brutal effect on Ms. Smith."

Largess went on to state that Henion was trying to leverage Smith's attempts to clear her name into forcing her to resign. "His position is calculated posturing that cannot be justified," Largess wrote.

Largess told the Smiths this week that he has still not received a response from Howell.

Largess also wrote a letter to Soo on May 3. Largess told Soo that in his opinion, the only thing keeping Smith out of the classroom was her refusal to resign. He added that Henion's concern about future legal liability was not a statutory basis for keeping Smith on suspension.

"Even if Dr. Henion believes that his position is not illegal, it still strikes me as unethical to use the power to suspend with pay in that way," Largess wrote.

Largess said he understood Henion might reconsider Smith's status after charges of misconduct were dismissed, but that even though the charges had been dropped, he saw no change. The only recourse, he said, was to request a board hearing.

"If Dr. Henion wants to avoid the Board hearing, he can do so by following the legal and humane avenue available to him for dealing with Ms. Smith," Largess wrote. "If he puts her back in the classroom, we will withdraw our request for a hearing. He can then recommend nonrenewal of her contract at the end of the school year if he so chooses."

To date, Smith said no hearing has been held. She has had no conversations with board members about the case, nor was she informed that Soo was scheduled to meet with the board of education Monday night to discuss her case. After meeting with Soo in executive session, the board voted not to renew Smith's contract. Smith said late Tuesday night that she had not received a telephone call or letter regarding her contract nonrenewal.

Copies of Smith's eight performance appraisals completed

Please see Smith, Page 8

Heart Association makes history with golf tournament

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

Perquimans County made history last week, hosting the first American Heart Association Women's Golf Classic held in the United States.

Ten teams competed for prizes at Sound Golf Links last Thursday, and helped to raise \$5,000 for the heart fund.

Perquimans Heart Association president Chris Lane said she was ecstatic about the tournament's outcome.

"We're very excited about it," Lane said. "I just think everyone had such a good time, and our sponsors were excellent."

Doncaster, a national clothing manufacturer with factories in Rutherfordton, Merck Human Health, Belks, Clinique and Ralph Lauren sponsored the tournament.

Ralph Lauren kicked off the two-day event with a cocktail party for participants held at the Albemarle Plantation clubhouse after practice rounds. Doncaster donated over \$500 in gift certificates used as door prizes and to auction after the awards luncheon which climaxed the tournament on Thursday. The company also presented a fashion show during the program. Belks and Clinique gave all those who

attended the luncheon bags of cologne samples and travel kits, and donated several door prizes and auction items.

Merck Human Health underwrote the luncheon, catered by Kelly's Restaurant, and speaker Robert Lust, a heart researcher at East Carolina University School of Medicine.

Lane said all the companies have asked to be sponsors for next year's tournament.

Lane said The Sound Golf Links staff provided tremendous assistance in the planning and implementation phases of the project.

"That's just such a beautiful place out there," Lane said. "They (the staff) just work so hard to help you in any way they can."

The tournament was a pilot program for the American Heart Association. Because of the tournament's success, Lane has been asked to hold training sessions for other local units so that they can sponsor tournaments.

Lane said the tournament

took a full year to organize.

"It's been a lot of hard work, but it was worth it," she said.

The organizer said her only regret was that there were three other women's tournaments scheduled for the same dates, which hurt participation. However, she said golfers who were unable to play in the Perquimans tournament asked to be contacted next year.

The first place team was made up of Clate Aydtlett, Patty Duff, Bettie Stokes and JoAnn Foreman. The foursome earned the right to advance to the pro-am at Pinehurst. After a three-hole play-off round, Kim Smith, Doty Hansen, Teem Arndt and Nancy Wright took second place. That team, too, earned the right to play in the pro-am.

Closest to the pin prizes were taken by Jearl Harrison (No. 11), Clate Aydtlett (No. 6), Regina Houlihan (No. 14) and Cindy Martin (No. 2). Suzanne Compitello and Cindy Martin earned awards for the longest drives.

