

# The Perquimans Weekly

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**Inside**

**Lady Pirates dominate Edenton**

Page 6

**JVs open season with 2 2-point losses**

Page 6

**Retinal camera finds general health problems**

Page 3

**PCHS seniors prepare for senior projects**

Page 8

## Hertford to upgrade electric system

**Council votes to move ahead with \$850K loan**

By SUSAN R. HARRIS

Editor

The Hertford Town Council voted to borrow \$850,000 to upgrade its electrical system during a public hearing Monday night.

The money will finance a major overhaul of the electrical system recommended by engineering firm Booth & Associates in 1996. Town Manager John Christensen said the project is expected to take two years to complete.

The Local Government Commission will act on the town's decision at its October meeting, Christensen said. With commission approval,

the town can close on the loan, then bid the project. All projects of this magnitude involving borrowed funds must be approved by the commission.

Christensen said the town presently has a 4,000 volt system with four circuits. The substation is located behind the fire department on Grubb Street. One circuit feeds Church Street and U.S. Highway 17 Bypass. Christensen said that circuit is operating at 100 percent capacity.

A second circuit serves the downtown area and a third, the area in the western sector of the town by Miller and Meads Mobile Home Park. Those circuits are operating at 70 percent capacity.

The fourth circuit feeds Edenton Road Street and Wynn Fork. That circuit is operating at 80 percent capacity,

and can tie back into the Church Street circuit if necessary, Christensen said. Because of the long distance the Edenton Road Street circuit runs to serve customers, Christensen said the town is sustaining high electric losses.

When new electric systems are designed, Christensen said engineers look at load capacities of 40 percent, far lower than any circuit currently operating in Hertford.

"Obviously we're at the point ... that we need to increase the capacity of our system," Christensen said.

The manager said the town needs to increase its system to 12,500 volts, also known as a 12.5 KV system. Christensen said the town could transmit power over the same lines, running more power with higher efficiency.

Among the problems with

the town's current system are high line losses in transmission which cuts the town's profit margin on electricity sales, limited availability of equipment when parts are needed, and the danger that results from the system's failure to trip out when lines are downed due to storms or accidents. Christensen said a couple of years ago, the town was forced to turn off its electric system because a power line was downed by a storm in many places in town. Because the present system will not trip out on the order of a circuit breaker in a home to avoid fire or injury, the town was forced to cut power to prevent injury to people riding around to survey storm damage and clean-up crews.

With the upgrade, Christensen said the town will be able to add new circuits in high-growth areas such as the

commerce centre.

North Carolina Power would have to upgrade its substation right behind the town public works complex during the upgrade.

If the upgrade moves as planned, the Church Street circuit will be converted to 12.5KV 100 percent. The Don Juan circuit will be converted to 12.5 KV to the Country Corner intersection, then remain at 4KV afterwards. The Edenton Road Street circuit would be converted to 12.5KV to Wynn Fork Road, then revert back to 4KV.

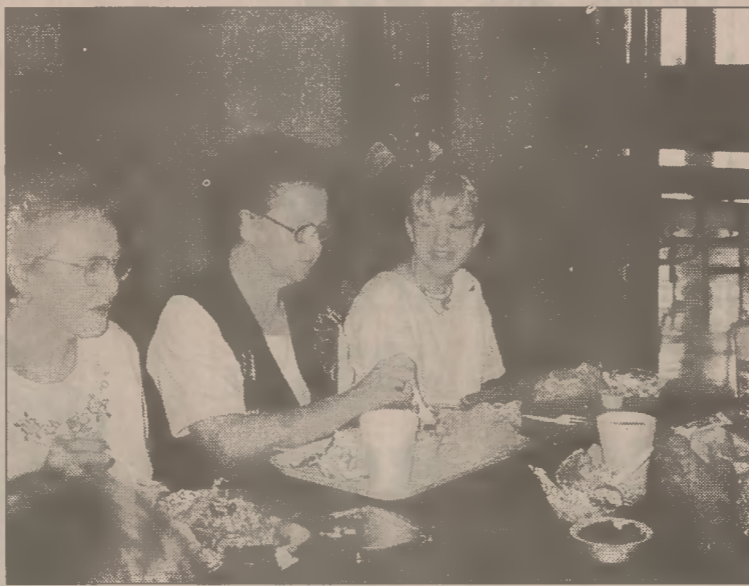
Christensen said the engineers projected that the town will be able to pay off the loan with the savings in line losses the improvements will bring. The town does not expect any increase in consumer cost of electricity to result from the project.

## LOVE THOSE GRANDPARENTS



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

In celebration of Grandparents Day, more than a hundred grandparents filled the cafeteria at Perquimans Middle School on Sept. 10. Grandparents were invited to enjoy lunch with their grandchildren and then participate in school picture day. Grandparents Day is a national holiday and is always observed the Sunday after Labor Day.



## Indian Summer Festival is Saturday

By SUSAN R. HARRIS

Last-minute details for the 17th annual Indian Summer Festival are underway by the Hertford Downtown Merchants Association.

Set to kick off at 9 a.m., Saturday's gala will feature entertainment, crafts, food, games, information and specials by local merchants.

Entertainment will begin with the Inspirational Voices and the Perquimans County High School Marching Pirates Band.

Radio station 103.7, the HOT FM, will broadcast live all day from the courthouse green.

The festival will climax with a street dance in downtown Hertford.

For a complete schedule of events, list of participants, bus schedules and pick-up points and other festival information, see the Indian Summer Festival book included in this newspaper. The book was produced by The Perquimans Weekly in conjunction with the Hertford Downtown Merchants Association.

## Water, sewer bonds officially on Hertford ballot

**Referendum okayed for up to \$4.8 million**

By SUSAN R. HARRIS

Editor

Hertford Council made it official Monday night: Hertford voters will decide on Nov. 3 if the town should issue up to \$4.8 million in bonds to upgrade its water and wastewater systems.

The bonds would cover the cost of major additions and renovations needed in both the water and sewer systems.

Town Manager John Christensen said the town may not need to borrow all \$4.8 million through bonds if grant applications presently being reviewed are approved.

Christensen said the timing is right for the town's grant applications, and that the applications and project outline are strong.

The Local Government Commission has approved the town's application to issue the bonds.

Christensen said he does not anticipate that the town will borrow the entire \$4.8 million, but because that is the total amount of the project, the Local Government Commission wanted that amount on the referendum. The town will subtract any grant funds from the \$4.8 million before issuing any bonds.

The bonds will be general obligation bonds, meaning that the town is backing the issue with its taxing power.

If the bond referendum does not pass, council members said they will be forced to find funds from other sources because the systems must be improved.

Christensen said the advantage of issuing bonds for such a large project is that the cost is lower than borrowing from a financial institution. He said the interest rate on general obligation bonds will be significantly lower than loan funds.

Council voted to hold off on the fire department's request for a new truck, in part because council members do not know what will happen at the polls on Nov. 3.

Councilman Carlton Davenport said while he thinks fire chief Sid Eley is doing a good job and some of

the department's rolling stock is not in good shape, he was not in favor of authorizing the purchase of a \$185,000 fire truck when the town was on the brink of borrowing \$850,000 for electric improvements and issuing \$4.8 million in bonds.

Davenport recommended that council wait until after the bond referendum to discuss the purchase of the truck.

Eley said waiting to purchase a truck could mean paying a higher price. The chief, also a councilman, said the department purchased a new truck in 1994, but the other equipment is 30 years old. In addition to the 1994 truck, the department uses 1969 and 1963 pumpers, a 1962 step van and an old ambulance purchased from the county for \$1. The new truck would replace all but the 1963 pumper, Eley said.

Councilman Billy Winslow said he had been told at one time that it was a law that fire departments respond to wrecks, but that recently he had been told that it is not a law. He said wreck response is the job of the rescue squad, and that the county should help purchase the new vehicle if one of the reasons it is needed is to answer wreck calls.

Winslow added that he thinks the town has gone "overboard in the fire department." He said the town budgeted \$15,000 this year for equipment and that the "mutual aid is tremendous." He said the department has three class A pumpers certified by the state.

Eley responded that while county departments do back each other up, each department has to be self-sufficient. He said the 1969 pumper had to be "nursed through" the last pump test. He added that if the town had replaced equipment one a 10-year schedule instead of purchasing no new rolling stock in the 1970s and 1980s, the department "wouldn't be in this shape."

Mayor John Beers said firefighters have told him that keeping the trucks operational is becoming increasingly difficult. Work on the motors, which often will not turn when firefighters get a call, has become almost constant and costly, Beers said.

Eley's last motion to purchase the truck if the bond referendum passed died for lack of a second.

## Aid available for hurricane victims

**Federal, state programs offer assistance**

By SUSAN R. HARRIS

Editor

Federal Emergency Management Agency representative Barb Stermer was in the area last week to make those who sustained losses due to Hurricane Bonnie aware of federal assistance available.

According to figures released by Perquimans County Emergency Management Coordinator Ray Cullipher, farmers were the hardest-hit in Perquimans County.

Stermer said farmers who sustained losses may qualify for assistance under the gov-

ernment's Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Business Disaster Loan and Housing Loans/Grants for Farmers programs.

The Disaster Unemployment Assistance program provides weekly benefit payments to those out of work due to disaster, including self-employed persons, farm workers, farm and ranch owners and others not covered by regular unemployment programs. The program is administered by the state, and application for assistance may be made at Job Service offices, Stermer said.

The USDA may make loans to permanent residents sustaining damages that require repair or replacement of their homes under the Housing Loans/Grants for Farmers program. Grants of up to \$5,000

are available to applicants age 62 and over and who have low income. Emergency loans may also be made to farmers and ranchers, either owners or tenants, who were operating and managing a farm or ranch at the time of the disaster. The loans are limited to the amount necessary to compensate for actual losses to essential property and/or production capacity. Application may be made for cost-sharing grants for emergency conservation programs, such as debris removal from crop/pasture lands, repairs to land/water conservation structures and permanent fencing.

Business Disaster Loans are also available through the Small Business Administration to repair or replace destroyed or damaged

business facilities, inventory, machines or equipment. The maximum loan amount is \$1.5 million.

Other assistance is available through the National Flood Insurance Program. The self-sustaining program was created to help avoid flood losses and to help pay for them through insurance.

Stermer said one important but often overlooked assistance program is crisis counseling. She said often people have difficulty sleeping or coping with devastating losses. This program provides counseling to help victims cope with disaster-related stress or trauma.

For more information about disaster assistance programs, call 1-800-525-0321. To apply for aid, call 1-800-462-9029.