



# Happy Thanksgiving

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## Commerce center primed for activity

By SUSAN R. HARRIS  
Editor

After years of planning and preparation, The Perquimans County Economic Development Commission will soon break ground on the first building in the Perquimans Commerce Centre.

Economic Development Director Robert Baker said the structural steel has been delivered on site for the 30,000-square foot shell building. Carolina Construction, the contractor erecting the building, anticipated receiving permits Monday, with excavation for the foundation to begin later this week. If all goes well, Baker said the shell building should be completed by the end of the year.

The building is being constructed by the county with funds from the North Carolina Electric Cooperatives. The group provides affordable loans on a competitive basis for economic development.

Once the building is complete, it will be used as a tool to get businesses to visit the commerce centre. Baker said many prospective business owners want to see an available building when they visit an area. With the shell constructed, the county expects to sell the building and repay the funds to the electric cooperative agency.

Next door, Perquimans 2020 Vision Coalition is finishing plans for bids for the ARISE building, a 10,000-square foot business incubator. Baker said that building is scheduled for completion in late June.

Already, 2020 Vision has had serious inquiries from three prospective tenants for the incubator — a micro-processor company, a chromatography company and a software development company. Baker said the three would occupy about 7,000 square feet of the building.

In addition, Baker said there is a pending purchase option on 8 acres in the commerce centre. If the tract is purchased, it will represent the first private sale in the development.

Baker said the company negotiating for a waterfront tract already has established marine businesses in both North Carolina and Virginia. The company would provide repair service to marine traffic on the Intercoastal Waterway for craft up to 50 feet. Baker described the business as a clean industry which would be required to meet EPA, DENR and CAMA standards before opening.

The owner anticipates initially hiring 25 employees, with a possible expansion to 50 employees in the future.

The net investment for the business would approach \$2 million, Baker said.

The economic development Director said the owner of the Morgan building is also beginning renovations there. She is presently exploring options on that building and is seeking tenants for businesses like an antiques mall or restaurant.

# Hall of Fame Square opens

### Vision turns department store into renovated business complex

By SUSAN R. HARRIS  
Editor

Randy Lassiter's vision of a downtown with less empty storefronts and more business opportunity became reality Friday, when Hall of Fame Square officially opened on Church Street.

The building which for many years housed Darden Department Store is now home to a plethora of small retail and service businesses.

"I love this community and I wanted to give something back, to help make it better," Lassiter told the large crowd that gathered to celebrate the grand opening.

Last spring, the building was a large, open space with cement floors. Today, it features seven completed suites, five of them occupied, one under negotiation, and an area for an eatery which will be finished to specifications when negotiations are complete. In addition, Lassiter will soon finish the mezzanine office and plans to add suites on the second floor.

Occupying Hall of Fame Square to date are Carolina Trophy, the Perquimans County Chamber of Commerce (to open there Monday), The Perquimans Arts League Gallery, Stitch 'N Time (seamstress, sewing notions), and Linda Weinbaum, clinical psychologist. Lassiter said he anticipates the addition of a real estate office in the complex soon.

Entering the building from the street, shoppers will first



PHOTO BY SUSAN HARRIS

Randy and Lynn Lassiter (center), their children and their parents were among those who celebrated the grand opening of the Hall of Fame Square in downtown Hertford Friday. The

Lassiters bought and renovated the former Darden Department Store building, which now features retail and service businesses with the promise of more to come.

come to the showcase window office of Carolina Trophy and Engraving. Owned and operated by Russell and Brenda Lassiter, Carolina Trophy carries a wide variety of gifts, including Christmas tree ornaments, baby gifts and picture frames, many of which can be personalized with engraving.

The chamber occupies the next suite. Chamber Executive Director Sandra Smith said she is excited about the organization's move to historic downtown Hertford. The chamber plans to be operational at the new site on Monday.

Next is the gallery of the Perquimans Arts League. PALs members have created a shop chock full of quality arts and crafts from oil paintings to jewelry and tatting. The gallery is a perfect spot for Christmas shopping.

Johnetta Forehand has opened Stitch-N Time next door to PALs. Forehand is a veteran seamstress who can handle alterations and other needs from behind her sewing machine. In addition, she carries sewing notions.

Next is the suite in which Lassiter expects a real estate office to open soon.

With both a hallway and back entrance is Weinbaum Clinical Associates. Linda Weinbaum, a clinical psychologist and social worker, has opened Hertford's first private clinic of its kind.

The first suite on the right as you enter the front door is the future home of an eatery. Lassiter said he has had several contacts from those interested in opening sandwich, coffee and/or bakery shops in Hall of Fame.

There is one suite remaining unoccupied on the right next to the future eatery.

His daughter's December

wedding has Lassiter slowing down on his renovations right now, but he plans to move ahead again after the first of the year. Even Saturday, when he was on site taking care of some small details, he was contacted by several people interested in the possibility of moving into Hall of Fame.

Lassiter said the monument to Jim "Catfish" Hunter across the street from Hall of Fame Square on the courthouse lawn inspired the building's name. He characterized Hunter as a great baseball player and a fine person who has done much for the county.

## HOLIDAY KICK-OFF



The Hertford Downtown Merchants Association kicked off the holidays Saturday with A Christmas in Carolina. Entertainers provided music on the courthouse lawn while vendors offered a variety of items.

## Parade, ramble next holiday events

Holiday events will continue in Perquimans County with the annual Extension Homemakers Christmas Ramble tour of homes on Dec. 3, 6:30-9 p.m. Several homes, a bed and breakfast, a business

and a church, all decorated for the holidays, are on this year's tour. For information, call the Extension Office at 426-5428.

Next up will be the Christmas parade on Dec. 5 at 2 p.m. The Chamber of Commerce is still

accepting applications from businesses, bands, marching units, and school, church and civic organizations for parade entry. For an application or information, call the chamber at 426-5657.

## Grants to correct failing septic systems

The District Health Department will use an \$857,000 state grant to help low-income families replace faulty septic systems.

The PPCC health department, which serves and gets its name from Pasquotank, Perquimans, Camden and Chowan counties, secured the grant from the state's Clean Water Management Trust. The trust helps finance local projects that protect or restore water quality in state rivers, creeks, lakes and estuaries.

According to a health department news release, PPCC's Public Management Entity Program will use the grant to help families prevent their septic systems from failing.

Qualifying applicants will be eligible to borrow 100 percent of the cost to repair a failing septic system at 5 percent interest for five years.

The borrower only has to pay an \$100 application fee and \$250 to cover the prepayment costs of the program's \$50 annual inspection fee.

Loans under \$4,000 will be secured by the best lien available. Loans over \$4,000 will require a deed of trust.

Low-income homeowners also may qualify for special deferred payment loans, the health department's release states. Those who qualify will not be required to repay their loans in monthly installments. Instead, their loans could be forgiven, provided they keep ownership of the property throughout the term of the loan.

Typically, homeowners are responsible for maintaining their septic systems. In most instances, septic system permitting agencies have little oversight of septic systems. The only authority they do have is the power to investigate a proposed site and the power to provide design and installation specifications when the system is being built.

The Management Entity Program was established four years ago to supervise the design, installation and operation of non-conventional wastewater systems in the four counties served by the health department.

Since then, Currituck, Gates, Hertford, Tyrrell and Washington counties have joined the program, according to the PPCC news release.