

Merry Christmas!

December 24, 1998

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PERQUIMANS COUNTY  
110 W ACADEMY ST  
HERTFORD NC 27944  
DEC 23 1998

# The Perquimans Weekly

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Vol. 66, No. 52

The only newspaper for and about Perquimans County people

Hertford, North Carolina 27944

## Christmas wish of a lifetime comes true

### M. B. Taylor celebrates with open dinner

By SUSAN R. HARRIS  
Editor

M.B. Taylor finally got what she's wanted for Christmas since her childhood on Dec. 12: She invited everyone she saw to dinner at her home.

"I'd never been so happy before in my life," the retired extension home economist said. "That's when I get my joy, when I'm helping other people."

Taylor grew up Minnie Bess Eason, one of 10 children. Everyone in the community struggled to make a living, but they shared a great love for each other and a willingness to share what few material possessions they had with their neighbors of all races.

As a child, Taylor said it was her dream to be financially able to hold a huge dinner and invite anyone who would to dine with her.

"I just kept that in my heart that I wanted to do it and so Saturday I did it," Taylor said last week.

Taylor began her cooking on Thursday when she put a 28-pound turkey in the oven. A 30-pound ham followed before 11 sweet potato pies made their way into the oven. Before her cooking frenzy was over, Taylor had also fixed a canning pot full of chicken pot pie, a roasting pan of concealed salad, a huge pot of collards, candied yams, potato salad, cornbread and hot rolls. To this she added 11 cakes she had made and had bought and four pies that someone else made for her. She was ready on Saturday at 3 o'clock when she had told everyone she saw they could begin to arrive.

"They came in groves," she said. "They came so fast I forgot to count. I had bought 200 disposable plates and I had some already. I looked around one time and they were washing the plates! I can't tell you how many I had. I had a crowd."

Taylor said some of her guests ate at her home, but most took plates home. And almost all who came to get a plate took one to someone else. Taylor tried to make sure those who were homebound were sent a meal.

So many folks were coming and going from her Dobbs



M.B. Taylor

Street home, Taylor said she received phone calls asking if she was selling dinners. She told them she wasn't selling anything, she was sending out an open invitation.

Taylor said she spread the word through ministers, youth she

saw on the streets and by word of mouth to everyone she saw just before her dinner.

"Just tell whoever you see (to come). Just tell everybody," she told everyone.

Her siblings and in-laws came for the occasion.

Although Taylor said she usually doesn't decorate much, her brother and brother-in-law pitched in for the occasion and decorated her home and lawn. She said their handiwork was beautiful and warmed her heart.

Even a sister in poor health pitched in. Taylor said she worked in the kitchen for hours and told Taylor she felt better than she had in a long time.

Taylor was tired, but happy, when the serving was over around 9 p.m., after 6 hours of fixing plates.

"I had my Christmas," she said. "I had a good Christmas. I had a great time and I can't get over it."

It was a much different Christmas than Taylor experienced as a child. She said there were small gifts, perhaps a doll or candy. Her mother always tried to have something a little special for Christmas dinner.

"At that time, people didn't have nothing," Taylor said.

Through hard work and the help from those in her neighborhood, Taylor was able to obtain her college education and enter her long-time career as an extension agent. She said people helped her along the way when she needed help, and she tries to return that helping hand to others when she can.

Taylor said people told her she should share her holiday celebration with the newspaper. She did, she said, to encourage others to open their homes and hearts and share their gifts during the holidays.

While visions of sug-arplums dance in the heads of children on Christmas Eve, Taylor will no doubt be smiling as she dreams of the Christmas gift she received that she's wanted for so many years — the gift of giving, the real gift of Christmas.

## Board okays second music position

But members warn that if state funds cut, position will be cut next year

By SUSAN R. HARRIS  
Editor

A second, part-time instrumental music teacher will be hired in Perquimans County Schools, but school board members drummed it in that the position is only temporary.

Superintendent Gregory Todd said the system received an additional one-half teaching position from the state this school year based on the system's average daily membership. Todd said the board should consider the request for additional personnel for music instruction made by the Perquimans Band Boosters in November. He recommended that the position be used for a second music position.

Board member Marjorie Rayburn asked what will happen to the position if it is not funded by the state next year. Todd said that funds for next year will be allotted on overall average daily membership, and that there is no guarantee the position will be funded again. In fact, Todd said, the system's average daily membership is down for 1998-99.

Rayburn said once the position is established, it will be hard not to fund it next year even without state funds. She said there will be an expectation from parents, students and the community that the second instructor will remain.

In the motion to approve, Charles Cheezum added that the position is temporary and should be advertised as such.

### HOLIDAY DECOR

Hundreds of people rambled through Perquimans County earlier this month for the annual Perquimans County Extension Homemakers Christmas Ramble. The tour included three homes, two businesses and Hertford United Methodist Church, where people got a history lesson on the stained glass windows (right) and enjoyed refreshments prepared by the homemakers. For more on the Ramble, see our Holiday Greetings Section.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN HARRIS

## Band to get new uniforms

By SUSAN R. HARRIS  
Editor

The Marching Pirates will sport uniforms next year, thanks to a collaborative effort by the school board and Band Boosters.

The board voted Monday to allocate half of the \$20,000 it will get from the sale of temporary classrooms at Central School for band uniforms. An additional \$10,000 will be set aside in the 1999-2000 budget. The boosters will pay the remainder of the \$32,000-plus bill.

Board members said the board and boosters should work closely together to set up a long-range plan for uniform replacement.

Two bids were obtained on the uniforms, both for just over \$32,000.

## First grader left alone on county school bus

### Family members share concerns with school board

By SUSAN R. HARRIS  
Editor

The mother and grandmother of a Perquimans Central School child left unattended on a bus asked the school board to make sure policies are implemented to alleviate bus problems in the schools.

Katy McGuinness, grandmother of first grader Keegan Lane, said she was "shocked and disturbed" by the Dec. 8 incident.

According to an earlier account by the boy's mother, Mary Lane, her son fell asleep on the bus after being picked up at Central School at the end of the day. He was supposed to get off the bus at a daycare center in Hertford. When he did not arrive, the care provider called Keegan's father, Tony Lane. Mr. Lane went to Hertford Grammar

School, where the buses had gone to pick up more passengers after leaving. Mr. Lane spotted Keegan's red hair through the bus window, got the child off the bus, and took him to daycare, Mrs. Lane said. The bus driver was not on the bus, nor did anyone stop and question Mr. Lane when he took the child off of the unattended bus.

"There must be something done immediately to stop this before a serious tragedy occurs," McGuinness said.

"Anyone could have gone on that bus and taken him just as his father did," she added later in her concerns.

The grandmother told board members that by this time of year, bus drivers should be familiar with children on their routes and where children are dropped off each day.

"Leaving a child on a bus should be criminal neglect," McGuinness said, adding that people can be charged for leaving children unattended in a motor vehicle.

Another thing about which

McGuinness was upset was that no one from the school system contacted the Lanes immediately after the incident. McGuinness said the principal should have been aware of the incident and that superintendent Gregory Todd should have been notified prior to Wednesday afternoon.

"This lack of communication must end," McGuinness said. She added that there should be a notification policy implemented.

Ultimately, McGuinness said, this incident and the two incidents of children being left on school buses last school year cause mistrust not only of bus drivers, but other school personnel.

"If school bus drivers are not doing their job, who else is not doing their job?" she asked.

McGuinness said because this is the third incident of its kind in a one-year period, perhaps the drivers' supervisor should be disciplined as well.

"People must be held accountable for their actions

or non-actions," she said, adding that she does not know any of the school system employees involved.

Mrs. Lane went a step further in her presentation, giving board members handouts on her suggestions for improvements in the system and offering to help write and implement policies to protect children.

"I do not prefer to be part of a problem, I prefer to be a part of the solution," Mrs. Lane said.

She said she had reviewed draft policies for bus drivers, but found that there is no overall strategic plan for driver or student rider training. She also questioned the disposition and review of reports completed by drivers, as well as the disposition of many documents she reviewed marked "draft copy."

She said children should have bus safety drills just like they have fire drills so that they know what to do in case of emergency.

"The children learn by

doing," she said.

Mrs. Lane also suggested that perhaps present policies are not specific enough and address fault. She said policies should include specific actions that are not allowed as well as steps to take in an emergency, and be more behaviorally based.

While Mrs. Lane said she is upset over the incident and the way it was handled by school officials, she believes that the system generally has good bus drivers who want to do a good job.

Both women suggested video monitoring on all buses. Mrs. Lane said she found that it had been discussed in the past and asked whether discussions continued.

"I want this to be addressed and corrected as soon as possible," she said.

According to school officials, the driver was disciplined per policy.

School board chairman Wallace Nelson said the board is looking into the incident and reviewing bus policies.