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Winfall vote may cause racial friction

GOOD NIGHT, IRENE!



PHOTO BY SUSAN HARRIS

Perquimans County residents said good night to the sounds of Hurricane Irene dumping more water on an already soggy landscape Sunday night. With no place to drain after Floyd's floods a month ago, water spilled over roadways in several areas in the county. School was delayed an hour Monday and Tuesday due to the roadway flooding. Water was still standing across Center Hill Road (above) as late as press time Tuesday. Now forecasters are watching yet another tropical depression in the Atlantic.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Perquimans County Middle School 8th Grade Band performed at the 1999 Business Expo last week at the National Guard Armory in Edenton. The band, making its season debut, performed under the direction of David Ziemba.

Business Expo '99 held in Edenton

SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

Business and education leaders got together last week to network and give high school students a chance to explore careers at the third annual Business Expo.

Begun in 1997 as a joint venture by the Edenton-Chowan and Perquimans chambers of commerce and the Chowan-Gates-Perquimans JobReady Partnership, the expo moved this year from the Edenton Cotton Mill to the National Guard Armory.

Wednesday evening was billed as the sneak preview and featured delicious edibles prepared by six food service businesses in Edenton. Both exhibitors and business lead-

ers gathered to network during the evening.

Thursday morning brought bus loads of ninth graders from the three counties in the JobReady Partnership. Armed with a list of questions, students visited three booths to find out more about careers in which they might be interested. These small group information sessions were followed by seminars. Selected juniors and seniors participated in afternoon mock interviews.

Thursday evening brought messages from local officials, a performance by the Perquimans County Middle School 8th Grade Band, a career development seminar, a student/parent scavenger hunt and an expo wrap-up with Dr. Sylvester McKay, president of COA.

TAKE IT FROM THE TOP



PHOTO BY SUSAN HARRIS

Demolition crews painstakingly tore down the N.C. Forestry Service fire tower in Winfall Friday, beginning with the top section. For over 50 years, the tower served as a lookout post for smoke and blazes that could have quickly consumed acres of woodland and structures. The introduction of cell phones, CB radios, and other modern communication methods made the use of the tower obsolete. It was condemned about 5 years ago due to structural rust and deteriorated wood steps which made it unsafe to climb. Friday the landmark came down for good.

JEREMY DESPOSITO
The Daily Advance

Winfall Town Council's split vote Wednesday to appoint a white minister to replace a deceased black pastor on the board may end up causing friction in the town's African-American community.

By a 2-1 vote, the council appointed Methodist minister Jim Krepps to replace its only African-American member, the Rev. Willie Moore, who died last month.

Krepps' appointment came despite the presentation to council of a petition containing the names of 70 residents, most of them African American, recommending the appointment of the Rev. Morris Edward Mitchell.

Mitchell, who is black, is pastor of Temple of Christ Church in Elizabeth City and has lived in Winfall for more than 20 years.

Krepps, pastor of three United Methodist churches — Oak Grove, Epworth and Cedar Grove — has lived in Winfall for approximately 15 months.

Almost from the start, Wednesday's discussion about replacing Moore focused on race.

No sooner had Councilwoman Carol Cooper made a motion to appoint Krepps than Mayor Fred Yates asked, "What color is he?"

Cooper replied that Krepps is Caucasian.

"What color was Reverend Moore?" asked Yates.

Cooper responded that state law doesn't require appointments to town council to be based on a candidate's race.

Cooper and Councilwoman Joan Mansfield then voted for Krepps. Councilman Jake Chesson, who is white, voted against Krepps, saying he had never met him.

"I've never heard (of Krepps) or talked about (his appointment) with the board before," said Chesson, who knows Mitchell. "No one had ever mentioned him. I didn't know he was from Winfall."

Under the town's charter, council has the authority to appoint Moore's replacement.

African Americans at Wednesday's meeting clearly wanted Mitchell appointed to Moore's seat.

"I would like to see another African American on the board," said Bethsheba Ormond, a black resident who presented council with the petition backing Mitchell.

"I'm not trying to be prejudiced, but I think it's only fair (to appoint an African American.)"

Perquimans County Commissioner Shirley Yates, who attended Wednesday's meeting, said she believed Cooper and Mansfield had made their decision to appoint Krepps privately.

"I feel Carol and Joan got together and decided they didn't want to have an African American on the board," said Yates, the wife of Winfall's mayor.

Her husband also believes Cooper and Mansfield discussed appointing Krepps prior to Wednesday's meeting. That would be illegal, Yates charged. Moore's death left Winfall with a three-member

board, and state law states that a majority of a governing board can only discuss public matters in public.

"How does it happen to be that it's Joan's pastor that got appointed (when) Carol don't go to Joan's church?" he asked.

Yates had strong words for the two councilwomen.

"(This decision is) insensitive to the African American people," he said. "they feel they can ram anything through. I think it was done out of hatred."

Cooper denied that she and Mansfield discussed Krepps' appointment in private.

Mansfield also said she and Cooper never discussed Krepps' appointment in private. She said she was in fact surprised by Cooper's nomination of Krepps.

Cooper also said the appointment of Moore's replacement shouldn't be decided by race.

"It was not an issue of race," she said. "I was choosing the best person that could best serve the town. It's not that I have anything against (Mitchell). I don't know him. I believe (Krepps) is a person of integrity. He's interested and involved in the community."

Yates said he has no problem serving with Krepps. But he would have liked to see the appointment process conducted more thoroughly.

"My concern is what's best for the citizens," Yates said. "(Krepps) don't know the people he's going to represent other than his congregation. He may be the better man, but is he going to be sensitive to the African American population?"

Asked if Krepps will be able to represent African American constituents the same way Moore did, Cooper said she thinks he can.

"...I think Reverend Moore was a good person and his heart was for the town, and I believe Mr. Krepps has the same desires for the town," she said.

Reached at his home Wednesday night, Krepps said he, too, believes he can be sensitive to the concerns of African Americans. He also hopes for more unity between blacks and whites.

"I would like to see more uniting of the two communities to work as one, so we can deal with issues of more pertinence," he said. "Unfortunately, (race) still plagues us. We're going into the 21st century; it's time to start learning how to live together."

WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY
HIGH: 68
LOW: 54
RAIN

FRIDAY
HIGH: 67
LOW: 49
PARTLY CLOUDY

SATURDAY
HIGH: 70
LOW: 49
PARTLY CLOUDY