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Hertford cop implicated in K-Mart theft

JULIAN EURE

DAILY ADVANCE NEWS EDITOR

A Hertford police sergeant has resigned after being implicated in the theft of thousands of dollars in merchandise from an Elizabeth City department store.

Anthony Webster, 28, a member of the Hertford police department since July 1994, resigned Friday, several days after acknowledging to ECPD investigators that he had received merchandise from Kmart without paying for it.

Webster, who lives on Buddy Drive in Elizabeth City, hasn't been charged with a crime yet,

but will face misdemeanor larceny charges, probably within the next week, ECPD Lt. Joe Tade said Friday.

Webster allegedly was one of about a dozen Kmart customers who over the past year were caught on a store surveillance camera going through check-out lines without paying for high-priced electronic merchandise like hand-held computers, game systems and phones.

"Some people working (at Kmart) were letting people come through their line and either weren't ringing (their purchases) up or ringing them up for a lot less than they were

worth," investigating officer Sgt. Rick Pureza said.

Kmart store security officials, who suspected several employees of stealing, alerted police at the end of April, Pureza said.

After viewing hours of video tape and interviewing several of the suspected employees, police learned that one of the customers receiving stolen merchandise was Webster, the Hertford police sergeant.

Elizabeth City police interviewed Webster at the Hertford Police Department Tuesday, and he came in on Friday and voluntarily resigned, Hertford

Police Chief Dale Vanscoy said.

"He didn't say why, but I think it had something to do with (the theft allegations)," Vanscoy said.

"I was very shocked. He's not the type of person who would do something like this. He's been an excellent employee and as loyal as anybody to this department for six years."

Prior to his current situation, Webster had never even been disciplined, Vanscoy said.

He also had had several opportunities to leave the Hertford department and take a higher-paying job elsewhere, but never did, Vanscoy said.

At least three Kmart employees have been implicated in the probe and will probably be arrested next week, Pureza said. He declined to give their names since none officially has been charged. All three will likely face felony larceny charges, he said.

All three of the employees have left Kmart's employ, Pureza said. Two resigned, the other was fired. Citing his company's strict policy about not commenting to the media, a Kmart spokesman declined to confirm those details Friday.

As for the dozen or so customers who, like Webster, removed merchandise from the

store without paying for it, police are in the process of identifying them from hours of videotape, Pureza said. Most will be charged with misdemeanor larceny. However several who took significantly larger amounts of merchandise will face felony charges.

About \$8,000 in merchandise was taken over a period of a year, Pureza said. Most of it was used by those who stole it. However, there is evidence that some merchandise was stolen and later sold, Pureza said. Some of the stolen merchandise has been recovered, he added.

Gregory proposes budget

ANNA GOODWIN MCCARTHY and SUSAN R HARRIS

Perquimans County Manager Paul Gregory proposed what he said is a tax decrease for most Perquimans County property owners Monday afternoon.

Gregory's proposed 2000-2001 budget calls for a tax rate of 62 cents per \$100 of assessed property value. The solid waste fee would remain \$75 per dwelling. Gregory said almost all property owners would experience a decrease in property taxes with his proposed budget.

But Commissioner Charles Ward wants even more of a tax cut. He said he would not vote for a budget with a tax rate of over 60 cents.

The 62 cents tax rate takes into account new property values set by the revaluation completed earlier this year. Gregory said in his budget message to commissioners that it appears the net growth in property values is 18.8 percent, taking into account allowances for vehicles, senior citizens exemptions and utilities. His proposed tax rate is a 20.5 percent decrease from last year's 78 cents.

He said the county needs to be progressive and futuristic when considering its plans for a new budget.

Gregory said the proposed budget would allow for no prominent increase in tax rates for the next four to six years.

Please see BUDGET, page 8

CultureScope 2000



PHOTOS BY SUSAN HARRIS

Kids of all ages enjoyed CultureScope, a multi-cultural festival sponsored by the Perquimans Arts League Saturday at Missing Mill Park. Children enjoyed painting paper mache balls and bracelets, and making dream catchers, masks and framed artwork. Several pinatas were broken throughout the afternoon, and children scammed to pick up the brightly-wrapped candy. Information about other countries and cultures was on display. Hot-off-the-grill hot dogs were one All-American component of the festival



County gets \$250K recreation grant

SUSAN R. HARRIS

Editor

Expanded recreation offerings may be in store for Perquimans residents with the receipt of a state Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant.

Recreation Director Tim White said he has received confirmation from trust fund officials that Perquimans County will receive \$250,000 to expand its recreation facilities. The county agreed to match the grant. The county has applied for a \$100,000 grant from the Rural Center to help offset the county share of the project.

Plans call for the construction of a gymnasium complete with offices, restrooms and storage. Recreation basketball will move to the new facility upon its completion, relieving the scheduling bottleneck on the middle school court in the winter. In addition, White said the offices of the Recreation Department will be housed in the gym.

The project will also allow for the construction of a lighted baseball field and a separate lighted soccer field. The 13-to-15 and 16-to-18 Babe Ruth baseball teams will play on the new field upon its completion. Soccer and midget football will be played on the soccer field.

These sports are presently played on school fields, and scheduling, especially during periods of inclement weather, has sometimes been difficult. This summer, Babe Ruth baseball is being played on the county softball fields due to a maintenance project scheduled on the high school field this summer. While some sum-

mer baseball can be played at the middle school field, that field is not lighted, so only afternoon games can be scheduled there.

A restroom/concessions building will complete the project.

The new facility will be built near the present county softball fields in Winfall, but the exact location has yet to be determined. White said once the actual site is chosen, officials will determine how to situate each component of the project on the property, then the bid process can begin. Under the terms of the grant, the project must be completed by June 2002.

"We happy to expand and have the facilities to serve more children," White said. "It is also going to be better from a staff perspective to have our facilities and offices together."

Final paperwork is being submitted for the last trust fund grant received for recreation, White said. The last project was funded in June 1998, and included the construction of the lighted tennis courts, refurbishing the old tennis courts into a basketball facility, and adding playground equipment and horseshoe pits. The project is located on Grubb Street on Academy Square.

In addition to the recreation facility upgrades on the site, White said the town of Hertford's beautification project in the adjacent park has made the area much more attractive.

In addition to White, the Recreation staff includes Athletic Director Guy Webb and part-time clerical support.

County tax collections average

SUSAN R. HARRIS

Editor

Tax collection rates impact ad valorem tax rates. How does Perquimans measure up when it comes to collecting taxes?

The county is average, according to information provided by the N.C. Department of the Treasury. Perquimans' collection rate is 94.4 percent, compared to a statewide rate of 94.07 percent for counties with a population of 25,000 and below.

The statewide tax collection rate is 97.9 percent, but that number is high due to the high collection rates in the state's largest counties like Mecklenburg and Wake, said a spokesperson for the Treasury Department. Larger

counties generally have more employees and are better equipped to go after delinquents from a personnel standpoint, he added.

The spokesman also said motor vehicle tax collection rates pull down overall tax rates. He said without motor vehicle taxes, collection rates for small counties is 95.3 percent.

Perquimans County Tax Supervisor Cheryl Phillips said using her calculations, the county's collection rate rises to almost 96 percent without the motor vehicle taxes.

Phillips said the county has five full-time people in the tax department, plus a clerk split between the water and tax departments. In addition, a tax lister is employed to list

personal property during tax listing season beginning in January of each year. Two employees are responsible for most of the collection work, in addition to their other duties.

Phillips outlined the tax collection process. Bills go out by the first week in September, with payment due in full by Jan. 1. Taxes become delinquent if not paid by Jan. 5, she said.

After the first week in January, delinquent notices are sent out letting property owners know that the department begins enforcement procedures in February. If those who owe delinquent taxes do not respond, collection action is taken in February or March.

Please see COLLECT, page 12

'Gifted' students no longer labeled

ANNA GOODWIN MCCARTHY

Correspondent

Approximately 41 high school students, 10 middle school students and one elementary school student are classified as gifted in the Perquimans County School System.

In a recent meeting, school board members discussed the decreasing number of gifted students and the school system's responsibility to challenge gifted students.

Superintendent Gregory Todd said the decrease in numbers is the result of a program started in 1995, which ended the labeling of students as aca-

demically gifted in the school system.

"We are not in the business of identifying students," said Todd.

In 1995, the school system replaced the academically gifted program with a program sponsored by the Frank Porter Graham Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Todd said the program is advantageous because it challenges all students.

The Integrated Able Learners Program applies in class and across class flexible groups, computer based

Please see GIFTED, page 8

WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY
HIGH: 82
LOW: 63
PARTLY CLOUDY

FRIDAY
HIGH: 87
LOW: 66
PARTLY CLOUDY

SATURDAY
HIGH: 89
LOW: 71
PARTLY CLOUDY