

Spruce up for spring

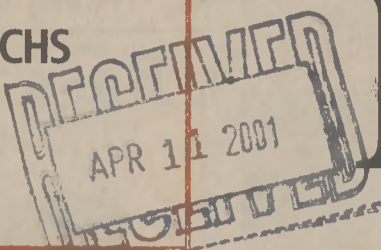
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Harrell at home at PCHS

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# THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

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## HHBA hosts Easter events

Those who hop on to downtown Hertford Saturday can enjoy food, contests and lots of bargains from merchants and flea market vendors.

The Historic Hertford Business Association is again sponsoring an Easter event, and this year has combined it with the group's annual flea market on the courthouse lawn.

The Easter bunny will

arrive Saturday at 9 a.m. for a breakfast hour. A contest to determine the best-decorated Eastern bonnet is set for 11 a.m. An Easter egg hunt for children 8 and under will take place at noon.

From 8 a.m.—2 p.m., the flea market will operate on the courthouse lawn. Space are available for \$10. To reserve a space, call The Wishing Well at 426-2021.

## Attorney blames race for Coston weapons arrest

CHIP ROMANOVICH  
The Daily Advance

The attorney for a Perquimans High School student charged with bringing a rifle to school says the entire matter is race-related, and her client is being unfairly prosecuted.

"I'm sure race plays a role here," said Teresa Smallwood, a Windsor lawyer retained by 16-year-old Emanuel Coston. "I'm sure of it."

Police and school officials both say the charge against Coston has nothing to do with race, but is a matter of school safety.

Coston, who is African American, was charged March 8 after several students said they saw a rifle in his pants while he was on the school bus that morning.

After a through search, police did not find a weapon on Coston or in his locker. He has, however, been suspended from school until the outcome of his trial.

Smallwood says police didn't find a gun on Coston because there wasn't one. The only reason her client has been charged and suspended from school, she said, is his race.

"He's certainly not been treated the same as other individuals who have actually been caught with weapons," Smallwood said. "I think you take it seriously and investigate it, but I think you give him the benefit of the doubt - same as you do other, who are of a different hue, obviously."

Interim Perquimans Schools Superintendent Pat Harrell denied Smallwood's allegations.

"This was not a race-related issue. This is a safe school issue," he said. "We feel we have a good school and a good school system and we feel we don't have a feeling among our people that there is a race issue."

Hertford Police Chief Dale Vanscoy also said race had played no role in his department's investigation of Coston.

"We're investigating a weapons on campus charge," he said. "The weapon is our main priority, and that's the only way

we look at it."

Vanscoy said he spoke with two witnesses, one white and one black, and both were specific in their recollections of what they saw.

"They were very explicit on what they described...Based on that, we went forward with charges," he said. "The school staff said they've had quite a few (witnesses), but I've talked to two that were very explicit. Once it gets ready for court, if the district attorney wants to call more witnesses on behalf of the state, they can do that."

Like school officials, Vanscoy said his department's primary concern is school safety.

"That's all we're looking at," Vanscoy said. "We want the students to feel safe going to school; we want parents to feel safe sending them to school, and we want the staff to feel safe going to work."

Smallwood said she thinks the investigation has gone too far, however.

"He was in the campus a very short period of time...and they never did find a weapon," she said. "He didn't have a weapon, and I think I can show that once we get in court."

Some of the witnesses may have had a conflict with Coston in the past, she added.

"I'm speaking of at least one teacher and one student in particular," she said.

Perquimans High School Principal Dwayne Stallings said he was disappointed to hear Smallwood's claim that racism is behind Coston's prosecution.

"We did our investigation and turned it over to the police," he said. "I'm sorry it's looked at from that angle. It's a safe school matter."

Coston made his first court appearance in Perquimans County District Court Wednesday morning. The appearance was only to determine his legal representation. He did not enter a plea, court officials said.

He is scheduled to appear in court again April 18 for a probable cause hearing.

## ANOTHER HIT



PHOTO BY SUSAN HARRIS

The Perquimans High School Drama and Music Departments presented a hit last week with the musical comedy "A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum." Audiences were treated to yet another stellar performance by PCHS thespians and vocalists. For a review of the play, please turn to page 6.

## County hopes redistricting will end split

ROBERT SHILES  
The Daily Advance

Perquimans County commissioners have passed a resolution requesting the N.C. General Assembly to place all of Perquimans County into one state House district when legislative redistricting takes place later this year.

As it is now, Perquimans County is part of two House districts — the 1st House District represented by Bill Owens, D-Pasquotank, and the 86th House District represented by William Culpepper, D-Chowan. Owens repre-

sents one precinct — consisting of 1,624 of the county's 7,755 registered voters — while Culpepper represents the remaining six precincts, totalling 6,131 registered voters.

"We support both our representatives, and both have done an excellent job for us," said County Manager Paul Gregory. "But the chance of Perquimans County having its own candidate elected to the House when the county is split in two is negated ... We've had no problems with our legislators, but politically its not feasible to have the county split the way it is now."

As stated in the resolu-

tion passed last Monday, "A citizen has no realistic chance of being elected to the N.C. General Assembly as evidenced by the fact that no one from Perquimans County has served in the General Assembly (since House districts were last redrawn in 1991), either Republican or Democrat ... Perquimans County is one of a small minority of North Carolina counties that does not have a representative as every other citizen in the state of North Carolina."

Ed Regan, deputy director of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, said it is not unusual that counties

located in more than one district seek to be put into one legislative district. Having districts drawn along county lines used to be the norm, and Regan said this year, there is a movement to use county lines as boundaries once more.

As do all other states, North Carolina must redraw its state legislative and congressional districts every 10 years based on new census data. According to law, the state's 50 Senate seats and 120 House seats must be drawn to represent as closely as possible the same number of citizens.

Slow growth in the east will probably cause legislators to draw larger districts based on the 2001 census figures.

Currently both districts have less than the ideal number of 67,078 residents. The 1st district — Currituck, Camden, Pasquotank and one Perquimans precinct — has 62,488, while the 86th — Chowan, Dare, Tyrrell and parts of Washington and Perquimans — has 63,762.

## OUTSTANDING ATHLETE



Perquimans' Kindra Lee was named The Daily Advance Athlete of the Year for Winter Sports.

## WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY  
High: 83  
Low: 63  
PARTLY CLOUDY

FRIDAY  
High: 87  
Low: 58  
ISOLATED T'STORMS

SATURDAY  
High: 78  
Low: 51  
PARTLY CLOUDY