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Three local schools named 'Super Safe'

Three Perquimans County schools have earned the N.C. Department of Public Instruction's top safety award.

Central, Hertford Grammar and Perquimans High schools collected the Super Safe School awards on Feb. 19 at the annual Safe Schools Conference in

Raleigh.

The award is given to schools that participate in a voluntary process of assessing safety procedures, incidents of disruption and violence, and school response to safety concerns.

"It is a tremendous amount of work to complete the application

process," said Schools Superintendent Ken Wells. "We are fortunate to have three schools selected. I am proud of each school and each staff member."

Wells said providing a safe learning environment for children and educators is a priority because he believes high student achievement goes hand-in-

hand with a safe learning environment.

To qualify for the Super Safe School Award, schools must show they follow safety procedures above and beyond those that the state requires. Schools must also report data on student performance, provide copies of student and parent handbooks, and analyze safe

schools and crisis management plans.

At the conference, school employees attended workshops on best practices of schools throughout the state, which can be used to further improve local safety plans.

"The safety plans for each school are constantly being developed and

becoming more detailed," said Director of Special Projects Jeanie Umphlett.

The application process for the Triple S Award allows principals and staff to perform a real self-study of the school by voluntarily submitting a portfolio documenting the safety processes they have in place.

School dropout rates decline

Perquimans County Schools improved its dropout rate for the fourth consecutive year.

According to the 2002-03 Dropout Data Report recently released by the Department of Public Instruction, Perquimans County Schools improved from 10.06 percent during the 1998-99 school year to 5.17 percent during the 2002-03 school year. In 1998-99 Perquimans County Schools reported 63 dropouts and in 2002-03 reported 32 dropouts, significantly improving its dropout rate.

Last year, Perquimans County Schools reported 32 students as dropouts. A dropout is defined as a student who a) was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year; b) was not enrolled on Day 20 of the current school year; c) has not graduated from

high school or completed a state or district approved educational program and does not meet any reporting exclusions including transferred to another public school, home school or state/district educational program; or was temporarily absent due to suspension, to school approved illness, or death.

"We are serious about providing assistance to students who are struggling in school," said Schools Superintendent Ken Wells. "Recent interventions implemented include the Advancement Center at Perquimans High School, the on-site Alternative Education Programs at Perquimans Middle School and Perquimans High School, the installation of Web Academy, and the Judicial Council for Improved Attendance.

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STUDENT ART SHOW



In celebration of March's National Youth Art Month Perquimans Arts League is hosting an exhibit of art created by Perquimans County School students. The show will be in place through March 15 at the PAL Gallery in Hall of Fame Square.

Sheriff warns of scams

SUSAN R. HARRIS

Perquimans County Sheriff Eric Tilley warns residents that his office has seen an increase in calls complaining about financial scams.

"If it sounds too good to be true, it normally is," Tilley said.

Tilley said those who could potentially have been scammed typically say that they received an e-mail or phone call telling them they have won a large sum of money. Others receive e-mails saying that American citizens have died in a foreign country, leaving a huge sum of money which needs to be dispersed.

The typical contactor says that if those called will send information and/or money, they will receive a large sum of money later.

Tilley warns that people should never give out a social security number or any financial information unless it is to an agency known to them to be legitimate.

E-government forum set

Perquimans County residents may attend a public forum to help development an e-government plan for the county on March 3, 5—6 p.m. in the commissioners room at the courthouse annex.

The public may provide input and comment on creating e-government capabilities.

A planning grant from e-NC will help develop a framework for the plan.

Onley named Ambassador of Aquaculture by state agency

SUSAN R. HARRIS

When Aubrey Onley was a little boy, he used to dig holes around his family's property, adding fish to see how long he could keep them.

Onley has graduated to acres of ponds and tanks, where he first raised crawfish and has now moved to yellow perch fingerlings and freshwater prawns.

He was one of the first in the eastern part of the state to go into aquaculture, and is credited by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services as a leader in the industry. In recognition of his efforts as a major organizer and promoter of the industry, Onley was recently named an Ambassador of Agriculture by NCDA&CS. He has worked closely with NCDA&CS as well as N.C. State University in research and promotion of N.C. aquaculture, both in the state and across the nation.

Onley began his foray into aquaculture in 1988, raising crawfish.

Now, it's yellow perch season, and Onley has his brood stock in large tanks on his farm, where they are spawning. The eggs are gathered and incubated, then the fry are transferred to fingerling ponds for 6—9 weeks.

They are harvested when they are about 1 1/2—2 inches long, then the fingerlings are transferred



Aubrey Onley raises perch fingerlings and fresh water prawns on his Old Neck farms. Onley was the first producer of prawns in Eastern North Carolina. He gets help from his family (right), wife Sheila, and sons Darin and Ryan, who proudly shows off one of the fish in his dad's brood stock.

to large tanks where they are trained to take feed. Once they are on the feed and doing well, they are shipped to other operations that grow them out into food fish.

Onley is particular about transferring his fish for transport in trucks to other facilities. They are actually dipped in 5 gallon buckets, weighed and loaded.

Some people transfer fish using bobcats, but Onley said that stresses the fish, something he doesn't like to do.

During harvest, Sheila, who works at the county clerk of court's office, helps, as do sons Ryan, 7, and Darin, 4. The boys' job is to pick the tadpoles out of the fish as they are dipped to produce a clean harvest.

Sheila also does all the accounting work for the operation.

The work is very labor-intensive, but it's what Onley has always wanted to do.

"I've always enjoyed working with fish," Onley said. "It's what I've always wanted to do."

While yellow perch, known by many people as "raccoon perch" has been considered somewhat of a "trash" fish here, Onley said its popularity as a food fish is growing. The fish is hard to scale and is much easier to clean if skinned like catfish. The meat, Onley said, is mild-flavored, white and low in fat.

Presently, Onley is working with state agencies and grower groups to develop markets for farm-raised



yellow perch in North Carolina. A marketing campaign is being developed to educate North Carolinians about the tasty fish.

"It's not easy to find farm-raised yellow perch fillets," Onley said. "Our goal is to have it on menus. We're working on it almost daily."

During the off-cycle of the yellow perch, Onley

raises prawns, or freshwater shrimp.

"They're delicious," Sheila said.

Onley would also like to get back in the crawfish business.

He anticipates growth in his operation over the next 2—4 years, with pond renovation and development, and continued improvement of his brood stock.

HOLIDAY WEATHER

THURSDAY
High: 49
Low: 34
FEW SHOWERS

FRIDAY
High: 48
Low: 30
RAIN/SNOW
SHOWERS/WIND

SATURDAY
High: 62
Low: 40
SUNNY