

Business

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ness," Higgins said. In the beginning, the focus was on bringing light industry to the county. But that focus had to be changed when more retail than industry inquiries were coming in, Higgins said.

Five years since the incubator opened, there are six businesses renting spaces. Another business, Galloway Auto Transport, has flown the coop and expanded space and operations within the county. Instead of hauling cars for other dealerships, owner T.G. Weeks runs Galloway Auto Auction on U.S. Highway 17.

"(Galloway) has the potential to be a good employer in the county," Higgins said.

Weeks bought a building on for his business and leases the property. He learned about the used car business at the incubator as he networked with dealers across the country. For at least three years, he's been buying cars, repairing them and selling them on his lot.

It's not been a quick financial success. Weeks' first setback came while he still operated in the incubator. He found an investor who owned a building at 302 Dobbs Street. Money was invested to fix it up, but the property was not zoned for a car dealership, so that plan did not come to fruition.

Then his 18-wheeler, that he used to haul cars, needed major repair work.

Without an investor or a truck to continue business, Weeks felt the pressure to move out and begin selling autos, but he was on his own, financially. Now, Weeks struggles in a turbulent economy.

"It's been tough to try to get inventory," he said. "I've probably sold three cars in the last two months." His goal was to sell a car and buy two more, but slow auto sales have equated to barely making ends meet in a business that is his only livelihood.

Weeks is hopeful that sales will turn around, and he looks forward to tax season when vehicle sales are usually up.

The benefits of beginning his business at the incubator offered Weeks a clean space with low rent and utilities included, as well as utilization of shared resources, such as Internet connection, fax machine and phone use. It also allowed him to move his business out of his home and give him a place to park his nine-car carrier.

While Weeks continues to make his business succeed, the incubator has experienced some failures. Two businesses failed financially and three others closed for other reasons. The goal of 2020 is to see each business fly the coop by the end of three years, with a one-year extension allowed. Additional years would need to be approved by the county board, Higgins said.

Two established businesses, The Lovin' Oven and Attorney Janice Cole, changed their focus and, because of that, were able to take advantage of the benefits of the incubator.

Carol Hammer, owner of The Lovin' Oven, — previously a retail coffee and baked goods shop in downtown Edenton — said she decided to switch primarily to wholesale shipping.

"In this area," Hammer said, "it's very hard to get the growth. I have to go way outside." Most of her business is done on a Web site on the Internet. She employs three part-time workers and additional help during the holidays.

Hammer said she couldn't find any industry space in Edenton. She's been located in the business incubator for about two and a half years. But, she doesn't see leaving anytime soon as an option, especially with her gingerbread business being traditionally seasonal.

"The economy is just not cooperating," Hammer said. And in addition, "...I have to try to convince people that you can eat cookies in the summertime."

In addition to gingerbread, Hammer makes cakes for all occasions. She will offer items retail beginning in November.

Another business, Country Corner Antiques & Used Furniture, is utilizing 2,500 square feet of undeveloped space in the building. That space might have been more profitable if some of it were divided up as office space and rented separately, Higgins said. But, there's no waiting list for in-coming businesses and there is still one unoccupied office available, he said.

Joe Harrell, owner of the antique shop, is grateful to have a large space to store and sell used furniture. But he and his wife, Joan

Harrell, still maintain full-time jobs elsewhere as they wait for a break in a stormy economy.

"I feel like we're all making progress toward our goal," Joe Harrell said. "Whether we make it or not depends on the economy."

People are spending their money on higher gas prices and groceries and their priority isn't on furniture right now, he said.

The Harrells began their business by setting up antique furniture on U.S. Highway 17 on weekends and working the antique show circuit. Loading and unloading large, heavy items became a weekly chore. The incubator provided a place to open shop without having to continually haul items around, Joe Harrell said.

The outlet has been operating in the incubator for two and a half years with no clear options for moving out and up. Harrell hopes to begin holding auctions in the future.

"I feel like Perquimans County has a need for (an auction house)," he said, "and the people of Perquimans County will support me in that."

Prior to the antique store setting up, potential owners of a beauty shop and sausage industry were interested in renting the large space. But expensive health requirements made those offers unfeasible, Higgins said.

There is no longer federal funding for the NCTDA which supported some 22 business incubators in the state, Higgins said.

"We have to be self-supporting," he said. "Right now, we're self-supporting."

Merchants

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Harmon also recommended that merchants advertise and promote themselves together.

"No one is going to come if one store is having a sale," she said, "but they will come if five stores are having a sale."

She also talked about sharing advertising costs by promoting themselves as a group and HHI matching the dollars. Advertising could also promote the idea of a marketplace. She suggested that merchants purchase plastic bags in bulk together using the name Historic Hertford on the bags.

Harmon recommended that merchants improve customer service skills, seek out items that customers really want and maintain consistent hours.

Merchants could also take advantage of events that are already promoted in Hertford, such as the Tour of Homes and Pig Out on the Green. Merchants and others who attended the meeting rallied around specific ideas.

"They may not buy that day," Eley said, "but they may come back." One couple from London saw a house in one day and bought it, he said.

Harmon suggested that merchants strive for a cohesive look, such as they've already done with the planters that are found in front of a number of shops.

Jewett said that when Susan Suggs of the Division of Community Assistance was working

with the town on Streetscape, she noticed the unifying effect of the landscaping.

"Because of what we have done," Jewett said, "(Suggs) uses us as an example of how towns can make a town more attractive."

Eley said that the Chamber of Commerce is looking for grant money to continue work on updating the building facades. Previous monies have run out, he said.

By April, \$65,000 milling and re-paving work is expected to be completed on Church Street. Work will not begin until the town completes the installation lights, according to RPC Contracting. The town doesn't expect the lights to be installed for at least 10 weeks and paving cannot be done in the winter, said Town Manager John Christensen.

A discussion of signage on U.S. Highway 17 followed with much input and the subject needing further investigation.

The eight merchants who attended the meeting agreed to kick-start their promotional efforts on Friday, Oct. 14 when Dotty's Café will begin selling prime rib dinners on Friday nights.

"I didn't want to start another association because there's too many of those," said Steve Lane, owner of Inteliport. But something needs to be done to get business in now, he said.

Lane is a new member of the Historic Hertford, Inc. Board. HHI is a non-profit organization responsible for the town's Main Street Program.

Relief

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Perry approached her principal with an idea and other schools in the district, as well as others, called in to see how they could help.

One of the school districts that called PCHS to contribute was directly affected by Hurricane Katrina, said Superintendent Kenneth Wells.

"Perquimans County students benefited from the generosity of others following Hurricane Isabel," Wells said. "This was a wonderful opportunity for our students to give back to those that had generously helped us in the past."

American Red Cross Executive Director John B. Gillis received the check from the school system to use for relief efforts in the areas of shelter, food, clothing and medical assistance.

Ben Hobbs, county commissioner and owner of 1812 Bed & Breakfast Inn, and his fellow church mem-

ber, Mark Futrell, formed a small group to help residents in Mississippi. They and Hobbs' sons, Ernie Hobbs of Huntsville, Ala., and Calvin Hobbs of Springfield, Miss., met in Biloxi in mid-September for a week to clear yard debris around hurricane-hit neighborhoods.

Ben Hobbs loaded a small tractor onto a flatbed trailer and extra fuel and drove with Futrell some 16 hours southwestward. Hobbs and Futrell had heard about particular neighborhoods that needed help from Ernie Hobbs' Presbyterian church.

"We didn't want to go down and not have something to do," Ben Hobbs said. "A lot of the devastation was so severe that there really was not a lot you can do."

They began with a list of places — which they finished — and found other people who needed help, as well, he said.

"We're glad we went," Ben Hobbs said. "It really was a mess."

Gas prices turned out to be lower in Biloxi than in Hertford, Ben Hobbs said.

"That was a big surprise to us."

In another volunteer effort, T.G. Weeks, owner of Galloway Auto Auction, left Friday for Gulfport, Miss., with a tractor-trailer rig filled with donated vehicles and food.

Tidewater Auto Auction in Virginia donated a van, purchased non-perishable food to put in the vehicles and asked Weeks to drive the rig to Grace Memorial Baptist Church in Gulf Port, Miss., Weeks said. The other vehicles were donated by Hall Auto World, Charlie Falk Auto, Heritage Motor Company and Victory Auto Sales, all in Hampton Roads, Va., and Auto Truck South in Moyock.

"We wanted to do something down there," said Mike Hockett, owner of Tidewater Auto Auction. "We weren't sure who to contact."

The dealership contacted other dealerships and financial institutions to find a contact. Finally, they heard that the church of the owner of Long Beach Auto Auction needed vehicles for church members

and others who had lost their vehicles in the flood and didn't have auto insurance, said Pastor Jerry Nance.

"We put out an opportunity to church members," Nance said, "and they knew some folks in the community who had needs also."

Tidewater Auto Auction decided to fill the vehicles with food, which will be given to volunteers who came to Grace Memorial to assist with relief efforts. Some will also be given to community members who come to the church for food, Nance said.

Three additional vehicles were donated, but were not mechanically suited for the church's use. They will be sold and the money will be used to buy more food, Hockett said.

"We want to make sure that they know that they have not been forgotten," Hockett said of the people in Gulfport.

Weeks presented the vehicles and their titles and food to one of the church's members late Saturday night.

PUBLIC HEARING

The Perquimans County Board of Adjustment will hold a public hearing on Thursday, October 27, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. in the Jury Room of the Perquimans County Courthouse Building located at 128 N. Church Street, Hertford, NC to consider the following:

1. A Zoning Variance application submitted by Floyd and Susan Ford to complete the construction of a storage shed approximately 7' 8" from the property line. Current county setbacks require a 10' setback distance. The property is located at 107 Webb Street, Hertford, NC, (Parcel Number 4-D077-1002-DC).
2. A Zoning Variance application submitted by Jeffrey and Heather Winslow to complete the construction of a room addition, approximately 11' feet from the property line. Current county setbacks require a 15' foot setback distance. The property is located at 296 Up River Road, Belvidere, NC 27919, (Parcel Number 1-0011-0004).

The proposed applications may be viewed at the Perquimans County Manager's Office at 128 N. Church St., Hertford, N.C.

William Ethridge, Planning Director, Perquimans County

Winslow earns scholarship

Austin Winslow, a senior at North Carolina State University, recently received the Richard L. Jensen Foundation for Environmental Agriculture Education Scholarship. The \$1,000 scholarship is awarded annually to college students entering their third

or fourth year of study in crop production or an allied field. Winslow, a agronomy major with emphasis on turf and ornamental study, is involved with numerous clubs and has received two additional scholarships. He is the son of Stan and Lou Ann Winslow of Belvidere.

News deadline Friday, 5 p.m.

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