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THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

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Pedestrian bridge work delayed

MARGARET FISHER

A backup of other construction jobs has caused a delay in building a 6-foot pedestrian bridge over Church Street Extended.

That's what Lee Bundy, transportation supervisor for the N.C. Department of Transportation, says is the holdup in getting the bridge completed. The bridge was supposed to have been completed by last Friday.

"There's only nine of us

and we have 14 counties we have to take care of," Bundy said.

DOT did get the pilings driven in that needed to be completed by Feb. 14 to meet the environmental deadline. The rest of the work is planned to begin around mid-February after three other jobs are completed, Bundy said.

Once work begins, the road may be closed to traffic from the closest driveways for as many as three days.



PHOTO BY MARGARET FISHER

Ernie "Uncle Sonny" Neupert of Paisley, Fla. rode through Hertford last week during his fund-raising tour around the United States. He is raising money for the American Diabetes Association during his 10,000-mile tour that began last April in Florida.

Biker peddles inspiration for donations

MARGARET FISHER

When Ernie Neupert rode his bicycle into Hertford last week, he wasn't just getting a bit of exercise and taking in the local sites. He was heading toward the end of his second tour in which he will have pedaled through 48 states.

Neupert, also known as Uncle Sonny, is raising money for the American Diabetes Association during the approximately 10,000-mile tour that began last April in Florida, extended to California and continues back south.

"I have no idea how much (money) was raised," Neupert said. "I'm just an instrument trying to raise money for the disease and make people aware of the disease."

The Paisley, Fla., resident is accompanied by his wife, Jean Neupert, who drives a recreational vehicle for support and has type 2 diabetes. His niece, a 16-year-old in California, has type 1 diabetes and just had her third major diabetes-related surgery, he said.

"The sad part is that children born that way

with insulin-dependent diabetes - the life expectancy of children born that way is only late teens, early 20s," Neupert said.

Neupert rode on his first tour of about 8,000 miles in 2000 for his 60th birthday. He raised money then for the American Cancer Society. His wife at the time, Helen Neupert, was diagnosed with breast cancer and died from the disease after seven years. Neupert, himself, is a colon cancer survivor, he said.

The 65-year-old lanky man with shaggy gray hair dons a sweat shirt that reads "Smiles Tour - Tour Around America 2005." His social security check is paying for his tour, he said. He distributes contribution forms to anyone who will listen to him.

The retired mason worker has weathered problems in more than a few areas, such as tornadoes in the southern states, snowstorms in the northern states and fires in the western states, not to mention construction and other hardships. He once had to take a 35-mile detour and also encountered snow in

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INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED



PHOTO BY MARGARET FISHER

Sadot Mendez, a marathon runner who is a familiar sight on local roadways, is honored by friends at Dotty's Cafe on Jan. 24, proclaimed Sadot Mendez Day in Hertford. Mendez was inducted into the Aibonita Sports Hall of Fame in Puerto Rico on Dec. 10, and again in Hertford at a gathering organized by his friend, Jerry Gill.

Mendez is Hall of Famer

Runner honored in Puerto Rican home town

MARGARET FISHER

With a list of accomplishments that seems as long as some of the marathons he's run, Sadot Domingo Mendez Delgado was inducted into the Aibonita Sports Hall of Fame in Puerto Rico on Dec. 10.

A reception for Mendez was held on Jan. 24 at Dotty's Cafe by his friend, Jerry Gill. There, Hertford Mayor Sid Eley proclaimed that day Sadot Mendez Day and awarded him a plaque.

And there, local friends who knew Mendez from his 16 years of teaching Spanish and coaching track and cross country at Perquimans County Schools expressed warm commendation for the local and international sports hero.

"To me, Mr. Mendez is my hero," said Louise Privott of Hertford. "...He has been an inspiration to our family."

Eley recalled the high school having a cross country meet with at least 25 schools participating. Mendez had invited so many people there was no room for the activity buses to park. "Can't" wasn't a

word in Mendez's vocabulary, Eley said.

Mendez started teams, had students running wherever there was room to run and even organized a group to clear out an area for a course.

"I've always been proud of what he's done for our community," said Mary Stevens of Arrowhead Beach.

Mendez had a goal to make it to the Olympics. Three times, misfortunes prevented him from running in the Olympics, but he was one of 25 athletes chosen as a torchbearer for the 2002 XIX Olympic Winter Games that were held in Salt Lake City, Utah.

His humble background began, though, growing up in a poor family in the hills of Puerto Rico.

The 54-year-old runner was born in Coamo, home of one of the top three road races in the world - the Maraton San Blas de Illescas. He was raised in the mountain town of Aibonito, which he considers his home. When he was about six years old, he ran in small races on streets full of dust and stones.

In school, his teacher created a competition to see who could bring back a purple flower from a particular type of oak tree first. Mendez was the first to bring a flower back.

In fifth grade, a track and field day was held against the sixth grade class. Though Mendez fell

during the race, he finished third. In sixth grade, he won the 200-meter race without falling. Later, he finished sixth in a road mile race between all the middle schools in the Aibonito area.

But eventually, Mendez realized that he needed to train all year in order to remain competitive. So while attending Aibonito High School, he would run either to or from his job he had of feeding pigs.

He finished third in the school's cross country race, ran a 3,000-meter meet in Mayaguez and went on to the regionals.

In those days in the 1960s, he would run with long pants so his grandmother wouldn't know that he was running. It was a common belief that long distance running was harmful, he said.

In his sophomore year, he had the good fortune to receive a scholarship to study at Central Christian High School, a Mennonite school, in Kidron, Ohio. He broke all the track records and went undefeated for two years in the two-mile run.

As a sophomore, he won his first medal by finishing third in a cross country race. That year, a baseball pitcher taught him how to train, for the first time.

After graduating, he returned to Puerto Rico and attended the Colegio Universitario de Cayey. He

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County gets state help on voting machines

\$40,000 grant brings down county cost

MARGARET FISHER

The N.C. Board of Elections has appropriated about \$40,000 to help defray the county's cost of purchasing voting machines. That brings the estimated amount that the county will owe down to about \$21,000.

In addition, the state has negotiated with the voting machine vendor, Election Systems & Software, to agree to wait until the next fiscal year in July to bill counties for the expenses, said County Manager Bobby Darden.

"As a local government, we don't like large expenditures coming in the middle of the year," Darden said. Funds would have had to come from reserve funds or additional revenues brought in before July 1.

After the N.C. Association of County Commissioners flailed the state election board with letters of concern, the board announced that it has appropriated about \$3 million to help ease the financial burden on counties that must purchase new voting equipment according to new regulations. They've assigned a flat rate of \$30,000 for each county. They are also taking over the testing of the voting equipment, which will save counties about \$2.4 million, or about \$10,000 for Perquimans County.

This year, local election board members will go to Raleigh for equipment testing and distribution, said Eula Forbes, the board's director. Forbes said she was pleased to hear about the savings to the county.

"It's a big benefit to everyone because we didn't even know we were going to get it," she said.

WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY
High: 65, Low: 53
Mostly Cloudy

FRIDAY
High: 66, Low: 49
Few Showers

SATURDAY
High: 65, Low: 43
Cloudy/Wind