

New softball coach at PCHS

Page 2

Mediation program funded

Page 7

Hoops update

Page 7

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# PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

35 cents



Dr. Kenneth Wells

## Wells steps down as superintendent

SUSAN HARRIS

After six years at the helm of Perquimans County Schools and 30 years in education, Superintendent Dr. Kenneth Wells announced at Monday night's school

board meeting that he will retire at the end of this school year.

"I have mixed feelings about retiring, but I am comfortable with my decision," Wells said. "Working in Perquimans has been the highlight of my career.

I know I have never been treated as well anywhere as I have been here. Perquimans County is a special community. The collaboration among schools, community agencies, churches and businesses is phenomenal."

Wells, 53, came to Perquimans in 2001 from Dare County, where he served five years as interim superintendent and assistant superintendent.

He began his tenure in education in Charlotte, where he spent six years in

the classroom before becoming an assistant principal, then a principal. He ended his 18 years in Charlotte as executive director of secondary education for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. **Continued on page 7**

## Navy sets OLF hearing here

MARGARET FISHER

A public hearing originally planned for the fall concerning an outlying landing field may be taking place this March.

Perquimans County Schools confirmed that the U.S. Navy has requested the use of the high school auditorium for a public meeting on March 21 from 4:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Ted Brown, U.S. Fleet Forces Command spokesman in Norfolk, Va., also said that March 21 is correct, at least for now.

"We're considering that tentatively scheduled," Brown said.

The Navy wants to build a practice landing strip on 30,000 acres for F/A-18 Super Hornet aircraft to practice maneuvers.

Since the Fourth Circuit Appeals Court found that the Navy's original Environmental Impact Study was deficient, the Navy must hold public hearings in five counties, including Perquimans, once the Supplemental Environmental Impact Study is completed.

More than a year ago, the Navy planned to finish collecting data for their SEIS by Aug. 2006 and hold public hearings by fall.

Brown said in December that the Navy had tentatively planned about nine dates, including Jan. 9, for the hearing. However, earlier dates were cancelled because the Navy had not completed their SEIS by the expected time period.

"We anticipate the release (of the draft SEIS) to be in late February," Brown said.

Currently, biologists are in the field continuing to study through the winter, Brown said. Also, the SEIS is presently being revealed.

In addition to Perquimans County, the Navy is also studying Washington, Craven, Hyde and Bertie counties as potential OLF sites.

The Washington Daily

News reported on Sunday that the Navy has requested April 4 or 5 for a public hearing at the Vernon James Center in Plymouth.

Washington County is the Navy's first choice for an OLF because it is a remote spot and ideal for pilots to train for carrier landings and take offs away from city lights.

However, the area is situated near Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, a wintering spot for snow geese and tundra swans. This year held record numbers of waterfowl. Environmentalists say that jet noise could harm the birds and the bird population could pose a risk to aircraft. A flight early in the study was cancelled because of the large numbers of waterfowl in the area, Brown confirmed. Last year, at least eight red wolves, an endangered species, were also spotted in the area.

If the Navy does not find Washington County suitable to build an OLF, No OLF supporters believe it is possible that they will consider Perquimans as their next choice because of its midpoint location between Oceana Air Base in Virginia Beach, Va., and Cherry Point — where Hornet squadrons are based.

Added to the dilemma is the complications of whether the Navy will relocate Oceana. In late 2006, a Korean development firm offered Virginia Beach a \$4 billion proposal that would include two 40-story towers and condominiums and hotels under Oceana's flight path.

At the hearings, the Navy will listen to public comments. They will include those comments, as well as emails and letters, in their Final SEIS expected to be published in the fall of this year. Any new information that biologists collect through the winter will not be in the draft SEIS, but will be in the Final SEIS, Brown said.



## Ducky weather

Ducks enjoyed a break in the rain earlier this week, as they explored along the Perquimans riverbank, and did a little close-to-shore fishing.

PHOTO BY MARGARET FISHER

## Forum addresses school needs

### \$10 billion needed for facilities in region

MARGARET FISHER

At least eight counties were represented at last week's forum where officials brought school facilities needs to the forefront.

Rep. Tim Spear D-N.C., was present to hear the school and county officials discuss their facility needs to about 110 people.

The Education: Everybody's Business Coalition will be seeking a

\$2 billion public school facilities bond referendum. If approved, it should go before North Carolina voters in November. Ten years ago, a \$1.8 billion bond referendum was approved.

The state lottery has generated about \$38 million in 2006. However, the needs of the region total nearly \$10 billion, said Gerry Hancock, coalition member and former chairman.

"Even if we get the \$2 billion, local counties will still be strapped to meet their needs. But this will help," Hancock said.

Perquimans County Manager Bobby Darden and Perquimans County Schools Superintendent Kenneth Wells both addressed the local needs

for PCS.

Perquimans County ranks in the bottom 10 for such areas as population, income and sales tax revenue, Darden said. In addition, the two cent property tax has just scratched the surface of school needs, he said. In addition, the public school funds may disappear.

"The counties are running out of fund options," Darden said.

Wells said that even after PCS has borrowed \$11 million for high school projects, there are still more needs to address.

"We'll still be using the auditorium constructed in 1924," he said. "We're proud of it, but we can't continue in an auditorium

as dated as that."

Economic development starts with the quality of the schools, he said. Wells said that one college student asked him what the status of the facility at PCS will be in three years. With retention of staff an issue across the state, teachers can pick and choose the best and most appealing schools.

"The effort we're providing (now) simply can't keep up with the demands of the 21st century," Wells said. **Continued on page 2**

## Harris Landing Road repair delayed; homeowners frustrated

MARGARET FISHER

One road slated for \$35,000 of improvements by the N.C. Department of Transportation is still waiting as the Dec. 31 deadline has passed.

Harris Landing Road in Woodville was approved by county commissioners last

August to be added to DOT's secondary road improvement list. All of the roads on the list that were slated to be paved met the deadline.

Harris Landing Road, a dirt road, was to be brought up to minimum standards - meaning graded and covered with rock.

That didn't happen because once the county approved funding for the road, the road has to be approved as part of the state system before repairs can be done, said Gretchen Byrum, District I engineer for DOT.

The request was submitted in December to the

Board of Transportation in Raleigh. Sterling Baker, DOT engineer, said that he expects the BOT to review it when they meet the first week in March. If approved, the road will be placed on DOT's spring work schedule, Byrum said.

County Manager Bobby

Darden said that residents had been trying to get DOT to pave it, but DOT needed a right of way in order to do so. When Bay Landing was developed there in 2004, the developer, Carolina Coast & Lakes in Greenville, donated a portion of right of way, Darden said.

**Continued on page 2**

## WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY  
HIGH: 47, LOW: 25  
PARTLY CLOUDY

FRIDAY  
HIGH: 40, LOW: 28  
SUNNY

SATURDAY  
HIGH: 57, LOW: 39  
MOSTLY SUNNY