

# THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

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## Locals claim money

CATHY WILSON  
Staff Writer

Since August 2007, more than \$50,000 in unclaimed property and 39 shares of stock have been reclaimed by local residents from the North Carolina State Treasurer's office.

Heather J. Franco, deputy director of communications for the office, said 45 claims totalling \$50,267.43 and 39 shares of stock have been returned in the past 10 months to locals.

As of July 15, Franco said 850 property owners in the county still have approximately \$150,000 in unclaimed property and 3,200 shares of stock available to be claimed in the state program.

The program defines unclaimed property as bank accounts, wages, utility deposits, insurance policy proceeds, stocks, bonds, and contents of safe deposit boxes that typically have been abandoned for one to five years.

Funds become unclaimed because the holder lost track of the owner due to an incorrect address or misinformation in the claim.

The Perquimans Weekly printed a story in August 2007, detailing the NC Cash Unclaimed Property Program and noting that, at that time, more than 1,000 county residents and businesses had unclaimed property in the program. Some property owners had more than one claim.

The story also pointed out that 25 property owners had funds of over \$1,000.

After the story ran, Hertford resident Skip Matthews organized an effort to help local residents get their unclaimed property through the combined efforts of the paper and Catholic Charities.

Beginning in April, The Perquimans Weekly has printed a portion of the names of local property owners who are listed as unclaimed property owners in the state program as of April 2, 2008.

Residents who do not own a computer or who do not know how to use a computer are encouraged to contact Catholic Charities

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Perquimans Weekly photos by CATHY WILSON

WHEN TEMPERATURES RISE, ONE of the coolest places in the area is on one of the county's beautiful waterways, including the Perquimans, Yeopim and Little rivers and Albemarle Sound. Whether in a speed boat, fishing boat, wave riding vehicle, kayak, canoe or party barge, there's lots of fun riding on the river. Just make sure to follow boating safety laws and guidelines for a safe outing.

## Town electric increase dies

CATHY WILSON  
Staff Writer

Despite Hertford having to pay a higher cost of supplying electricity, an effort to increase electric rates never made it to vote during the town council meeting July 14.

ElectricCities, which supplies electricity to the town of Hertford, is set to increase the cost of power to the town 14 percent effective Aug. 1.

Some Hertford leaders want to pass that increase on to town electric customers, but the motion to do so failed last Monday night because of a lack of a second to the motion.

Town Manager John Christensen presented a rate hike increase of 9.8 percent for residential customers and 11.7 percent for commercial customers beginning with the next billing cycle.

Mayor Sid Eley suggested splitting the increase throughout the year in an effort to soften the blow to customers who have already seen an increase in water and sewer rates this year. Eley suggested imposing half of the increase in September and the remaining half in January.

Councilman Carlton Davenport moved that the town adopt the split rate increase but the motion died from lack of a second. Neither Councilmen Ann White nor Horace Reid would act on the motion, and Councilman JoAnn Morris was not present at the meeting.

Wholesale power for the town will cost an additional \$280,000 per year that, if not passed on to the customers who use the electricity, will drain the utility reserve fund, Christensen said. That reserve fund, he pointed out, is needed to handle unexpected costs in the event of emergency break downs, equipment failure, and/or weather damage to lines and poles.

"Basically, without the rate increase, the rate payers won't be paying what's needed to support the fund, and it would eventually go bankrupt," he explained. "And, the Local Government Commission won't allow that."

Christensen said he will present the proposed rate increase to council for consideration again next month.

"We're fortunate we're only seeing a single digit increase," he said.

Other ElectricCities members are also facing rate increases in their localities.

Elizabeth City is proposing a 14 percent increase, while the town staff in Edenton is still reviewing to determine what exact retail rate will be recommended to town council at the end of July. Edenton's town manager, however, indicated the rate will range between 12.5 and 13 percent.

Albemarle Electric Membership Corporation raised its residential rate 6.6 percent May 1. The utility is not part of ElectricCities.

## Towns disagree on wastewater fees

CATHY WILSON  
Staff Writer  
and  
SUSAN HARRIS  
Editor

After examining and recalculating wastewater records between Hertford and Winfall, Hertford says Winfall owes \$15,554.55 in past due charges for treating Winfall's sewage.

Hertford asked Winfall to pay its bill by July 20. As of July 21, it had not been paid.

Last month, Hertford tried to collect \$7,975.99 in past due charges from Winfall for wastewater treatment during March and April. Winfall officials balked at paying, and instead said Hertford overcharged them around \$8,000 between May 2007 and February 2008, and Winfall wanted that amount applied to the town's March and April bills.

Winfall believes the temporary flow meters at Winfall's lift station No. 6 that have measured Winfall's wastewater usage for the past seven years are inaccurate. Winfall has even paid a consulting engineer to verify the flow numbers on two separate occasions, May 2007 and again in May 2008.

Hertford admits using the temporary meters for so long was unfortunate but necessary until Hertford's new system went on line July 14.

When Hertford noted fluctuations in flow numbers from month to month from numbers provided by Winfall, Hertford officials adjusted the numbers on Winfall's behalf.

Because of Winfall's concern over flow inaccuracies and the resulting charges, Hertford officials examined historical data on both flow numbers and billing over a period of one year.

They found several errors in figures produced by both towns. Winfall sends the flow readings to Hertford each month, from which Hertford bills Winfall for sewer treatment.

"Since these errors would affect our efforts to deliver a fair billing result, we went through every month beginning in June 2007 and ending June 2008 correcting any errors," wrote Hertford's Town Manager John Christensen to Fred Yates, mayor of Winfall, on July 10.

Since Winfall believes the town's flow rate was lower than Hertford's meters indicated and since errors were found, Hertford compromised and lowered the flow rate for Winfall for six months. After rechecking and correcting the mistakes found for both towns, Hertford discovered Winfall actually owes Hertford \$15,554.55 instead of the \$7,975.99 that was initially billed to Winfall.

Yates asked for the two councils to meet "to resolve the issue of monitoring sewer discharge that has been lingering in temporary status for the past seven years."

Christensen says Hertford council members considered Winfall's request for a joint meeting, but rather directed Christensen to analyze Winfall's dispute letter and respond as the towns' contract allows to seek an agreement.

"This also includes taking the dispute to USDA-RD for mediation if we fail to reach an agreement," Christensen's letter stated. "In other words, I was directed to follow the terms of the contract in solving this issue."

Regarding the letter from Christensen, Yates said July 21, "We don't have such a letter. There are serious implications from this and we don't want to play it

out in the media."

Hertford hand-delivered a copy of the letter to Winfall on July 21.

Hertford and Winfall entered into an agreement in May 1999 detailing Hertford's treatment of wastewater for Winfall's sewage customers. The towns' contract states in the event of a dispute, Winfall still has to pay the undisputed portion of the charge, as well as send written notice within 45 days of receiving a questionable charge. If the dispute can't be resolved within 30 days, then the United States Department of Agriculture-Rural Development can be called upon to assist in resolving the dispute. If still no resolution occurs, it can be settled in court.

Yates said Monday he has contacted Christensen by phone to discuss the issue, and that Winfall's council wants to sit down and discuss the issue with Hertford officials.

"This doesn't need to be confrontational," Yates said. "We want to be fair to everybody. We want both councils to sit down together with the engineer and discuss this. It can be resolved."

Yates said Winfall has shown good faith in dealing with Hertford over the past 10 years. Winfall had secured grants and loans to put in its own stand-alone sewer system when officials there saw that the amount they would have to charge customers each month to operate a sewer collection and treatment system would be too costly for many of Winfall's residents.

In the meantime, Hertford was in the process of putting together a grant/loan package to upgrade and expand its sewer system. Both towns were working with USDA-RD, and those officials and officials from both towns saw

### WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY  
HIGH: 85 LOW: 70  
SCATTERED STORMS

FRIDAY  
HIGH: 90 LOW: 71  
ISOLATED STORMS

SATURDAY  
HIGH: 89 LOW: 73  
ISOLATED STORMS

