

# THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

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## Towns get street money

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has distributed \$86,340.65 in State Street Aid, also known as the Powell Bill Fund, to the two towns in the county.

"This funding helps cities and towns pay for maintenance, repair, construction, widening and sidewalks on city-owned streets," Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippet said. "With most budgets strained, this infusion of Powell Bill money really provides key assistance to our communities for needed transportation improvements."

Hertford received \$65,448, while Winfall received \$20,892.

Legislation passed last year also allows municipalities to use Powell Bill funds to help pay for projects included in NCDOT's seven-year Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.

The funds, which come from revenues generated by the state gas tax and other highway user fees, are dispersed annually using a formula set by the North Carolina General Assembly. Seventy-five percent of the funds are allocated based on population, while the remaining 25 percent is based on the number of city-owned street miles in each municipality.

The fund is named for Junius K. Powell, former state senator and mayor of Whiteville, whose name headed a list of legislators sponsoring 1951 legislation to help the state's cities with urban road problems. The first allocation of Powell Bill funds was in 1951 for \$4.5 million and was distributed to 386 of the state's cities and towns.

This year, \$145 million in funds were distributed to 506 municipalities across the state.



Perquimans Weekly photos by CATHY WILSON

STUDENTS AT PERQUIMANS COUNTY High School were evacuated Monday morning after a fire was discovered burning in a trash can inside the female bathroom located in the foyer of the new building that houses the gymnasium. The fire was quickly extinguished (above).



FIREFIGHTERS FROM HERTFORD, WINFALL and Bethel Volunteer Fire Departments responded to Perquimans County High School Monday morning after smoke from a trash can fire in a bathroom filled the new building housing the gym. Firefighters set up fans to help blow smoke out of the building (right).

## Trash can on fire at PCHS

CATHY WILSON  
Staff Writer

Local high school students and staff took part in a fire drill early Monday morning, the first day of Fire Prevention Week. This drill, however, was no practice.

It was needed to evacuate the school after a small fire in a bathroom trash can sent smoke throughout the new building that houses the school's gymnasium.

According to Brenda Lassiter, the school's public information officer, a student alerted faculty members T.J. Worrell and Mike Horwat of flames in a trash can in the female bathroom located in the foyer of the new building. Both staff members responded quickly, searching for the nearest fire extinguisher. Worrell located a fire extinguisher and was able to extinguish the flames within a matter of minutes.

The fire was confined to the trash can, she said.

"I received a call at 8:16 a.m. from Principal James Bunch indicating a fire had been extinguished in the female bathroom which is housed in the gymnasium," wrote Lassiter in an email. "Maintenance Director Jonathan Nixon called for the immediate shutdown of the ventilation system to confine smoke and prevent it from spreading throughout the high school."

Members of Hertford, Winfall and Bethel volunteer fire departments responded and checked out the buildings. They set up fans to blow the smoke out of the building that houses the gym.

Perquimans County EMS responded as well. There were no injuries reported.

The fire is being investigated by Perquimans County Fire Marshall Mark Rogerson who said it "was not an accidental fire." The school's fire alarm did activate.

Suspects are currently being interviewed, he added. The school's resource officer, a member of the Perquimans County Sheriff's Department, will be the lead investigator on the case.

"This situation was kept under control because employees were on task and in the halls monitoring the entrance of students into the building," said Principal James Bunch. "The safety and discipline plan at Perquimans High School calls for constant supervision (by employees) in the halls and remote or secluded areas of the building during transition time of students. I appreciate the quick response and actions of my staff in this situation. Their actions prevented the fire from spreading which could have produced significant damage to our facilities."

"I also commend the student who alerted employees of the situation," he added.

Lassiter sent out an emergency call to all parents of Perquimans County High School students at 8:25 a.m. to alert them of the fire and that all students had been safely evacuated. She also let parents know that direct communication with the school would be unavailable until the building was released by the fire departments for occupancy. Parents, she told them, could call the central office for further information.

Central office staff fielded more than 50 calls about the incident.

Once the fire departments gave the OK for students to re-enter the building, Bunch allowed students to

return to the building in staggered formation. Classes being held in the gymnasium and adjoining classrooms were relocated to keep students separated from any smoke or smell residue from the incident.

Bunch also requested the school nurse to be on campus the rest of the day in the event of any problems from allergies or asthma.

Lassiter said Quality Carpet Care cleaned the air later that morning with air scrubbers. The school's ventilation system was restarted after the air was cleaned and posed no threat to students or staff.

"The irony of today's event is that today (Monday) marks the first day of Fire Prevention Week," said Lassiter. "Our schools are participating in a number of educational and training activities this week to help students understand the dangers of fire. Education and training are pivotal to school employees and students when they are called upon to respond to situations like the incident today."

Superintendent Dwayne K. Stallings commended Bunch and his staff for their quick response in ensuring the safety of the students and staff by immediate evacuation; responding to the fire by utilizing staff that are appropriately trained; and communicating the situation with parents immediately.

Lassiter pointed out that the school system has consequences in place for anyone who engages in any act of arson or malicious burning. Students who commit a Category IV offense shall be suspended for up to 10 days, recommended for long-term suspension, and reported to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

## Key gets 25 yrs

Pleads guilty in federal court to drug trafficking charges

From news release

A 44-year-old Hertford man was sentenced to prison last week on federal drug trafficking charges.

According to a press release issued by the U.S. Attorney's office in Raleigh, U.S. District Judge Terrence W. Boyle sentenced Damone Key to 305 months' imprisonment followed by five years supervised release. Key pleaded guilty in May to conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute more than 50 grams of cocaine base (crack) and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

The charges were brought after a May 22, 2007 robbery investigation by the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office discovered a loaded handgun and marijuana in a home where Key had answered the door.

A search warrant was obtained and executed and money, multiple calibers of ammunition, marijuana, cocaine and cocaine base were seized.

The investigation further revealed that the handgun, a Hi-Point, Model JCP .40 caliber revolver, belonging to Key, was purchased as protection because Key had been previously robbed of cocaine. It was also learned that three to four months prior to the search, Key had sold four to five kilograms of drugs.

Key's extensive criminal history includes two convictions of assault on a female, possession with intent to sell marijuana, simple possession of cocaine, possession of drug paraphernalia, numerous convictions of possession with intent to sell or deliver cocaine and possession with intent to sell or deliver a schedule II controlled substance, and possession of marijuana up to 1/2 ounce.

Investigation of the case was conducted by the Raleigh Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office. Assistant United States Attorney Ethan Ontjes served as prosecutor for the government.

This makes the second Hertford man to plead guilty to drug charges in federal court in the past four months.

Michael Leonard Coston pled guilty to possession with intent to distribute more than five grams of crack cocaine June 2 and can receive up to a maximum of 40 years in prison, supervised release up to five years, and a fine of up to \$2 million. His sentencing is scheduled for Nov. 3 in New Bern.

## Christensen carries out Council directives

CATHY WILSON  
Staff Writer

He's been told he's no Bill Cox, but then again, he wasn't hired to be one.

Hertford Town Manager John Christensen followed in the footsteps of the longtime, well known, politically connected mayor/manager who had the historic distinction of serving in the two positions at the same time, something only allowed by an act of the

state legislature.

When Cox retired, Christensen was hired to serve only as manager since the manager/mayor slot had been separated a few years earlier. Still, council, he says, recognized that enforcement of many of the town's ordinances was lax, partly because of having a politically motivated manager in the past.

"My directive from council was to enforce the ordinances," said Christensen,

who in December will celebrate 15 years serving as town manager.

"I became the bad guy. I had to make decisions based on the ordinances," he said. "Some old timers didn't like it. I was told several times I was no Bill Cox, but council appreciated me. I did what they wanted me to do."

Some folks still think he's the bad guy.

Serving on the front line of the day to day battle of

dealing with the public and department heads, Christensen has taken a couple of direct hits in the past month. Two former and interim police chiefs have complained of what they say is his lack of support of the town's police department, both with personnel and equipment.

Christensen's response to both has been he does support the police, but town budgetary limitations only

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WEEKEND  
WEATHER

THURSDAY  
HIGH: 76 LOW: 64  
FEW SHOWERS

FRIDAY  
HIGH: 75 LOW: 63  
SHOWERS

SATURDAY  
HIGH: 79 LOW: 63  
FEW SHOWERS



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