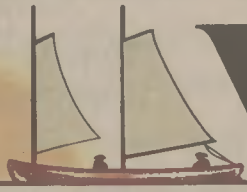


THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY



"News from Next Door"

MARCH 11 - MARCH 17, 2009

35 cents

NCDOT to repair Hwy. 17 river bridge p.3

Charles & Alice Jean Ward make \$25,000 donation for Marching Pirates uniforms p.4

Three schools deemed "Super Safe" p. 10

Schools report criminal activities

Criminal acts in school '07-'08	
Perquimans	13
Pasquotank	15
Edenton/Chowan	23

— as reported to the state

CATHY WILSON
STAFF WRITER

Perquimans County Schools reported 14 criminal acts last year according to data released last week by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. While 13 of those offenses were reported at Perquimans last year, only one was reported at the middle school.

With an average daily membership of 526 at the high school, 13 criminal acts there gave the school a reportable act rate of 24.71 per 1,000 students.

By comparison, 15 criminal acts were reported in Pasquotank County Schools and 23 in the Edenton/Chowan school system.

Last year, there were nine instances of possession of a controlled substance in Perquimans schools and one possession of alcohol. There were four instances of possession of weapons. One possession of a controlled substance was reported at the middle school.

"Superintendent Dwayne K. Stallings acknowledges that one incident of violence in schools is too many," stated Brenda Lassiter, public information officer for the school system.

"School officials recognize, however, that the school population will mirror that of society and issues will arise within the school walls. Consequently, it is imperative that strong leaders are in place to increase your effectiveness in a crisis situation.

"No school district can afford to be unprepared for a violent emergency," she continued. "Violence prevention is an ongoing process that includes physical deterrents coupled with peer communication.

"Each school in the Perquimans County School District has a safe schools committee on site that reports to a district-wide safe schools committee under the direction of Perquimans County Schools

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PERQUIMANS WEEKLY PHOTO BY CATHY WILSON

Ann Carol White, library assistant, reads to the little ones about wind during last week's Storytime for preschoolers at the Perquimans Library. The number of folks using the library in 2008 set an all-time record. Almost 60,300 visitors used the facility last year, an increase of 19 percent over 2007.

Public library use up in 2008

Tough economic times often stoke usage

CATHY WILSON
STAFF WRITER

In tough economic times, more people use the public library. At least in Perquimans County they do.

Jeri Oltman, Perquimans County librarian, says the number of people using the county library in 2008 set a new record. Almost 60,300 visitors used the facility last year, an increase of 19 percent over 2007.

"You've probably noticed newspaper articles and segments, on TV programs about the increased use of public libraries during times of economic downturn," Oltman reported to county commissioners recently. "Perhaps you've been wondering if that's true in our community as

well...it is true. Each month we document certain activities and uses, based primarily on the standardized reports required by the State Library of North Carolina."

Those reports show that in addition to the number of people using the library, Oltman and the staff track the number of county residents who have library cards. As of Feb. 23, 6,395 residents hold a library card.

They also track the number of people who sign in to use the library's computers.

"We continue to set new records in this area as residents and tourists come to the library to use our computers on a high speed network," she said.

In January, 1,010 people clicked on the library's computers. Another 904 people used them in February. In 2008, the 13 computers were used by 11,496 people, an increase of 17 percent over

2007. The library also has wi-fi access which allows folks to bring their own laptops to the library for internet use as well.

Even with items like recorded books, music, videos, DVDs, periodicals, headphones, equipment, toys, puppets, games and puzzles available to check out, still the number one item checked out in Perquimans is books.

"As you would expect, getting good books to read is one reason people come," Oltman continued. "We keep track of how many books we circulate each month. Even though the use of DVDs and videos is strong, the number of books checked out each month is stronger."

Last year, more than 57,000 items were checked out, an increase of 11 percent over 2007. That number does not include magazines and newspapers read while in the library. Of the

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Fire destroys Belvidere home last week

CATHY WILSON
STAFF WRITER

BELVIDERE — Quick response by local firefighters Thursday afternoon prevented a fire in a vacant mobile home from spreading to a nearby brick home, sheds and several vehicles.

The two-bedroom mobile home, located at 1951 Belvidere Rd., Belvidere, was reported burning around noon. Firefighters from Belvidere-Chappell Hill, Winfall and Hertford contained the fire to the inside of the vacant house.

Emergency Management Coordinator Jarvis Winslow

said the home was totally destroyed.

Owner Edward Chappell said he and a worker had been installing insulation in the home earlier in the morning, but had left to work on a boat parked in the yard nearby when a passerby in a car reported smoke billowing out of the home's window.

The home had no electricity but was heated by a kerosene heater, Chappell said. Chappell said he didn't know how the fire started.

"When I saw it burning, I ran and moved the boat and the dump truck away from it," he added.



PERQUIMANS WEEKLY PHOTO BY CATHY WILSON

Belvidere-Chappell Hill, Winfall and Hertford firefighters responded to a mobile home fire on Belvidere Road around noon Thursday. The home was a total loss, firefighters said.

Butterfield County tax collections going strong to meet residents

CATHY WILSON
STAFF WRITER

Congressman G. K. Butterfield or a member of his staff will be available to meet with constituents March 12, 9-11 a.m. in the commissioners' meeting room in the Perquimans County Courthouse Annex.

Butterfield invites anyone experiencing difficulties dealing with any federal issue or agency including the Social Security Administration, Veterans Affairs, Medicare, USDA and HUD. No appointment is necessary and people will be met on a first-come, first-served basis.

For further information, please call Butterfield's district office at 1-888-874-9063 or at 252-237-9816.

While county tax collections are down slightly due to the economic downturn, most Perquimans County residents are paying their local taxes.

Frank Heath, tax administrator for the county, told county commissioners March 2 that as of the end of February, county tax collections are less than 1 percent behind last year's figures.

"Ordinarily, I'd be very upset," Heath said. "But, from what I have heard from surrounding counties, those counties are down anywhere from 2-5 percent compared to last year. While we're not where we want to be, considering everything, I'm

okay with it."

For the 2008-2009 fiscal year, county residents have paid just over \$6 million in taxes or 93.96 percent through the end of February out of almost \$6.5 million billed for real estate. That leaves about \$391,834 to be collected.

By the end of February last fiscal year, the county had collected 94.95 percent of taxes.

"Of course, we billed about \$500,000 more in total levy this year than last, and that makes a difference too," Heath explained in an email.

Total tax amounts were higher this year because tax rolls were actually boosted in 2007 by new construction, new subdivisions lots, and any buildings that were partially completed as of Jan. 1,

2007.

Also, the county's recent revaluation found additional taxable property that had been added over the last eight years that may not have been assessed in the past. Storage buildings, bulkheads, and concrete driveways were among some of the taxable property found by the revaluation that were not on previous tax rolls.

Heath said the county collected over 97 percent of taxes billed in fiscal 2007-2008 and 98 percent (a 25-year high) billed in 2006-2007.

"I think that the slight decrease in percentage collected (this year) can be linked to the trends with the economy," he added.

See TAX on Page 4

Officials want \$100K from reserves

County hopes to collect funds before accounts are hijacked by the state

CATHY WILSON
STAFF WRITER

County commissioners have agreed to try to syphon their state lottery and public school capital building funds (ADM) from state coffers into the county's treasury before the state freezes those funds.

Last week, members of the Perquimans Board of Commissioners voted to withdraw \$112,000 in local unallocated funds currently sitting in the state treasury that is normally used to pay for capital school improvement projects. Commissioners have asked members of the Perquimans Board of Education to approve the drawdown as well. School board members are expected to give approval March 11 during a special called meeting.

The cash-strapped state government has withheld the county's February quarterly distribution of lottery and ADM funds to help ease the state's cash-flow problems, said County Manager Bobby Darden. The county's second quarter distribution of both funds amounted to approximately \$48,000, Darden said.

Officials from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners have warned counties that the state may very well hold distributions for the final two quarters of the fiscal year as well.



The county uses those funds to pay for school improvement projects that are not financed. They do not use the funds for debt service payments.

"We've gotten lottery funds for about three years now," Darden said. "They have never been threatened in the past. This really caught us off guard."

In addition, Darden said county leaders across the state are concerned that the state will freeze or seize what funds the counties already have accumulated in those accounts. That fear is what prompted county commissioners to direct Darden to draw down the \$112,000 already there for Perquimans.

"Perquimans County has historically let these funds accumulate at the state treasurer's office and drawn them down to help fund construction projects," Darden wrote to schools superintendent Dr. Dwayne Stallings in requesting the school board's approval. "You may recall that the county funded almost \$1,000,000 from the ADM fund towards the Perquimans County Middle School repairs several years ago. Perquimans County has resisted using these funds to make annual debt service payments due to the fluctuation in the amount of funds received year to year. These funds have been a compliment to our land transfer tax and provide additional revenue options for school capital projects."



Darden explained that county commissioners consider both lottery and ADM funds to actually be local funds held in the state treasury until the county draws out the funds to use on a project. Since Hertford Grammar School's HVAC project is still an open project for the county, Perquimans can still draw the funds now.

In the past, the quarterly distribution has been as high as \$60,000, Darden said. While the lottery's funds are increasing, the ADM funds are based on state corporate income tax revenues which have declined with the slower economy.

"When the economy is good, the ADM funds are good. When the economy is

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WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY
HIGH: 56 LOW: 40
MOSTLY CLOUDY

FRIDAY
HIGH: 51 LOW: 46
SHOWERS

SATURDAY
HIGH: 57 LOW: 46
FEW SHOWERS



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