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THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY



A Prom to Remember

35 cents

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"News from Next Door"

APRIL 29 - MAY 5, 2009

Man pleads to lesser charge in beating

Lee guilty of felony assault; Sheetz pleads guilty to careless & reckless driving

By Cathy Wilson
Staff Writer

James Carson Lee, 24, pleaded guilty in Perquimans Superior Court last week to felony assault by strangulation in connection with an assault on an Elizabeth City man who was left for dead in a local church parking lot last July.

As a result of a negotiated plea bargain, Judge Jerry R. Tillett sentenced Lee to a minimum of six months and no more than eight months in jail suspended, and placed the Snug Harbor man on supervised probation for six months.

Lee, however, chose to serve the active jail time instead. A second charge of attempted first degree murder was dismissed.

According to Assistant District Attorney Michael Johnson, Lee and victim Gregory Hayes, 43, were attending a party at a home on Dogwood Drive on July 22, 2008 when the two became involved in a dispute over Lee's girlfriend.

Lee beat Hayes, Johnson said, then carried Hayes to a church parking lot and left.

The sheriff's department received a report of a suspicious vehicle parked at Bethel Baptist Church located on Burnt Mill Road in the Bethel area just before 1 a.m. that day. When a deputy arrived, he found Hayes lying on the ground, severely beaten.

At the time of the incident, Sheriff Eric Tilley said Hayes suffered extensive injuries including head and facial wounds, an injury to the throat, several broken ribs, lacerations to the body, and groin injuries.

He was first taken to Chowan Hospital and later flown to Pitt Memorial Hospital in Greenville.

"The medical folks said if he (Hayes) had stayed there (parking lot) for another two hours, he probably would have died," said Tilley. "At the time, he (Hayes) responded to EMS and said the beating was

Which bus to take: school or prison?



Students get lesson on 'transportation' into their futures

By Cathy Wilson
Staff Writer

Stay in school. Those words are heard routinely by teenagers from parents, teachers, and school administrators.

Local eighth graders heard the same words again last week, but this time they came from young people locked behind bars-inmates because they made wrong choices.

The Choice Bus, a former school bus transformed into a rolling impetus for staying in school, visited Perquimans Middle School last week.

Around 150 students experienced the Inside-Out program that includes watching a documentary showing the devastating and lasting effects of dropping out of school, visiting the Choice Bus which is part movie theater and part jail cell, and finally, signing pledge cards promising not to quit school.

"I hope it will make a difference for them," said Principal Jamie Liverman. "The teachers in the classroom have been trying to make a correlation between those who drop out of school and those who end up in prison."

The Choice Bus visit, sponsored by AT&T of North Carolina, is the headliner in the ongoing program offered by the Mattie C. Stewart Foundation of Birmingham, Ala.

Their focus on the link between dropping out of school and spending time in prison is supported by showing the students a brief movie inside the bus in addition to requiring that they watch the documentary the day before the bus arrives.

The movie, "The Choice is Yours," stars young prison inmates who tell how their lives would



PERQUIMANS WEEKLY PHOTO BY CATHY WILSON

Students sit and listen to stories of life behind bars from the 75 percent of America's dropouts who are now inmates. The students pledged to stay in school.

After watching the movie, the students were led into the back of the bus which holds a prison cell complete with toilet, sink and stainless steel prison bed topped by a thin mattress.

The cell door clanged shut behind the students, punctuating the message completely.

"I was shocked to see how young the people in prison were," said Vaughney Waterfield, age 14. "I think this experience will definitely inspire me to make the right choices."

Thirteen-year-old Curtis Hurdle agreed. "It surprised me, too, that they were so young," he said. "I don't want to be like that."

Both said they would sign the cards pledging to stay in school, to study hard, to graduate, not cut classes, not be lured away by gangs or turn to a life of street crime.

They also promised to follow their dreams, be all they can be, and refuse to sacrifice their lives by going to prison.

According to the Foundation, a kid drops out of school every 26 seconds with eight of 10 dropouts eventually going to prison. Foundation statistics also show that 75 percent of America's inmates are high school dropouts.

County officials consider new housing rules

Minimum rules would mimic Hertford, Winfall

By Cathy Wilson
Staff Writer

Perquimans County is considering a minimum housing ordinance to help rid the county of sub-standard properties.

A public hearing on the proposed ordinance will be held May 4 at 6:30 p.m. in the Perquimans County Courthouse Annex, second floor courtroom.

The county's housing committee, comprised of officials from the county and both towns, has worked on developing the ordinance for the past year.

"The goal is to have every dwelling unit that's occupied up to minimum safe standards," explained County Manager Bobby Darden.

"It was the intent of the committee to devise an ordinance that would go after the worst of the worst."

The proposed ordinance is patterned after Hertford's current ordinance. The goal is to have a uniform ordinance regulating minimum housing in the county. Both towns already have such ordinances in place.

The proposed ordinance is comprehensive, covering all types of housing including rental, mobile homes, rooming houses, and dwellings holding multiple units.

It covers minimum standards for structural condition, plumbing, heating, electrical, ventilation, space, safety, cleanliness, and infestations by rodents or insects.

The proposal puts enforcement in the building inspector's office, and offers an appeal process for property owners not satisfied with findings cited by the county.

"From a practical standpoint ... in a year, we know we're not going to solve every substandard housing problem in the county," said Darden.

"The process takes time. We're dealing with people's property. This is not a 30-day remedy."

The good part is focusing on vacant or abandoned decaying houses that can be improved or demolished.

But what about a falling-down house occupied by an owner who can't afford to do any better, or is comfortable living that way?

"There are pros and cons to this," Darden noted. "It's going to be widespread as to who it will touch."

Darden said that while the county won't go out looking for problem houses to address, the proposed ordinance can be used as a tool by county agencies like Department of Social Services or the Sheriff's Department to help in investigations like abuse or neglect cases.

"The ordinance is complaint driven," he added. "While the public may make complaints, county officials may also issue complaints as well."

A copy of the proposed ordinance can be found on the county's website: www.perquimanscountync.gov.

IF YOU GO

What: Public Hearing on Proposed Ordinances

When: Monday, May 4, 6:30 p.m.

Where: Perquimans Co. Courthouse Annex, 2nd floor

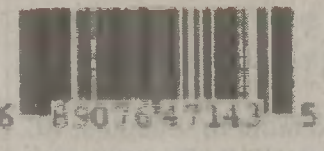
See GUILT on Page A2

WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY
High: 77 Low: 61
SCATTERED T-STORMS

FRIDAY
High: 81 Low: 64
AM CLOUDS/
PM SUN

SATURDAY
High: 81 Low: 58
SCATTERED T-STORMS



By Cathy Wilson
Staff Writer

Grand openings and ribbon cuttings are usually held for new businesses.

For the Perquimans Chamber of Commerce, however, last week's ribbon cutting and open house were held to finally celebrate the purchase of the building they have occupied for the last nine years.

"This didn't come about easily," said Chamber Director Sid Eley.

The process took about three years, he added. He hung his funding hopes on the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development.

"We were hoping for a loan, but they told us we didn't have any money," Eley laughed. "Then we started looking for a grant, but were told we didn't have a chance receiving one because there weren't any being given!"

Luckily, there was one USDA grant awarded in

the state, and the chamber snagged it. Thanks to Perquimans County commissioners, North Carolina Northeast Commission, and ElectriCities, the Chamber raised enough funds to meet their end of the bargain.

Once the grant was obtained, several items needed to be repaired on the building, including installing a new roof, creating an office inside the building, replacing the handicap ramp and railings. A fresh coat of paint and a new front door completed the building's transformation.

Eley managed to get much of the needed services and supplies for the building either donated or by bartering memberships for services and products.

The building was purchased from Robert and Chris Lane at a sizable discount. The Lanes, Eley said, allowed the Chamber to occupy the building rent-free for nine years. Chamber membership has increased each month during



PERQUIMANS WEEKLY PHOTO BY CATHY WILSON

Chamber President Shelley Layden cut s the ribbon celebrating the purchase of a building by the Perquimans County Chamber of Commerce. After occupying the building for nine years rent-free, the Chamber obtained a matching grant through the USDA Rural Development to buy the building. Thanks to Perquimans County commissioners, North Carolina Northeast Commission, and ElectriCities, the Chamber raised enough funds to meet their obligation. A day-long open house was held on Wednesday.

that time. "We are very pleased that the Chamber now has a permanent home," said Chris Lane.

The Chamber building is not only used for Chamber business, but also houses the local Visitors' Center and now the mini-museum memo-

rializing local baseball legend Catfish Hunter.

About 30 folks attended the ribbon cutting ceremony.