

THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

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School fire-fighting program enters second semester, 2

"News from Next Door"

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50 cents

Towns may have way out of utility debt

BY PETER WILLIAMS
News Editor

Hertford could get out from under the crushing debt of owning a share in five power plants, but town leaders say it's far too early to start counting up the savings yet.

The stakes are significant. A residential customer using 1,000-kilowatt hours is paying \$145.59 for electricity in Hertford right

now. Out of that, \$40 goes to pay the debt.

However any deal between Duke Energy Progress and the agency that represents the municipalities could be two years away and any agreement will require all 32 members of the co-operative to agree.

Working on the side of the customers is the N.C. Eastern Municipal Power Agency.

That means if Hamilton — a

half-square-mile town with 500 people in Martin County doesn't sign off, the deal can't go through even if the other 31 municipalities like the offer.

Hamilton is the smallest participant in the power plant deal with a .07 percent share and about \$1.5 million of the debt.

Greenville and Rocky Mount have far more skin in the game. Combined their debt totaled \$650 million. Elizabeth City's share

was \$86 million as of last year, more than 10-times the amount of Hertford.

Hertford Town Manager Brandon Shoaf said the agreement could be a very positive thing for the town.

"It could be very good, and provide a lot of relief for our customers," he said last week.

But he cautions it's a long way

See WAY OUT, 2

RATES IMPACT MORE THAN JUST HERTFORD

Even Perquimans County residents who don't live in Hertford have a stake in seeing the town's electric rate drop.

County offices, the industrial park and two of the four schools

See IMPACT, 4

GOLDENLEAF FUNDS

Two county projects advance

BY PETER WILLIAMS
News Editor

Two Perquimans County projects worth more than \$1.2 million will advance to the next round of competition for help from Golden LEAF.

In August, Golden LEAF announced it was opening up the \$10 million program to 21 counties. They were allowed to submit multiple projects, but the most a single county could get was \$1.5 million.

Now only 10 counties and 13 projects remain in the running.

One by one, the other four counties in the Albemarle area were cut. Chowan, Pasquotank and Currituck didn't make the first cut.

Camden was dropped along with others last week.

One of the three original Perquimans County projects is also no longer in consideration.

"We are fortunate to have two out of three (projects) moving forward," said Perquimans County Manager Frank Heath.

The county is looking for \$360,000 in Golden LEAF money to build the ramp off North Granby Street. Eventually the county wants to dig a boat basin at the site to attract marine industries, but that would require \$20 million.

"Because the Marine Industrial Park is our primary economic development initiative at this time, having our boat ramp project continue is great news," Heath said. "The ramp has a good potential to allow companies to locate here now instead of waiting for the final construction of a basin."

Also in the running is \$860,000 for a plan that would provide tablet computers for every Perquimans County student in grades three through 12.

"We still have a ways to go before we can celebrate, but being included as the field of applicants is narrowed is very exciting," said Perquimans County Superintendent Dwayne Stallings. "Perquimans County Schools is dedicated to produce the information needed by Golden Leaf as they make

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Fire displaces 18 people

BY PETER WILLIAMS
News Editor

A child's Easy-Bake Oven might have been the cause of a fire Sunday night that displaced 18 people and heavily damaged a four-unit apartment complex in Hertford.

Eighteen people were displaced Sunday night when fire swept through the one-story complex off Wynne Fork Road adjacent to U.S. 17.

Hertford Fire Chief Bob Reid said the blaze apparently started in the unit at 222 Wynne Fork Drive and quickly spread to the adjoining units. No injuries were reported. Nine of the 18 people involved are students in the Perquimans County Schools, according to Brenda Lassiter, a spokesman for the system.

"The fire got way ahead of us before we got there," Reid said Monday. "When we arrived there was fire coming out one of the front windows. With no firewalls between the units, it quickly spread."

At least 30 firefighters from departments in Hertford, Winfall and Bethel responded to the alarm about 7:30 p.m. The housing development is in Hertford, but Chief Reid said it is policy for the nearest fire units to also assist in a structure fire. Firefighters remained on the scene until about 11 p.m.

Hertford Police Officer Kenneth Lynch spoke with the resident of the unit that was first to catch on fire. Thyicka Miller told him that she was taking a shower and heard the smoke detectors beeping for about five minutes but ignored them because they have randomly began beeping in the past.

She told police when she got out of the shower she could smell smoke coming from a child's bedroom and she saw flames going up the wall almost to the ceiling.

She grabbed her three children and evacuated, but told Officer Lynch she did see an Easy Bake oven plugged into the socket and pushed against the wall next to the curtains.

When the brand of toy oven was first introduced in 1963 they used two 100-watt light bulbs as a heating source. Since 2006 some models adopted a



PHOTO BY ED LEICESTER

Fire pours from a window of an apartment at the public housing development on Wynne Fork Road, Sunday night.



STAFF PHOTO BY PETER WILLIAMS

Firefighters have their air packs replaced during Sunday night's house fire.

heating element instead and since 2011 all of the ovens use a heating element.

Gail White, the executive director of the Hertford Housing Authority, said those units were inspected just two weeks ago and no problems were found with the fire alarms.

"Everything out there was working and the alarms do not go off for no reason," she said.

Chief Reid did not want to speculate on the cause. Perquimans County does not



STAFF PHOTO BY PETER WILLIAMS

Residents stand outside a four-unit apartment complex damaged by fire Sunday night.

have a fire marshal, but instead uses services provided by the Elizabeth City Fire Department. ECPD Fire Marshal Barry Overman was scheduled to visit the site Monday.

Once fire investigators wrap up their probe, White said an insurance adjuster would visit the site. Based on that, White

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Students, staff mourn the loss of veteran teacher

BY PETER WILLIAMS
News Editor

Teachers and students were mourning the loss of a veteran educator who died last week.

Peggy Griffin, 55, died Feb. 3 at Pitt Memorial Hospital after an illness.

Griffin taught in Perquimans County for more than 32 years, virtually all of them at the middle school.

Hundreds of people attended a wake Thursday night at Perquimans County High School.

"Peggy could have worked in any school district she desired," said Brenda Lassiter, a school system spokesman. "She chose Perquimans and we are a better place (school district) because of it."

The school system's Facebook page was flooded with comments from students who had taken her math class as well as those who didn't but still



GRIFFIN

felt touched by her. A common thread was Griffin was a teacher who cared for everybody.

"She wasn't even my teacher, but had it not been for her taking the time to push me and show me someone cared, I wouldn't have made it through my eighth grade year," wrote Heather Carter.

"She was just about the only person in the world to ever get math to make any sense to me," added Joseph Webb. "She always cared.

May she rest in peace."

"My heart is saddened to learn this," wrote Lisa Klinger. "I'm glad I saw her not to long ago to tell her how I felt about her. She brought math alive. She cared."

A funeral service was held Saturday at New Welch's Chapel Baptist Church.

School officials called upon additional counselors, ministers and co-workers to assist those at Perquimans Middle School, according to Andrea Greene, the principal.

"There is no doubt that

Ms. Griffin touched many lives during her 30-plus years as an educator in our school system," Greene said. "Her compassion for students, colleagues and all that she came in contact with made her a favorite of all. Her constant smile, pleasant personality and helpful demeanor were qualities that made her so loved by all."

In 2011, Griffin was honored as one of Perquimans County's Teachers of the Year by the Hertford Rotary Club. At the time, Griffin was at Perquimans County High School.

In 2011 Griffin said she was just doing something she'd always wanted to do — teach. It was something her mother was never able to do.

"Teaching is a gift placed within me for the purpose of sharing and helping to direct people in the right direction, to impact others, and make a positive contribution to their environment," Griffin said.

"Peggy's influence will be felt for generations to come," Lassiter said. "She has touched thousands of lives over her three decades in education."

