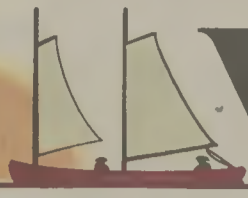


# THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY



"News from Next Door"

WEDNESDAY, JULY 20, 2016

50 cents



Lane attends conservation workshop, 6

## JACKSON BROTHER FOUND GUILTY

### Given 18 to 34 years in prison

BY PETER WILLIAMS  
News Editor

One of six brothers accused of having sex with their sister — the only one not to accept a plea bargain — was found guilty last week and sentenced to between 18 and 37 years in prison.

Plea bargains allow defendants to accept guilt for some crime, but escape punishment for others. District Attorney Andrew Womble declined to say what the plea bargain offer was for Aaron Jackson, but confirmed Jackson rejected it.

In court Tuesday Aaron said "I'd rather get 80 years in prison than do two or three (years in prison) knowing I am innocent."

A day later, after about three hours of deliberating, a 12-member jury said he wasn't innocent.

The jury found him guilty on three counts of second-degree sexual offense. They came back with not guilty verdicts on two more sexual offense charges and one count of incest.

Superior Court Judge Jerry Tillett sentenced



Aaron Jackson and five of his brothers have been found guilty of abusing their younger sister in this home on Chapanoke Road.

STAFF PHOTO BY PETER WILLIAMS

Jackson to between 73 months and 148 months for each crime. Tillett could have had the sentences run concurrently — meaning he would serve all the sentences at the same time and be out after 73 months.

Instead Tillett ordered the sentences run consecutively, or back-to-back. That means Jackson will serve 73 months on the first charge, then start serving 73 months on the second charge and then another 73 months. Tillett did leave the door opening to reviewing the sentence at a later date.

Perquimans County Sheriff Eric Tilley put it

this way. Tilley said Aaron "rolled the dice" by not taking the plea and lost.

Many of the sex crimes occurred at the family compound, a 5-acre place on Chapanoke Road.

The victim in the case, now 18 years old, spoke after the guilty verdicts and asked the judge to give her brother the lighter sentence. That prompted meetings between her and lawyers. The victim came back and told Judge Tillett that she didn't want her feelings to influence his decision.

Attorney Danny Donohue, who represented Jackson, also urged the judge to run the sentences

concurrently, pointing out that his client had never been arrested before. He said if sentenced on the higher end, Aaron would end up serving more prison time than brothers who pled guilty to more egregious acts. The oldest brother, Eric, won't be released from prison until 2027.

Womble said the plea bargains were offered to spare the victim from the trauma of testifying against her family.

Womble said the sentence handed down by Judge Tillett was appropriate given Jackson never accepted responsibility for his crimes while his other

five brothers did.

"I am satisfied we were able to secure some amount of justice for the victim," Womble said. "I am saddened at the events that led us to this point and saddened we had to have the victim come back and relive what happened."

Sheriff Tilley said justice was done.

"I think the jury's decision was not quite what the state was looking for, but the sentence the judge handed down sent a harsh message," Tilley said.

The deal offered Aaron's twin brother Benjamin earned him a

See JACKSON, 2

## Students exposed to career options

BY PETER WILLIAMS  
News Editor

While the traditional track to a four-year college degree remains, Perquimans schools are increasing efforts to show students there are other options.

Jill Cohen coordinates the Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs for the school system. Not only is the school system increasing the number of programs offered, it's offering more at an early age.

The idea is to raise students that are career and college ready.

"Our plan is developed around the economic health of Perquimans," Cohen said. "Seventy percent of our employed residents work outside of our county with 14 percent working outside of our state. We need to prepare students for the workplace within a 75-mile radius of Hertford as we transition from a rural community to a bedroom community."

"Schools have been working in the past 30 years focusing on getting a four-year degree, but many of the jobs in northeastern North Carolina don't require one," Cohen said. "For some it doesn't make sense to go to school for four years when you can't get a job."

Cohen brought in Tim Norman to speak to students last school year. He's the executive director of the N.C. State board of Examiners of Electrical Contractors and he encouraged them to consider the profession.

See STUDENTS, 2

## Planning Board delays action on wind power project

BY PETER WILLIAMS  
News Editor

The Perquimans Planning Board reviewed plans for a \$300 million wind power project on July 12 but decided it wanted more time to consider some of the information.

The next meeting is set for Aug. 2.

Apex Clean Energy is seeking a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for the project known as Timbermill. About 17,000 acres of Perquimans and Chowan land would be leased, most of it owned by Weyerhaeuser.

The county allows wind power projects, but considers them in a special category, hence the CUP process.

In February the Perquimans County Commission made changes to its wind

rules. An outside consultant reviewed the Apex CUP document and concluded it satisfied the Perquimans ordinance.

However Clarion Associates, a Chapel Hill firm, suggested commissioners should consider adding some conditions if it decides to approve the project.

Opponents of the Apex project maintain the Clarion report is not an independent study of the project, but simply a review of the data that Apex provided.

Chad W. Essick, a partner in the Raleigh law firm Poyner Spruill, raised a number of questions that he feels need to be answered. Among them are health issues and the potential that property values

See DELAY, 4

## Opponents: Wind project is flawed

BY PETER WILLIAMS  
News Editor

The lawyer for opponents of a proposed new wind project in Perquimans and Chowan county says, there are flaws in the application and important things that are being overlooked — like property values.

In an e-mail response, Chad W. Essick, a partner in the Raleigh law firm Poyner Spruill, raised a number of questions that he feels need to be answered.

"Why has the applicant not prepared an emergency response plan or a traffic management plan in

conjunction with the CUP (Conditional Use Permit) application? Why won't the applicant agree to a property value guarantee for neighboring property owners if they assert there will be no adverse impact on property values?"

The project is expected to have a service life of 20 to 30 years. A decommissioning study commissioned by Apex as part of the CUP process estimates he cost to remove the structures will be between \$7.3 million and \$10.9 million.

Essick wonders if that is

See OPPONENTS, 7

## Chowan to review project plan July 26

BY REGGIE PONDER  
Chowan Herald

The Chowan County Planning Board will meet next week to review the Conditional Use Application (CUP) for the Timbermill Wind Project.

The review by the planning board is advisory. The actual decision on the permit application by Charlottesville, Va.-based Apex Clean Energy Inc. will be made by the Chowan County Board of Commissioners following a quasi-judicial hearing — probably late next month.

The Chowan Planning

Board meeting will be July 26 at 7 p.m. in the Chowan County Office Building on Freemason Street.

Apex has proposed a utility-scale wind energy facility in the Bear Swamp and Center Hill areas of Chowan and Perquimans counties.

The planning board meeting will include a staff report, which will introduce the project and the application, and also will include a presentation from Apex and an opportunity for public comment on the permit application.

See CHOWAN, 7

## Businessman says area catfish industry threatened

BY REGGIE PONDER  
Chowan Herald

Chowan County officials have gone on record in opposition to a federal regulatory change that a local businessman says threatens the livelihood of area fishermen and other workers in

the seafood industry.

The Chowan County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously at its July 5 meeting to send to the congressional delegation a letter supporting Senate Resolution 28, which would move catfish inspections from the U.S. Department of Agriculture back to the Food and Drug Administration.

"The current inspection program costs \$700,000 annually; however, the USDA inspection program would

cost approximately \$30 million to be established and another \$14 million for annual operations," the board's letter states. "The proposed regulations were designed to give protections on imported catfish; however, native catfish are also being affected. Catfishing in Northeast North Carolina provides the livelihood of over 600 families. Because of the potential for detrimental impact on local economies, we ask for our consideration

and support of Senate Resolution 28."

Ricky Nixon of Murray L. Nixon Fishery in Rocky Hock said this week that in order to comply with the USDA inspections process he would have to build a new facility to process catfish. That would not be cost-effective for his operation, he said.

"With FDA we haven't ever had a problem," Nixon said.

The FDA process has

not failed to protect public health and safety, so the move to USDA is unwarranted, he said.

Nixon said there had never been any health-related problems with the area's wild catfish industry under the FDA inspections system.

"We have been cutting catfish for 50 years and never had a problem," Nixon said. Nixon said if the change becomes permanent it probably would cause him to cut his workforce in half, "be-

cause I would have to get out of the catfish business."

That in turn would put commercial fishermen in the area out of the catfish business as well, he said, because those commercial fishermen catch catfish would no longer have access to a processor.

"We're the only wild catfish processor in the state," Nixon said. He said his facility processes catfish using

See CATFISH, 2

