

# THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

"News from Next Door"

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## Cole honored with portrait, marker



STAFF PHOTO BY PETER WILLIAMS

Superior Court Judge J.C. Cole (right) applauds at the unveiling of a portrait of his wife, former District Court Judge Janice Cole, Friday at the Perquimans Courthouse Annex.

BY PETER WILLIAMS  
 News Editor

The legal career of Janice McKenzie Cole was celebrated Friday when her portrait was unveiled in a courthouse ceremony in Hertford.

In 1990 Cole won a landslide victory to become the first woman and the first African American to be elected as a District Court judge in the first judicial district. The district includes Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Pasquotank and Perquimans counties.

Cole said when she decided to run, she promised, "let's do this right."

She joked that if two Democrats were gathered together, she was probably one of them.

She said it was significant that the barriers that were broken, were not broken by someone from a larger county, like Pasquotank County.

"The first one came out of little old Perquimans County," Cole said.

She held the bench until 1994 when President Bill Clinton nominated her to be a U.S. Attorney in the eastern district of North Carolina. She was the first female African American to serve in that role. It made her the highest-ranking federal law

enforcement officer over 44 of the state's 100 counties.

Cole said Friday that she tried to use her appointment to U.S. Attorney to help others.

"As U.S. Attorney, it gave me the opportunity to give opportunity to other people," Cole said.

One of those who got an opportunity was Felice Corpening. Cole hired her, and today Corpening is also an assistant U.S. Attorney.

"She took a chance on me, and it really has impacted my life," Corpening said.

She said while Cole seems mild mannered, don't let that fool you.

"You will be wise not to

confuse that quiet manner for weakness."

D. Cole Phelps, an attorney and Washington County Commissioner, said when he was in law school at North Carolina Central University, he was advised to reach out to Judge J.C. Cole, since he also attended NCCU. Phelps was invited to dinner at the Cole house.

"I found out Janice Cole was the one I should be talking to, since she was the first Judge Cole," Phelps joked. J.C. Cole is now a Superior Court judge.

Other speakers Monday included Fondella Leigh, a

See COLE, 2

## Board looks to future of park

BY PETER WILLIAMS  
 News Editor

Now that Perquimans County is close to having the cash to start the first phase of the marine industrial park, county commissioners used part of the time at a retreat Monday to discuss how it will go from here.

The county owns 72 acres near the Perquimans County Recreation Department and holds the permits needed to dig a 350-foot wide, 10-foot-deep boat basin with 4,600 feet of bulk headed shoreline.

The county has \$2.8 million from the state, \$750,000 from Golden LEAF and a grant application with the federal Economic Development Administration for \$2.7 million. Combined that should be enough to start the first phase of the basin.

County Manager Frank Heath asked the board to think about what it wants to do next.

"What will the organization of the park look like? Will we sell sites? Lease sites? If it were built today, would we do direct deals with each one? If the park happens, you're going to be talking about this. Ultimately it's county property," Heath said.

Heath wasn't county manager when the Perquimans Marine Industrial Park idea first came up in 2009. None of the current board was on the county commission back then.

One of them, Alan Lennon, was only sworn in December. He admits he has concerns.

"I have a hard time seeing this with the same vision,"

See PARK, 2

## FOOD DRIVE CHALLENGE



STAFF PHOTO BY PETER WILLIAMS

Perquimans Central School Principal Melissa Fields (rights) kisses a pig last week as part of a campaign to collect food for the Open Door Food Pantry. Central collected the most followed closely by Hertford Grammar School. The Junior Women's Club of Perquimans County organized the drive. Member Kim Harris is shown holding the pig, which came from Wally Hobbs Farms. Other members present from our club were Amber Reed, Winter Copeland and Erin Eure.

## Public works director sets goals

BY PETER WILLIAMS  
 News Editor

In the Navy, Greg Benton was in charge of making sure what amounts to a floating city had water, power, and other services.

Now back as a civilian in his native town, Benton is in charge of the same things but Hertford isn't a floating warship.

Benton, 58, came back late last year to take the position of public works director for the Town of Hertford, a town he grew up in.

"I live in the same neighborhood I was born in. When I was born I lived on Saunders Street and now I live on Hiland Park Avenue."

Benton, the son of Floyd and Gail Benton, attended Perquimans schools, but didn't graduate high school here.

"My Dad got transferred when I was 13 and I graduated from Morehead High School in 1978," Benton said.



BENTON

He joined the Navy and served 33 years, rising in the ranks in an unconventional way.

"I enlisted as a non designated seaman and I got out as a Commander."

Typically officers go through the Naval Academy or at least have a college degree. Benton was promoted from the enlisted ranks through the Limited Duty Officer program. His specialty was engineering.

But after he retired, he jumped at the chance to move back to Hertford.

"My father still lives in the area, and I have family here. When I had the opportunity to buy my grandparent's house, I jumped on it."

Among the ships Benton served on were the USS Wasp and the USS Nassau. Both are amphibious assault ships. They typically carry about

1,000 Navy personnel and when on duty, another 1,500 U.S. Marines.

"Everything with the exception of the combat systems, I was responsible for. I had 285 engineers under me. I was like the public works director, but aboard a ship. Here my boss is the town manager and there my boss was an O-6 Captain."

A lot of what a public works director does people never notice until it stops working. There is water and sewer treatment and network of pipes that deliver those services. There is the electrical system. There is a street division that tackles road issues.

There will be noticeable work there. The town received a Golden LEAF grant to replace aging sewer lines. That includes a stretch from Covent Garden from Dobbs to Market streets, Market Street from Covent Garden to West Academy Street and Grubb Street from Covent

See BENTON, 2

## School safety report released

BY PETER WILLIAMS  
 News Editor

Local officials say Perquimans County has already addressed many of the recommendations in a state report on school safety, but that doesn't mean they can let down their guard.

"School safety is an ongoing process, seven days a week, 24 hours a day," said James Bunch, the school system's interim superintendent.

The issue has garnered more discussion in the wake of the deadly shootings at Parkland High School last year.

So the Governor's Crime Commission Special Com-

See SAFETY, 2

## Jackson, mother found not guilty

From Staff Reports

Both Hertford Councilman Quentin Jackson and his mother, Marion Leary, were found not guilty of obstruction of justice Wednesday by District Court Judge Edgar Barnes.

A Perquimans County Sheriff's Deputy arrested them in January during a search of the room Jackson uses in his mother's home. Jackson is under probation and he and his possessions can be searched at any time.

During the search, Jackson gave his mother a key, which led to the obstruction charge.

Jackson said "no comment" when asked for more information.

## Work starts on assisted living facility

BY PETER WILLIAMS  
 News Editor

Site clearing has started for residential facility in Hertford for assisted living and independent care that includes a secured space for people who might wander off.

The project has been discussed for a number of years, but construction on Hertford House should start in about two and a half months, according to Hunter Trefzger, interim director of development for Affinity Living Group.

Affinity, which is based in Hickory, manages more than 90 facilities in the southeast. Most are in North Carolina, including ones in Edenton, Ahoskie and Moyock.

Depending on the location, Affinity operations can

include assisted living, memory care and short-term stay options. Currituck House offers all three, Edenton House offers assisted living and short-term stays while Ahoskie House offers only memory care services.

The Hertford project will be rather unique and unlike some of the others.

Trefzger placed the project cost in Hertford at between \$11 million and \$13 million. He said it would be

See FACILITY, 2



STAFF PHOTO BY PETER WILLIAMS

A piece of equipment works on clearing the site for a new assisted living facility on Church Street in Hertford last week.

