

Attorney General Checking Into Rapid Refund

The sign outside the front door of The Herald Building on King and Canterbury Road says it all: No More Instant Refunds Until Feb. 16.

But you can look at the parking lot where there now are some empty parking spaces and observe that the traffic has slowed down inside the H&R Block Tax Office at the front of the large log cabin which also houses The Kings Mountain Herald, Printing Press, Mountain Video and Jones Intercable.

Since Jan. 15th when H&R Block started offering taxpayers a rapid refund-five to seven days-the people have been lining up.

Manager Kathy Johnson said the local H&R Block had to stop giving rapid refunds for a week to get caught up.

"When the government shut down their computers at 6 p.m. we had crowds lined up in our office waiting and the volume just built up. We were unprepared for the crowds we've seen the past two weeks", she said.

Local tax preparers say there has been no arm twisting and no selling of the rapid refund program, which was tried out last year in the Durham Raleigh area with good results.

For a flat loan service fee of \$55, regardless of refund amount, the service allows taxpayers to get their refund back in about five days, compared with the usual wait of six to ten weeks and 22 cents for a postage stamp.

The fee includes \$20 to send a tax return by computer to

the Internal Revenue Service and an additional \$35 to get a quick refund. The refund is arranged through a financial institution, which pays the taxpayer and later collects its money from the IRS through a special bank account. The refund comes back to the local office here and the receptionists call the taxpayer to pick up the check.

"Everything went smoothly at first", said a local tax preparer, until the lines of people came in, the computers shut off at 6 p.m. and the volume became so great we couldn't handle it. The first week of Instant Refund our business was 100 percent more than last year but we were needing to run three shifts seven days a week," she said.

"We haven't promised anything we couldn't live up to and we haven't lied", said a local preparer who said that H&R Block has treated everyone alike.

The North Carolina Attorney General's office is trying to determine whether rapid refund services offered by tax preparers violates state usury laws.

A spokesman for H&R Block, the nation's largest tax preparation service, said he didn't see anything wrong with the practice.

Thomas Block, president of tax operations for the company with headquarters in Kansas City, said H&R Block "tax preparers told taxpayers of the cost and let them choose whether it's something worthwhile or not."

Local tax preparers agree. They are running into customers, however, who demand their money now, although local tax preparers assure them it could be from three to five days before they receive their checks in the mail.

The IRS isn't saying whether quick refunds make sense.

Neighbors in the same building with the local office, however, are breathing a sigh of relief that rapid refund could be a thing of the past?

Board Authorizes Bids

Kings Mountain Board of Education Monday authorized architects to proceed with the letting of bids for a proposed indoor swimming pool at Kings Mountain Senior High School.

Representatives of the architectural firm of Martin Bardsley Anthony of Shelby presented design plans to the board for the Kathryn M. Neisler Natatorium and a construction cost estimated at \$697,737.

Bids for the projects are expected to be received between mid-March and early April. Construction is expected to take six months.

Most of the project is being paid through private donations to the Kings Mountain Indoor Pool Foundation. Kings Mountain district Schools has earmarked \$100,000 for the project and

the City of Kings Mountain has earmarked \$15,000 per year for building upkeep and maintenance. Private fund raising is continuing in an effort to establish an endowment for continued operational needs.

Although the pool is to be available to the community as well as school use, it is to be constructed on the campus of Kings Mountain Senior High School between the auditorium and tennis courts.

Dr. Bob McRae, superintendent, said that advertising for bids will begin immediately. He said that the pool plans were approved in Raleigh by the Division of School Planning who had made some suggestions on the design and construction and had given guidelines on framework in how to let bids for the project.

Asbestos Must Be Checked

The school board is moving to comply with new federal laws requiring that all school buildings be inspected for asbestos and that plans for controlling or removing the substance be created by Oct. 1.

Associate Superintendent Larry Allen said the school system is taking an aggressive approach to meeting the demands of the federal Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act and that plans will be submitted to Governor Jim Martin's office by Oct. 12th. Implementation of the plan must begin by July 1989.

Dr. Bob McRae, Superintendent, said there

are serious monetary implications and costs could run from \$16,000 to \$75,000. Funding, he said, is not presently available.

Allen and McRae said local school buildings have been inspected before and what local officials will be doing is to re-inspect the buildings and the biggest source of asbestos in the KM schools may be floor tiling. This summer the school system plans to remove asbestos used for fireproofing at four classrooms at East School and in a workroom at Grover School. The cost of that project has been estimated at about \$40,000 to \$50,000.

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