

East

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they recognized the need to achieve racial balance but would prefer doing it while leaving the school open, and another, Mrs. Ann Bennett, a junior high teacher, did not speak in favor or against the closing but urged the board to consider before and after school day care at East, and if it couldn't provide that, to allow her to transfer her child to another school because the elementary schools do not begin operation until 8:30 a.m. and she has to be on the job by 7:40, thus creating a transportation problem for her.

East Principal John Goforth, who was appointed to that position a month ago, and two of his teachers--Mike Smith and Kay Jolly--urged the board to leave the school open. Goforth said he has discussed the matter with many parents in the East community and they are concerned about what will happen to the East property if it is closed, how it will affect their own property valuation, and maintaining their identity as a neighborhood.

"I have seen concerns that we'll be sending our children away to another school," Goforth said. "Even though, in miles, the distance is not that great, in the mind of this community it's sending our children to a distant place."

"In the past and in the future, East has provided quality education in a small environment," Goforth added. "None of the reasons to close the school are so great that they can't be solved. Every negative listed has a positive solution. Regardless of the decision, the staff and faculty will continue to strive for excellence in education but we urge the board to consider the positive influence that East can make to this community."

Smith said he has taught at East since 1973 and also lives in the community. He said the school's percentage of 56 percent minority students does not concern him.

"I have no problems teaching or living in a community that is predominantly black," he said. "I'm not prejudiced and I don't believe I am any better than anyone else. Not many years ago the school system closed several schools, and at that time it seemed to be the best solution. However, the closing of at least one of those schools was a detriment to its community. Anytime a community loses a school or a church it has lost a positive influence. I don't want to see that happen to this community."

Smith said he recognizes some of the problems at East, including racial imbalance and declining enrollment, but "I don't believe closing the school is the answer. Nor do I believe that busing students in or out is the answer. If our elected officials, school administration and citizens will commit ourselves we can find the answers that will make East a school of excellence and our community a community that anyone would be proud to be a part of."

Clifton Williams, a parent of an East student, said he has nothing against racial balance, "but that can cause harm if too much emphasis is put on it. The main thing is a quality education. I hope the school board will consider all the pros and cons and I definitely feel the pros outweigh the cons."

Nan Jean Grant, an elementary teacher, and the Rev. Harwood Smith pointed out that while a state study has recommended the closing of both East and West schools, a recent Southern Accreditation team recommended leaving East open.

"I ask the board to build on our strengths: Our parents who want the very best educational experiences for their children, our students, who are eager to be given educational opportunities, and our staff and faculty, who have always been committed to the educational process," Grant said.

Rev. Smith said closing East would be an inconvenience for "some" parents and students in other attendance zones, but would be an inconvenience for "all" students at East. "That is grossly unfair," he said.

Smith also pointed out that the majority of the people who would be affected "are perhaps those who are least influential in the community, politically and economically, and that strikes me as being very unfair."

W.C. Kelly, who lives a block from the school, pointed out that East has a history of providing excellent educational opportunities and noted that a large housing development is being constructed in the area.

"When people buy or build, the first thing they want to know is where the school is, not how many minorities are in the community," he said. "And I don't understand why the school board has waited so long to bring up the minority problem. You waited until it was 54 percent before you mentioned it."

Kelly said when voters in East Kings Mountain voted in favor of the recent school bond referendum which will provide funds for building and renovation projects in all-KM schools, they were "led to believe we were voting to fix it, not close it. Now that the bond issue's passed, you're talking about closing a fixture in this community."

Kelly said the question many board members have raised about the street which splits the back of the school property can be easily solved by working with city officials to have the street closed off. "The street shouldn't have anything at all to do with this decision," he said.

Kelly said the school's teachers "are the best we've ever had in Kings Mountain. If you close East School don't walk by the cemetery because Mrs. Irma W. Thompson will turn over in her grave. We tried to get this school named after her but the board refused to do it, and if you close this school I hope she comes back to haunt you."

John Houze also spoke briefly about the safety factor of the street, but said crossing the street "is much safer than crossing Mountain or West King Street at West School. I don't think that's a problem," he said.

Speaking of the difference in money required to repair East (\$1.4 million) or adding on to other schools to accommodate East students (\$1.3 million), Houze said "that's not any money when you're trying to keep a school open." Houze also touched on busing, noting that "minority students are already deprived and when you bus them they get even more tired and become less effective."

Houze said students at East are "deprived of a lot of opportunities students at other schools have, but if you look at their grades, they're just as good as the rest of the schools. That ought to tell you something about this school. Our problem is not racial imbalance. When you talk about closing East School, you're talking about destroying a community and that's more important. Race has nothing to do with it. We're all in this thing together."

Rev. M.L. Campbell, a former educator, said he can see both sides of the issue. "I can see the racial imbalance but we can work that out and make some adjustments," he said. "Some black students may have to be bused and I would hope that does not happen. It has happened in some school systems and has been a drawback. It would definitely be a minus to our community."

Jeff Gregory, who lives in a North district which has been mentioned as one area whose students would be re-assigned to East, said he's concerned about busing students to and from North and East across the railroad tracks. "I have nothing against East School, but I'm against my child coming here because of the safety factor," he said.

Gregory also questioned the school board's policy of allowing in-district transfers and said some of the racial imbalance at East could be blamed on that. "Maybe that should be stopped," he said.

Rev. Robbie Moore, former president of the East PTO, said it would be an "injustice" to close the school.

"We would have to pay the full price and the majority of students at other schools would not have to pay and that's just not right," he said. "We have good teachers and a good school which has been here for a long time. It's worth paying the price to keep it open. If people work together, we can keep it open and have a good school."

the percentage of minority students has increased. Many people have suggested that's because the school board has allowed so many students to transfer from East to another school, but McRae said that's not the case.

"I don't think that's a tremendous part of the problem," McRae said. "East had a net deficit of 14 students last year. Had we not had any transfers from East, ironically, there would have been 14 more students in school but the minority percentage still would have been 54 percent."

Asked if the federal government would step in and require balancing the racial percentages if the school is left open and elementary lines not changed, McRae said the system has not been pressured, nor would he expect it to ever be pressured, by the federal government.

"Kings Mountain Schools were integrated under a voluntary integration plan," he noted. "When you go under a voluntary plan, no percentages are set up for the schools. The federal government allows local communities to have the opportunity to place residential areas, including public housing projects, in whatever areas they feel are best suited."

"We have two public housing projects in the East attendance zone," he added. "That's the major factor in why our numbers have gotten out of kilter. But it wouldn't be appropriate for the government to come in and tell us we've put them in the wrong place."

"All of this brings us back to the initial point, which has always been, 'is what is currently happening fair for all children involved?' The parents who spoke Monday seemed to say they think it is, and that might be some additional information the board has not heard before."

"It's a tough decision," he added. "I hope everyone will understand that and that the board will make the decision that's best for everyone involved."

Orchestra To Perform In Gastonia

The Woody Herman Orchestra, directed by Frank Tiberi, will be making its debut in Gaston County on Sunday, Sept. 3, when it plays at Eastridge Mall as part of the United Way's 1990 Campaign Kickoff.

The legendary big band, founded in 1936, has been led by Tiberi since the founder's death in 1987.

The average age of the performers is about 29.

The performance will close out three days of celebration as the United Way begins its fall quest to reach a \$2.65 million goal to meet human needs in Gaston County.

Campaigners and the public are invited to enjoy a gala kickoff celebration at 12:30 on Friday, Sept. 1, at Center Court, which will include

entertainment and a cake cutting. On Saturday, Sept. 2, entertainment for children is scheduled between 1 and 3 p.m., wrapping up with a performance by Captain Rainbow, a magician and entertainer.

The 15-piece orchestra, "Thundering Herd," will perform from 4-7 p.m. at Center Court at Eastridge Mall. The performance is free and open to the public.

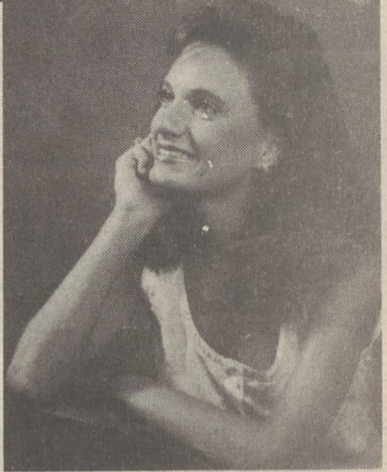
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Monday

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However, they're now running short on time because a decision must be made before the school system can go into its elementary building and renovation programs which were made possible through passage of the recent county-wide \$30 million bond referendum.

Supt. Bob McRae said he was well-pleased with the turnout of Monday's hearing. "It was gratifying that people attended as well as they did, and all the comments served to point out what the board's been saying all along, that it's a very difficult decision. There's no direction you can go where it's going to be satisfactory to everyone involved. Now we have to come back to the point of what's best for all of the children, and I'm sure the board members will make the decision that's best for everybody concerned."

The possibility of re-drawing attendance lines and the possible closing of East came up over a year ago when the board reviewed enrollment and racial percentages at all of the schools.

"The community is well aware that the process was never begun for any other reason than to make certain that what we're doing is fair to all children, including those who attend East," McRae said. "If East remains open, there probably is little likelihood of being able to balance the racial percentages without doing some cross-busing. All of these things have to factor in and the board has to decide which will be the least disruptive and the most productive."

Much of the school board's discussion has centered around the declining enrollment at East, which has dropped from almost 400 to just over 200 over the past several years. While the enrollment has been dropping,

Fund Raising Night Set

The Kings Mountain District Schools Education Foundation plans to begin its public awareness and fund raising campaign at a reception and banquet on Mon., Aug. 28. George Shinn, owner of the Charlotte Hornets, will deliver the address and will be guest of honor at a 6 p.m. reception at Kings Mountain Country Club. The banquet will be held at 7:30 at the KMHS cafeteria.

The foundation is a non-profit organization which seeks to provide opportunities for teachers and students which go beyond the scope of the regular school program. Initial offerings of the Foundation will in-


clude student scholarships and grants to teachers for special projects.

Tickets for the banquet and reception, which are tax deductible, are \$50 and tickets for the banquet alone are \$15. Tickets may be obtained at all Kings Mountain financial institutions, Kings Mountain Office Supply, Western Auto, Sagesport, all Kings Mountain schools, the Superintendent's Office, and from Dean Westmoreland, Martha Bridges, Bob McRae, Charles Mauney, Will Herndon, Emily Suber, Billy King, Howard Champion, Everette Thombs, Katherine Hardy and Marty Stallings.

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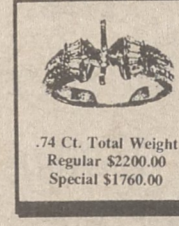

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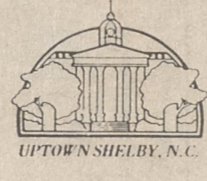
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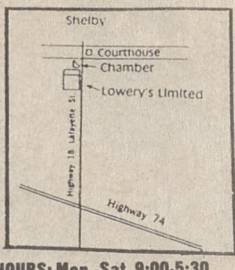
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