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Fire guts Comfort Inn.....See Photo

United Fund goal in sight....

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Arson not ruled out

Comfort Inn fire investigation continues

Kings Mountain police, the SBI, an arson task force, Kings Mountain Fire Department and Cleveland County Fire Marshal Beau Lovelace are continuing to investigate a fire at Comfort Inn Saturday where damages may run as high as a half million dollars.

"Arson has not been ruled out," said Fire Chief Frank Burns, who said evidence and witnesses' statements point to Room 212 as the place where the fire originated.

Burns said the room was occupied by Millicent Bell of Detroit, Michigan, formerly of Shelby, who

was reportedly staying in Kings Mountain to attend her mother's funeral in Shelby.

The woman was transported by police from the fire scene to Cleveland County Law Enforcement Center where a magistrate processed emergency commitment papers and she was admitted to Broughton Hospital in Morganton.

Police say the woman can't be interviewed by authorities for another week to 10 days.

Police are looking for the woman's male companion for questioning in the incident.

Shortly after the fire broke out about 5 p.m., wit-

nesses reported seeing a black woman standing naked on the second floor balcony of the motel and acting in an agitated manner. "The woman appeared upset and distraught and verbally abused police," according to the police report. "She kept shouting that her husband was in the room."

Cleveland County Fire Marshal Beau Lovelace said that someone set a pile of clothing ablaze in Room 212. He said no charges have been filed.

"All we're saying now is that it is a suspicious fire," said Chief Burns, who met with KMPD Det. Lt. Richard Reynolds, Lovelace, KMPD Chief Warren

Goforth, and other investigators Saturday, Sunday and Monday to probe the fire.

Police and firemen responding to a 911 call from the Burger King found flames coming through the roof of the 73 room motel. "The desk clerk and manager were knocking on doors and yelling for people to get out," said Burns, who said that 18 rooms were destroyed in addition to the attic area of the second floor and 30 or more rooms on the two story building were smoke and water damaged.

"Most of the guests were construction workers and

See Investigation, 10-A

County to finance water line

An agreement with Cleveland County to finance looping of a 12-inch water line to the new Kings Mountain Business Park at I-85 and 161 was approved by City Council Tuesday night.

The \$78, 539.90 price tag could be a loan unless new businesses and industries repay the loan first through property taxes.

Under the agreement, if enough new businesses open at the site in the next five years, the city will only repay the portion of the loan the county can not regain through property taxes.

Kings Mountain and Gaston County agreed last year to work together to build water and sewer lines to serve the new Firestone plant going up in Kings Mountain Business Park.

In related actions, the board adopted an ordinance amending the capital projects fund for water and sewer improvements to the Kings Mountain Business Park. The total cost will include \$1,171,487.00, including a \$1,092,947.00 grant from Gaston County and a \$78,540.00 grant from Cleveland County. Engineering and inspection costs are expected to run \$147,850.00; water line construction \$268,970.00 and sewer line construction \$754,667.00.

The board approved change orders to the contract with McClam & Associates of Little Mountain, SC to include the Cleveland County water line and the 18-inch sewer line.

The board also amended Bridgestone/Firestone's wastewater discharge allocation from 20,000 gallons per day of sewer to 40,000 gallons per day of sewer. City Manager George Wood said the new allocation represents 1/5 of the plant's water allocation.

The Firestone plant is scheduled to open in May, replacing the company's Gastonia plant.

Officials are working to encourage
See City, 3-A



Cleveland County Fire Marshal Beau Lovelace and a member of the arson strike team sift through the debris from Saturday's fire at Comfort Inn. Their investigation is continuing into the cause of the fire. Damages may run as high as a half million dollars. More photographs by the Kings Mountain Fire Department appear in Section B.

Black smoke from fire could be seen for miles

The black smoke from the high dollar fire at Kings Mountain's Comfort Inn Saturday could be seen for miles.

"When I pulled out of my driveway and saw that smoke I knew we were in trouble," said Kings Mountain Fire Chief Frank Burns.

Fifty firefighters with Kings Mountain Fire Department, Oak Grove Fire Department, and Bethlehem Fire Department battled the blaze for 30 minutes before controlling it. The 73-room Comfort Inn at York Road and I-85 has been closed since the fire.

Twenty-two of the 27 members of the Kings Mountain Fire Department, 11 officers with the Kings Mountain Police Department, Cleveland County Fire marshals Beau Lovelace and Dewey Cook and the Cleveland County Chapter of the American Red Cross responded to the 911 call about 5 p.m. Saturday afternoon.

"Luckily, no one was hurt and we had good assistance from volunteers and our experienced fire departments," said Burns, who also called the SBI into the investigation into the cause of the fire.

Burns said that when firemen arrived on the scene the fire was showing through the roof of the second

floor and about six units had burned. Fire spread quickly through the attic, he said, and damaged 15 rooms on the second floor. Water damaged another 15 rooms on the second floor and damaged the first floor.

One Kings Mountain fireman saw the smoke from as far away as Independence Boulevard in Charlotte and said, "somebody's got a big fire."

Kings Mountain police said that the first 911 call came in about 5 p.m. and after that at least 11 calls came in from people seeing the black smoke and wanting to know what was wrong.

Police responding to the blaze were Sgt. Phil Witherspoon, Ptl. Maurice Jamerson, Ptl. Jerry Tessenr, Chief Warren Goforth, Det. Lt. Richard Reynolds, Sgt. Mark Simpson, Captain Bob Hayes, Ptl. Don Martin, Ptl. Chris Owens, Ptl. Billy Fredell and Sgt. Derek Johnson. Dispatcher Theresa Long was called in to relieve Jamerson and she said she answered calls about the fire for more than two hours after police and firemen were on the scene.

Police said that the Red Cross brought food to the scene and that city workers from the water, sewer and electrical departments were called out when a

Long-term camping proposal tabled

Kings Mountain City Council Tuesday night tabled a proposal by Moss Lake Commission to stop long-term camping at Moss Lake.

Apparently divided on the issue of what constitutes permanent camping, the board appointed Councilmen Phil Hager and Jerry White their representatives to work with the lake commission and come up with a compromise solution.

"I can't see throwing them out," said White.

Fifteen campers were present for the meeting and met after the meeting with White.

Keith Lail, a camper at the lake for three years, presented the group's objections to the board changing the rules. He currently leases a camp site a year at a time but says he only camps 5-7 nights a month. He denied that campers are permanent residents.

At-Large Councilman Al Moretz said that Council should back the lake commission which had studied the matter for months and is ready to abolish permanent camping when the \$500 annual leases run out April 1. "These folks are getting water and lights for \$42 a month and a permanent camp/vacation site year round," said Moretz.

Moretz said that with 15 of the sites now permanently occupied that other people don't have a chance to rent a campsite for \$10 a night or \$13 a night if they want fishing/swimming permits.

Councilman Fred Finger suggested more camp sites would alleviate the problem but City Manager George Wood said adding city expense would provide what he and city staffers see as permanent campsites for 15 families.

See Camping, 3-A

Rec. Department to use school fields

City recreation requests topped the agenda for Tuesday night's City Council meeting and the board approved all.

Upon recommendation of the Parks & Recreation Committee, the board appointed John Blalock, Ward I, and Charles Smith, Ward II, to fill unexpired terms of board members Danny McDowell and Bo Goforth and asked council to fill the At-Large position held by Chuck Gordon who has moved from Kings Mountain.

Councilman Phil Hager recommended that Hubert Toney be appointed and the board concurred.

In related actions, the board authorized the use of five elementary fields, two at East, two at North and one at Central, for practice fields. None of the fields are lighted and will be used and supervised by the city only during daylight hours. The city will spend approximately \$475 at each site to

relocate back stops. Recreation Director David Hancock said that school officials are pleased with the arrangement.

Approved the use of City Stadium for the softball season. Portable fencing will be installed for safety reasons at cost of \$1200. Commissioner Jim Guyton asked Hancock to write a letter to Macedonia Baptist Church thanking the church for use of their fields.

Accepted an anonymous donation for grass for the infield at the Deal Street Field 3 and approved the site for the Dixie Youth Minor League State tournament and authorized the installation of a sprinkler system behind the mound and irrigation of 2,500 square feet of new sodded areas. The installation by city crews would cost less than \$500, including the sprinkler head. Sodding will be by volunteer labor.

See Recreation, 3-A

Wade Tyner, new Chamber of Commerce president

Wade Tyner, president of Wade Ford, was installed as president of the Kings Mountain Chamber of Commerce at the annual Monday night banquet which attracted more than 150 people to the Kings Mountain Middle School Cafeteria.

Outgoing President Ruby Alexander presented the gavel to Tyner, who praised her and the board of directors for promoting Kings Mountain as "the place to live and work." He said he welcomes ideas from the business community he called the strength of the Chamber.

Tyner presented Alexander with an appreciation plaque and recognized other new officers, including Glenn Anderson and Hugh Lancaster, vice-presidents; and directors Butch Kerns, Glee Bridges, David Faunce, Larry Hamrick Jr., Dr. David McDaniel, Mike

Huffman, Ronnie Whetstone, John Mitchell, Tim Miller, Ronnie Wilson and Ed Campbell.

Glee E. Bridges, who became chairman of the newly-formed education committee last October, praised the cooperation between the schools and the Chamber and said the banquet showcased the good things going on in the system. Table decorations were provided by the 52 Discovery classes and the place mats were the creative work of the art classes.

Gene Causby, Executive Director of the North Carolina School Boards Association, was the keynote speaker and was lauded by Supt. Dr. Bob McRae as an educator who "does a terrific job for your kids."

Causby, well known as an after dinner speaker for his sense of humor and keen insight to public

school issues, said the Chamber of Commerce is a major player in public education.

He used the topic, "Kids and Schools Are Better Than You Think They Are," in a humorous address in which he cited statistics to prove his point.

National studies during the past year, he said, have put public education in the headlines with no important, new information.

Causby called the past school year "the year of studies."

"We've got lots of negative attention from the media regarding one of the biggest news days as the release of the local school report card," he said.

Serious concerns about the economy have impacted education, he said, because the huge consensus is that the country's economic future is tied to the quality of the educa-

tional system. "We're now a pocketbook issue."

"While we have preached uniqueness we have practiced sameness," said Causby. "Is 180 days of school exactly right for every child and a 55 minute school period exactly right for each student? What's the magic deal about October 15? Can we set a date for a kid's ability to go to school?"

Causby said schools are getting the blame for the country's \$50 million a day drug habit and for the national debt. "Get real," he said, citing dramatic achievements of kids in the past 50 years.

Causby said that in 1940 61.9 percent of 25-year-olds in America had not graduated from high school. In 1990 the figure was 14.1 percent. In 1950 only 14 percent of minority students graduated

See Chamber, 3-A



Outgoing Chamber of Commerce president Ruby Alexander presents the gavel to the new president Wade Tyner. More than 150 people attended the annual banquet Monday night.