

# Gaston Mall, county's oldest, goes extra mile for customers

By Elsie Hamilton  
News Editor  
Belmont Banner/Mt. Holly News

Gaston Mall, Gaston County's oldest mall, is a community-oriented place.

"We're always doing something for the community," said mall manager Beth Strange. "We face a lot of competition from Eastridge Mall above us and Franklin Square below us. Doing for people is one way that we fight the competition."

Strange, the mall manager who works as well at the Ranch House Restaurant, talks warmly about the place she promotes. There's no doubt that the mall is more than just a job to her.

Just over, of course, is the Christmas season, when the mall boasted a 400-pound Santa Claus who heard the wishes of children and posed with them for pictures to be placed in family albums. Strange said the Union VFD brought Santa in on its fire truck, and "the kids just went wild."

For years the mall's St. Nick was the late beloved Charles Elledge, who was just about the most favorite Santa in town.

In November, Strange said, the mall was open to the Senior Citizen Craft Show. In October a charity bazaar was held at no charge to schools, churches and other non-profit organizations to give them an opportunity to raise funds for their needs.

Craft shows are held in March, June, September, and December.

"And we have the Halloween costume show in October and the Cottontail Parade at Easter," the

mall manager said. "Winners receive trophies, and all of the other children receive ribbons so that everyone is a winner. This year we'll have an Easter bunny for picture taking."

Strange noted that the mall holds "two big blood drives" each year. "The biggest is in December, and we always meet our quota," she said.

The mall also has sponsored a Cut-a-Thon to benefit the AIDS cause. Another is planned for September.

"The hairdressers of Greater Gastonia come and set up their chairs and do a haircut for \$7," Strange said. "Last year we raised \$8,000 to battle the terrible disease."

A beauty contest is held to help raise money for Miss Gastonia's expenses.

Strange said the mall, which recently was painted, has 34 stores, with all but five filled. One of the anchor stores is Mary Jo's, which one customer describes as "having everything and it's all beautiful." The other anchor store is Harris-Teeter supermarket.

Until the past year Brendle's was an anchor store, but it was closed by the corporate office. Although there have been rumors about the company's reopening in the Gaston Mall location, Strange said she can't confirm the stories being circulated.

The mall, says the manager, offers a wide variety of services and merchandise.

Jackson's Cafeteria is especially popular with senior adults and others who enjoy "home cooking"

style food. China House draws those who have a penchant for Oriental food.

In addition, the mall offers a portrait studio, a Christian book store, a new pet store, a video shop and Jon's Toy and Hobby.

The mall is the place to go if you want to renew your car license. If western is your thing, you'll find it at Lebo's in western apparel and boots, or better men's clothes, check Gentlemen's Clothiers.

Other stores include Bernina Says Sew, which sells sewing machines, and Hart's Desire, an interior design firm featuring "beautiful furniture and pictures."

T.J.'s Sandwiches, a fast-food business, keeps mall employees fed when they don't have time to visit a restaurant.

Strange, who has been at the mall three years, calls her job a rewarding one. "We have real nice tenants, and I enjoy doing all these events for the people and children," she said.

Gaston Mall is owned by Four Star Investors, composed of cousins David and Benny Hoyle, Mary Jo Cloninger and Charles Rick of Charlotte.

# Winterfest slated at Shelby Senior Center

The public is invited to attend the Shelby Senior Center's second annual Winterfest January 27 at 6 p.m. at the Senior Center, 408 E. Marion Street.

and entertainment. Proceeds will support the Senior Games/Silver Arts Program.

Avery Henderson of Chapel Hill will provide the entertainment

which is sponsored by Vision Boutique.

Advance tickets may be purchased from the Senior Center or may be ordered by calling 482-3488.

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# IRS may owe you money

The Internal Revenue Service estimates that over 500,000 North Carolinians may be entitled to extra dollars because of the earned income credit.

"Unfortunately, many people decide that if they do not have enough income to file a tax return, then they don't need to file," said J.R. Starkey, district director of the Internal Revenue Service. "Consequently, the taxpayers end up not getting the earned income credit to which they are entitled."

Starkey emphasized that depending on their income level, some taxpayers could receive up to \$2,364 just for filing a return.

The IRS emphasizes that even more people will be eligible for the earned income credit this year than last year. Those whose income is less than \$23,050 and had a qualifying child living with them in the U.S. for more than six months during 1993 may be able to take the credit. The credit is divided into three parts - the basic credit, a health insurance credit, and a credit for a child born in 1993.

"To qualify for the credit, taxpayers must have earned income

such as wages, salaries or net earnings from self-employment," said Starkey.

Qualified taxpayers can choose to get the credit from their employer in their paychecks during the year rather than waiting for a refund check after filing their tax return.

To get the credit in advance, the taxpayer must provide the employer with a completed Form W-5, Earned Income Credit Advance Payment Certificate. The earned income credit could add an additional \$100 per month to the paycheck.

For additional information, including other requirements for earned income tax credit, taxpayers may request a copy of Publication 596, Earned Income Credit, by calling toll-free 1-800-TAX-FORM (1-800-829-3676).

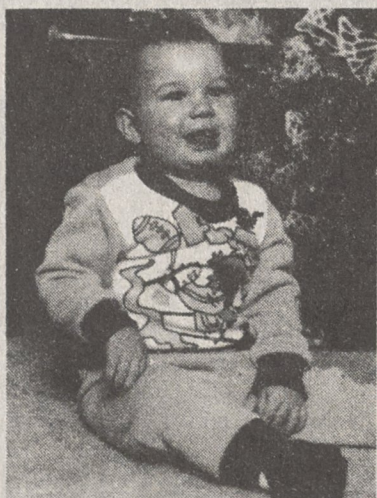
Organizations desiring an IRS speaker to discuss earned income credit can schedule a speaker by calling the North Carolina IRS Volunteer and Education office at (910) 378-2193. There is no charge for this service.

# Justin Lee Bridges celebrates birthday

Justin Lee Bridges, son of David and Kathy Bridges of Kings Mountain, will be one year old January 15. He will celebrate with a party at his home with family and friends.

Grandparents are Sam Wilson of Kings Mountain, J.W. Bridges of Hickory and Nancy Baynard of Rutherfordton.

Great-grandparents are Ivey Smith of Kings Mountain and Gladys Morgan of Shelby.



JUSTIN LEE BRIDGES

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