

Turn clocks back
1-hour Saturday night

**City Planner
Gene White retiring
3-A**

**KMHS girls volleyball
team wins SWC title
1-B**

Kings Mountain Herald

VOL. 106 NO. 43

Thursday, October 27, 1994

Kings Mountain, NC 28086

*****CAR-R-SUR1***
10/21/95 1
307 10121/95 1
MALNEY MEMORIAL LIBRARY
100 S PIEDMONT AVE
KINGS MOUNTAIN NC
28086 3414

City officials admit billing errors

City manager refuses to release info

City Manager Chuck Nance refused Tuesday to release results to the press of an in-house audit into possible electrical billing errors.

He said that the information would be made public when City Attorney Mickey Corry researched it and differentiated between what is a legal matter and what is public information.

Some Council members and city staff dodged reporters after the City Council meeting but not before a confrontation ensued between the mayor and an out-of-town reporter who was refused on the floor of the meeting the answers to clarifications he wanted to hear from Utilities Director Jimmy Maney.

Maney, who commented from the in-house audit report after being questioned by Councilwoman Norma Bridges, left the meeting before it adjourned.

Three Council members, Jim Guyton, Bridges and Dean Spears said after the meeting they saw no reason for the press not to get the answers and that the reporters should get copies of the consultant's report.

Bridges said she was told by the city manager there may be some errors in the consultant's report and that he would share that information with the press later.

City Council will hold a special meeting November 8 at the suggestion of City Attorney Mickey Corry to hear the results of the audit and to determine what steps, if any, should be taken.

Nance said Tuesday that it is clearly the city's fault in most of the irregularities but that the attorney needed to study the entire issue further due to legal matters which could come from it.

The two city officials who head the two city departments they are auditing for possible billing irregularities acknowledged at Tuesday night's City Council meeting that errors exist.

Finance Director Maxine Parsons and Utility Director Jimmy Maney said they are working to correct the errors, some of which go back two years.

"We can't blame all of this on yesterday's situation," said Maney.

After Mayor Scott Neisler opened the discussion, City Manager Chuck Nance suggested that the board take City Attorney Mickey Corry's recommendation to set a special

meeting November 8 to discuss the problems after all the information was in hand.

But Commissioner Norma Bridges persisted with questions to Parsons and Maney over objection of Councilman Phil Hager who said the board should proceed with agenda items.

"We can't solve the problems tonight," he said.

Maney used a copy of a report of an audit of meters and billing by a consultant who worked with him and Parsons on an internal audit of the two departments they head.

Maney gave copies of the report to Nance after the city utilities meeting Monday night and later to members of the full

Council but not to the press.

Responding to questions, Maney confirmed:

At least eight accounts of electric customers were audited.

The City of Kings Mountain underbilled electric customers \$143,028.56 and overbilled customers \$113,264.27 for electricity during the period from January 1992 through August 1994.

No residential power users are included in the group audited, only some industry and business which have demand charges.

Maney explained that errors could have occurred if a service order did not come in from the

See Billing, 9-A

Mayor: Nip it in the bud

"The buck stops with the supervisors," says Mayor Scott Neisler.

He was responding to questions about the city's in-house audit into the City Utility Department.

"It's our job as elected officials to hit this situation head on and not stonewall about finding the solutions," he said, saying that rumors were flying

this week that city officials were trying to sweep the problem under the carpet.

"I asked that this problem be aired in open session and placed on the agenda for Tuesday night's meeting," said the Mayor. (The item was removed by the city manager, said the mayor, on recommendation of the city attorney. Tuesday, the mayor put the item back on the agenda, moving it from other business to the top of the agenda order).

"We always have to sacrifice something when we don't have enough staff," said Neisler, defending possible billing errors.

"One person can't handle it all."

"The management study is correct that there are not enough people to handle the billing," he said.

Monday, the mayor estimated that the city may have to pay back some \$215,000 to customers who have been overcharged while attempting to collect some \$240,000 from customers undercharged for electricity. (Tuesday night Maney reported those figures as \$143,028.56 in overbillings and \$113,264.27 in under billings).

See Mayor, 8-A



Residents of the Hillway/Hilltop communities off Lake Montonia Road celebrate a "drug-free community." From left around a bingo table are Courtney Thompson, Ebony Leach, Ontario Leach, Gregory McNeill, and Furman Thompson. Standing are Calistra Cureton, left, and Sabrina McNeill.

Hilltop winning drug war

By ELIZABETH STEWART
of THE HERALD STAFF

The big celebration scene Saturday afternoon was something that longtime Hilltop Community residents never dreamed they'd live long enough to see.

A war on drugs by residents of two neighborhoods off Lake Montonia Road, in cooperation with Cleveland and Gaston Police Departments and Kings Mountain Police Department, was won through Community Watch and over 50 arrests of drug offenders.

"We've taken our neighborhoods back," said Robert Curry, President of Hillway/Hilltop Community Watch as 90-100 children and adults gathered under yellow circus-type tents to play bingo, fry fish and have a good time.

The local and area law enforcement teams were presented with appreciation plaques.

Longtime residents Pauline Love and Erma Lou Borders said that life was much different now for the six homes located in the once drug-infested Hilltop Community.

"It's so quiet now and we don't hear the sound

of guns and aren't afraid to step out our doors," said Love.

Borders said that she never could turn on the light at night because she was afraid and she always stayed close to the telephone.

The all-out effort against drugs started last March, according to Sgt. Jeff Icenhour of the Gaston County Police, supervisor of the K-9 Unit and a 16-year veteran of the police force.

"We started with street drug interdiction and made arrests and then involved other areas of county government, such as health agencies and solid waste management, and organized a Community Watch with the help of other law enforcement agencies.

"When we got rid of the dealers we got rid of the users," according to Sgt. Mark Simpson of the Kings Mountain Police Department.

Icenhour said that police are on a first name basis with the residents of the two communities.

"The change is as different as day and night," said Valerie Beam who said the area was cleaned

See Hilltop, 8-A

of guns and aren't afraid to step out our doors," said Love.

Borders said that she never could turn on the light at night because she was afraid and she always stayed close to the telephone.

The all-out effort against drugs started last March, according to Sgt. Jeff Icenhour of the Gaston County Police, supervisor of the K-9 Unit and a 16-year veteran of the police force.

"We started with street drug interdiction and made arrests and then involved other areas of county government, such as health agencies and solid waste management, and organized a Community Watch with the help of other law enforcement agencies.

"When we got rid of the dealers we got rid of the users," according to Sgt. Mark Simpson of the Kings Mountain Police Department.

Icenhour said that police are on a first name basis with the residents of the two communities.

"The change is as different as day and night," said Valerie Beam who said the area was cleaned

See Hilltop, 8-A

Kings Mountain People

Blindness is a blessing for KM's Gene Harris

By ELIZABETH STEWART
of THE HERALD STAFF

When he walks the trails Gene Harris, 64, sees the autumn leaves and the changing colors of fall through the eyes of others.

Trauma from a head injury in a truck accident three years ago damaged the optic nerve in his eyes.

He is praying for a miracle that God will restore his sight but he is thankful for life.

"I can make out shadows but I depend on my wife Wilma and our grandsons when I go for walks in the woods and yard," said Harris.

Wilma Harris, who admittedly never liked to drive a car, recently chauffeured her husband to the Outer Banks of North Carolina for the Lions of North Carolina Visually Impaired Persons Fishing Tournament.

"We all learn to make adjustments," said Harris, who considers his blindness one of life's challenges instead of an impairment.

And Harris said new friends like Lion Joe Harris of Shelby and his sister, Mary, longtime friends like Arthur Sprouse and Mitch Norris, neighbors on Phifer Circle and Family

Living Church of God help him cope.

April 3, 1991 is a day that the Kings Mountain trucker will never forget.

Harris and a friend usually rode to work together but on that morning Harris was alone in his small Mazda truck on I-85 North near the Sam Wilson Road about 8:30 a.m. Enroute to work at Spartan Express, he had stopped for breakfast in McAdenville.

"I was just driving along and suddenly a plastic bag hit the windshield and the truck swerved," said Harris. He learned much later that his truck

was struck by another vehicle. The Harris truck flipped over. Rescuers used the Jaws of Life to remove Harris from his flattened vehicle.

"The doctors told us he would never survive but God answered prayer and Gene is living proof," said Mrs. Harris.

Visitors to the Harris home never guess that the friendly, confident man who greets you on the front porch has any problems. He uses his cane to walk outdoors but he knows every inch of his house.

"I wash dishes and Wilma prepares my lunch before she leaves for work at Maney

Hosiery," said Harris, who has telephone buddies who keep in touch with him constantly.

Harris plans to stay in touch with new friends he met during the recent Lions Club outing in Dare County.

At first skeptical about making the long trip to Nags Head, Gene said he's glad that his wife twisted his arm. In addition to showing Wilma how to put squids on a hook and fish from a pier, he and 300 other visitors were treated royally by Lions from six host clubs to a fish fry, barbecue, banquet and the 11th

See Harris, 9-A