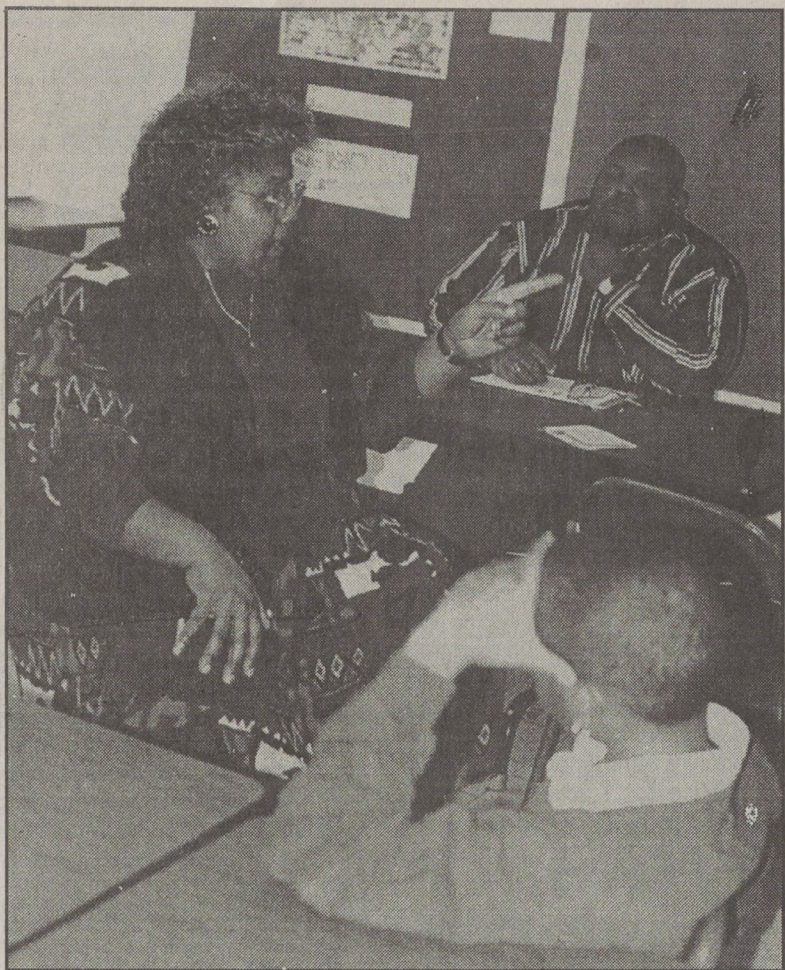


County fined for DSS violations



BLACK HISTORY MONTH - Evelyn Cumberlander, teacher's assistant at No. 3 School, tells a story during a Black History Month celebration Monday at Parker Street School.

Firestone to invest millions at Kings Mountain plant

Firestone Fibers and Textiles announced today a further multi-million-dollar investment at its Kings Mountain plant.

Jaggy Anand, president of the Gaston County based company, said "We are very pleased to announce that our parent company, Bridgestone/Firestone Inc., has approved the installation of a new multi-million dollar tire cord treating unit at our Kings Mountain plant."

"Installation of this state-of-the-art treating unit together with the company's existing treating facilities in Gastonia will allow FSFT to expand its tire cord business in support of BFS's objective of increased market share in North and South America as well as providing the opportunity to participate more aggressively in the tire cord market outside of BFS," Anand said.

Design for the installation of the unit, which has been produced by Zell Inc. in Germany, commenced in January with final installation planned for September 1997. The exact amount of the investment was not disclosed.

When the \$20 million, 416,000 square foot facility was dedicated in July 1993 on the 78-acre site,

KMHS sets sports banquet

The Kings Mountain High School winter sports banquet will be held March 11 at 6 p.m. in the school cafeteria.

Tickets are \$7 and may be purchased at the school office or at the door.

Cherokee Speedway to open

Cherokee Clash - the Hav-A-Tampa qualifier.

The first track to open in the area, Cherokee expects to draw cars out of Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia as drivers test new equipment for the new year. Fans are encouraged to attend the practice runs Friday and Saturday.

For more information, call the track office at (704) 732-2685 or the track at (864) 489-1969.

The \$2,000 to win late model race on Sunday will give fans their first chance to see local heroes before the out-of-state drivers roll in March 9-10 for the \$10,000 to win

AAU basketball tryouts slated

Tryouts for the Kings Mountain 14 years and under AAU Junior Olympics basketball team will be held March 2-3 at 3 p.m. at the Kings Mountain Boys Club. A player's age as of September 1 determines eligibility.

For more information, call Danny McDowell at 739-7026 after 3:30 p.m., Tom Bennett at 739-3667 from 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., R.A. Bell at 739-0102 after 5 p.m., and Jerome Parker at 739-1867 after 5 p.m.

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Cleveland County is among at least three counties of similar size fined in January for failure by the DSS to process some applications in a timely manner.

The Department of Social Services was also out of compliance in one of the Medicaid categories five of 12 months during the period February 1995-January 1996 for failing to process disability applications within a required 90-day period.

Al Thompson, state DSS Regional Administrator, said Cleveland County was fined \$10,700 by the state in January for failing to process applications for food stamps and Aid to Dependent Children in October, November and December.

Thompson said DSS officials took corrective steps to resolve the problems and the county did not request a waiver of the fine but paid the fine.

Thompson said both Onslow and Cleveland Counties had been working since September to implement a new "generic" intake application process that requires only one case worker - instead of two - in Cleveland County to handle requests for food stamps and AFDC payments and in Onslow to handle Medicaid applications.

Onslow requested a waiver to determine if certain cases were untimely beyond the department's control.

County commissioners, including Jim Crawley who sits on the DSS board, heard about the fine for the first time from former DSS

member Robert A. Williams at last Tuesday's county commission meeting.

Williams was removed from the board by the board of county commissioners in September and asked at that meeting for an update on the new generic application process that the county was just beginning. Williams' request was ignored.

Thompson backed the county's DSS Director Lorene Rogers who said at Tuesday afternoon's DSS meeting that "things are running smoothly now."

"It has been a difficult time for the staff and we have no reason to believe there will be any more major problems," said Rogers.

Rogers said the failure on the state report card can be attributed to several reasons. She said several employees since then have either resigned or gone on extended sick leave. Late last year, she said there weren't enough case workers to process all the applications in the required 45-day time limit. Rogers said at least two people left, in part, because of frustration with the new program.

"It was not an easy process for the staff to go through," said Rogers. The state administrator agreed.

Thompson said the Alexander-Hill-Flaherty-Britt report card is connected to a state court order that goes back to 1974. A computer system determines the timeliness of cases disposed of by DSS during a month's time and there is a threshold of 90 percent for all the

different programs. If a DSS is below 90 percent in a given program area there are four categories in which the department/county can be fined.

"Generic processing is causing some difficulties in adjustment periods," Thompson said.

Onslow County failed in the Medicaid area for three consecutive months in November, December and January.

"If we have a county that fails five out of 12 months we start looking at the possibility of a compliance team made up of Kent Campbell, the regional director out of Black Mountain, the county director, county commissioners and/or the county manager," he said.

Thompson said a compliance team was not necessary for Cleveland County in January because he was assured by DSS officials that the problems had been resolved.

Mecklenburg County was out of compliance in AFDC for four consecutive months and Caldwell County was out of compliance for three months, October through December, he said. Cleveland and Caldwell were both out of compliance in AFDC in October, November and December but no problems were reported in January.

Thompson acknowledged that other DSS departments were experiencing stress from the court order because of increased pressure for extra documentation of cases.

"DSS departments are experi-

encing a great deal of turnover and that means vacant positions and people have to pick up the slack after a person quits," he said.

Thompson said the holiday period and the snow also got DSS workers behind.

The local agency began training caseworkers to assume responsibility for family benefits in Medicaid, AFDC and Food Stamps programs in May 1995 but required customers to see only one caseworker to access benefits from all programs. Rogers said the consolidation of the programs reduces duplication that occurs when a customer must see three different caseworkers, providing the same information to obtain benefits. Rogers said restructuring did not occur until September.

Of 12 intake caseworkers, she said four left the agency's employment. Another of the 12 went on long term leave. Of the remaining seven caseworkers on intake, three had no AFDC or Medicaid experience. There are currently 16 caseworkers. During the period August 1995-January 1996, a total of 803 AFDC, 1,357 AFDC-MA and \$2,270 food stamp applications processed.

Rogers said that as of February 13 only one application is pending on the AFDC and Other Medicaid Program categories beyond the 45th day. She said the DSS regional staff met with her department February 8 and concluded that the agency took appropriate measures to regain and sustain compliance.

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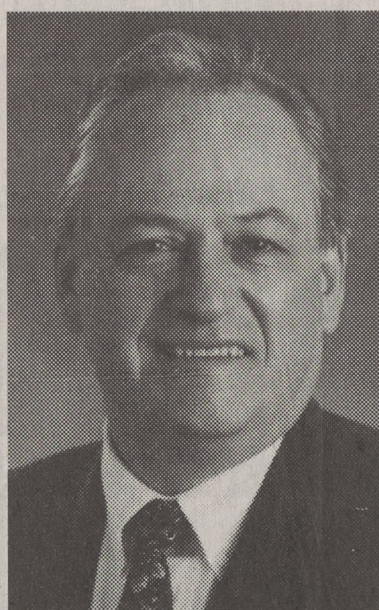
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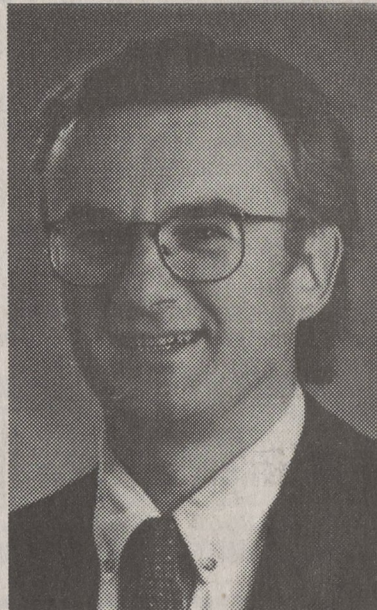
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