

# MERGER

From 1A

whatsoever to be improved in a merged system. However, on balance, I think the negatives far outweigh the potential benefits."

McRae said merged systems would result in a lack of closeness presently enjoyed by the Kings Mountain schools. "Bigger implies to me loss of the personal touch we have between our schools and the community," he said.

"I can't see any geographical benefit that inclusion of Kings Mountain would bring to a merged situation," said McRae.

"Our students could not be used to solve any unusual population challenges that exist in the other two systems.

"It's simplistic to assume that merger would cost less. While, for example one superintendent as opposed to three, there are many other funding inequities that imply additional funds. I work for the Kings Mountain Board of Education and I will support whatever direction it chooses to pursue," he said.

B. S. Peeler said he feared Kings Mountain Schools would be lost in a mega school formed by merger.

"I have always taken the stand that until someone could prove to me that merger would be beneficial to the Kings Mountain School District I would not support any movement to push forward the merger of the three school systems.

"Our board has investigated most of the recent mergers in the state and the Causby/Boyd Associates June 1995 Study of the recent mergers. Our contacts with the schools and the Causby/Boyd Study confirm our remarks that the costs and administrative personnel after merger were greater than before merger. The local schools felt that they had lost their freedom to perform their jobs. The redistricting of the larger school districts have a definite negative effect on the closeness of the schools in the community. Kings Mountain Schools would not benefit from a merger of the Cleveland County, Shelby City and Kings Mountain District Schools.

No one has proved to me that a merger would benefit our school system in any way," said Peeler.

Bolin said there are 117 school systems in the 100 counties of the state and Cleveland County has three.

"I feel the county needs only one administrative unit and consolidating our resources and administrations would be a more efficient use of the tax dollars than funding separate systems," she said.

Vice-chairman Shearra Miller disagrees with the concept that a merger will automatically save money.

"I do not believe that consolidating the three school systems into one large system merely for financial reasons would be in the best interest of the children.

"Many people assume that a merger of this type will automatically save money.

"This has not been proven in other counties where merger has taken place. I also feel there are many other issues to be con-

## Prayer for U.S.

(Ed. Note: This prayer for the United States by President George Washington was taken from "Writings of Washington" by Editor Leicester Ford, and submitted by Rev. Edgar Cooper of Kings Mountain.)

"Almighty God: We make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in Thy holy protection; that Thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government; and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow citizens of the United States at large.

"And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant our supplication, we beseech Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

sidered such as local supplements, administrative buildings and instructional program differences. I believe that we can continue to work together with the other systems in certain areas such as transportation, Smart Start, Head Start, Davidson School, North Shelby School, Job Ready and any others that would be appropriate.

"If an outside independent study proved that consolidating the schools would improve the instructional program for our children then I would be willing to consider this option but until that happens I simply cannot believe that bigger is necessarily better," said Miller.

"Why merge the school systems of Cleveland County?" asked Dr. Larry Allen. "What does Kings Mountain gain by being a part of merger discussions?"

Allen said consolidation is an issue that has been discussed many times by prior school boards and studied by several outside groups and the same conclusion was drawn by all. "Consolidation is not the most efficient method of operating our school system," he said.

Allen said he has never been a proponent of merging the school systems and feels that the best interest of the Kings Mountain District Schools can best be served by maintaining our local autonomy as a separate school system.

"Bigger is not always best," says Allen, who said he felt the general consensus of Kings Mountain citizens has been to keep our schools identity and to have local access to board members, administration and to be a part of operating our own school system.

"I will continue this focus and position with the local board," said Allen.

Board Chairman Ronnie Hawkins said the Board of Education is on record as being opposed to merger of the Kings Mountain District Schools. He said the issue of merger has risen many times over the years he has served on the board and each time board members ask themselves, "would consolidation be in the best interest of our children? Is consolidation what the people of Kings Mountain want?"

"I believe that a small community oriented school system assures our children of the best in educational opportunities," said Hawkins. "This allows parents to be more involved with those whose responsibility it is to make decisions regarding their children's education."

Hawkins quoted Dr. Dobson and Dr. Bauer of "Focus on the Family" who have stated that "public schools offered more for children when we had many small school systems, not large. He said an independent study not related to Cleveland County has shown that merged systems in North Carolina are in the red and not necessarily doing all that well academically.

"Since the Shelby Star began its editorials about merger I have again been told repeatedly that the citizens of Kings Mountain do not want merger.

"I will continue to support Kings Mountain District schools as a single system. It has proven to me that it can be successful in meeting the needs of the children that it serves and that the board and administration are willing to listen to the parents and community," said Hawkins.

# HISTORY

From 1A

The Pauline's street access and full utilities are a big plus, he said.

Bunch said when he bought the mills much of the textile machinery was still usable. He started selling equipment to companies in Canada and South America. Fire losses at the sites amounted to about \$600,000 and since the buildings were not occupied there was no insurance. At the Margrace site the Bunches say they plan to spend about \$200,000 more in the drying and finishing areas with the hope of attracting new industry.

Walking through the largest building at 3000 Margrace Road, Johnny Bunch talked about the active warehouse rented by Reliance Electric. The building provides storage for frames, housing and parts for the industrial electric motors Reliance manufactures. Bunch also services the warehouse.

Kelly and Bernice Bunch started the family business with a machine shop in 1969 that became the present company of offices and a welding and fabrication facility on Grover Road.

From the time they bought the two plants 14 years ago Kelly Bunch says they have worked to restore the 80-year-old properties, built by industrialist Charles Eugene Neisler Sr. about the end of World War I. The Neislers sold the mills in 1955 to Massachusetts Mohair Plush and the Teamsters Union closed the mills in the late 1970s putting many Kings Mountain people out of jobs.

"Jimmy Dickey used to tell us stories about the old Margrace," said Johnny Bunch, a vice president of Bunch Inc. Dickey was plant superintendent at one time and used to keep goats to mow the grass in one of the many warehouses on the sprawling Margrace properties. "About six months after Dad bought the property we went into the white house and there was this baby goat who had survived all that time," said Johnny.

The Reliance space is one example of what Johnny Bunch says Kings Mountain people can't see from the street side.

"Although on some parts of the property it looks like junk but most of it is re-saleable," says Bunch. Salvaging aluminum, copper, etc could recoup some of the cleanup expenses.

Before rebuilding could begin at the site the Bunches cleared and hauled off debris for over three years.

"The Reliance warehouse has walls 18 inches thick and six million bricks," said Bunch who said the cost today to lay that much brick would be \$2.4 million.

Bunch plans to build a new building inside those walls on a new poured concrete foundation.

"I never see the ruins of a textile empire when I walk over this property, I remember it when I was a kid growing up here," said Johnny Bunch. Bunch said his family wants to save that nostalgia by restoring the mills.

Like his father, Johnny Bunch has a dream for rebuilding a piece of history.



ELIZABETH STEWART / THE HERALD  
Samantha Taylor cleans brick at Pauline Mill in Kings Mountain

## City Council to hold hearing on condemnation of KM mills

City Council will conduct a public hearing Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. on an appeal from Kelly and Bernice Bunch not to condemn the old Margrace and Pauline Mills they bought in 1985.

The "repair and demolish" order was issued September 18, 1998 by then-chief building inspector Andy Scoggins. The order targets six of 13 buildings on the 24-acre Margrace site and four buildings, some fire damaged, at the three-acre Pauline site on Waco Road. The inspectors cited unfit and unsafe areas at both locations.

Johnny Bunch, vice-president of Bunch Inc., said he will present evidence of compliance with the terms of the order and engineering drawings for proposed improvements at Tuesday's meeting.

Council has three options, according to City Attorney Mickey Corry. Council can uphold the order, modify it or nullify it. Since the building inspector position is vacant, Council could also "start from scratch."

Over objections of Councilman Rick Murphrey, Council voted last month to set the hearing on motion of Jerry Mullinax, whose district is home to the Pauline Mill. Mullinax has pushed for clean up of the Pauline site.

Murphrey said at the meeting he had visited both the sites and had seen improvements and was particularly impressed with the improvements at Margrace. "You really can't see from the street what's going on behind that chain link fence," he said.

Bunch said he is complying with a schedule that was submitted last year when Mullinax called for the cleanup after he said he had complaints from neighbors.

Bunch said he has shown city officials a copy of his October 12, 1998 contract for \$1 with David Tilley of D. R. T. Service Co. to demolish the Pauline buildings and clear the property within one year.

Tilley was on the Pauline site this week. He and his daughter, Samantha Taylor and Jim McCoy were cleaning the white brick which Tilley calls New Orleans brick. Tilley said he plans to ship

the brick to Baton Rouge for possible building projects in the Louisiana historic sections.

Tilley says he can clear out the debris at the Pauline site in 30 days. He is salvaging what he can and recycling materials, taking out the metal and wood first. He estimated it will take four to five months to clean the bricks.

Rejuvenation of the Pauline mill started in mid-November. The Bunches are in process of renovating a warehouse. Tilley estimated it will cost him about \$35,000 to demolish and haul off debris from the site. Bunch had hoped to save the brick shell and build upscale condominiums in it but neighbors opposed. Tilley will remove the hull of the old mill but two smaller buildings, an office and a garage are intact. The restored warehouse is topped by a new galvanized roof and new aluminized steel siding.

At the Margrace plant six buildings have been rebuilt, reroofed and meet codes.

"They are not Hiltons but they are usable," says Kelly Bunch.

The old machine shop has been reroofed and painted and will soon house the Bunch welding business. The tin building has been reroofed. Window guards are on all the restored buildings. Vandals have shot out windows at the older buildings with bb guns and the window treatment will eliminate that problem, according to Bunch. A 200 foot long section of the plant is in process of going up and steel beams are on the ground.

Johnny Bunch redesigned the once flat roof at the Margrace to elevated steel and it now houses the 13,500 square foot active Reliance warehouse which has been up and running for two years.

Kelly Bunch said it had taken years to take big looms that weigh more than an automobile from the Margrace plant and estimated that as much as 350 tractor trailer loads of equipment had been hauled off.

Some of the looms that came out of the old Margrace and Pauline Mills were manufactured in 1898. When the Pauline Mill was torched the looms were destroyed.

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# SHELBY

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