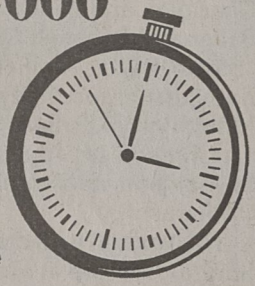


Countdown to 2000

By Alan Hodge



Carolinas have good Y2K start

Call it Tar Heel horse sense or technological mastery, but North Carolina is one of the pack leaders when it comes to having its state government computers Y2K ready. Ranked 10th nationally in the percentage of state computer system compliance, the Old North State is leagues ahead of neighbor South Carolina who comes in 22nd out of the 50 states.

In North Carolina, the task of overseeing Y2k compliance for state computers falls on the Commerce Department. Part of the Commerce Department's task included contingency plans just in case something doesn't pan out the way it's supposed to.

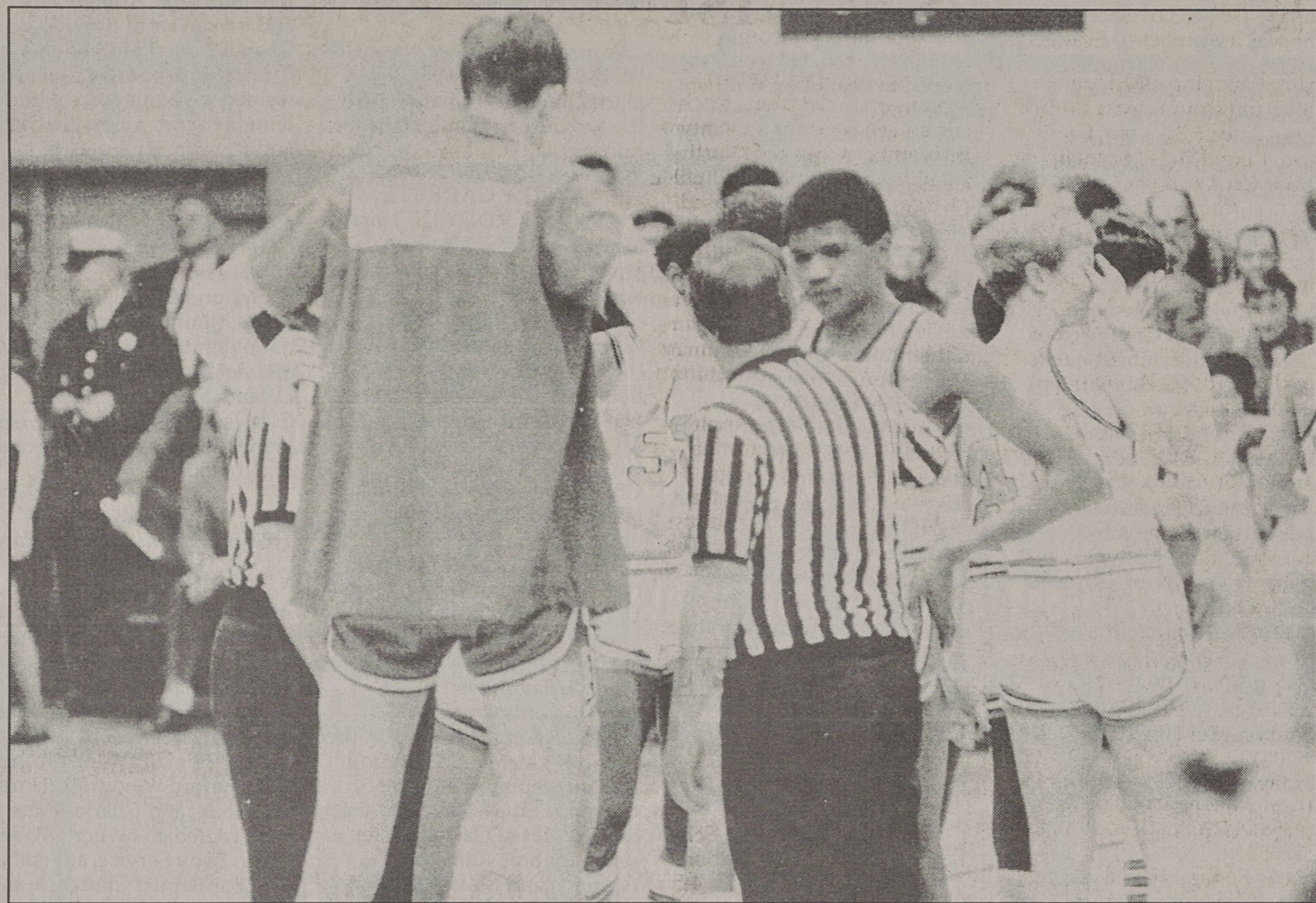
In terms of money spent to assure state computer Y2K readiness, North Carolina has earmarked \$125 million for the job. South Carolina has set aside \$33 million. So far, North Carolina has 75 percent of its state computers Y2K compliant. South Carolina has 55 percent.

In both North and South Carolina, the top priority has been given to computer systems directly involved in delivering government services and collecting revenue. In North Carolina there are over 1,200 such systems, and 91 percent have been checked for Y2K bugs and repaired. South Carolina's numbers crunch out to 681 critical systems with 81 percent repaired.

One of the most important state computer systems in both North and South Carolina are those related to the state Revenue Departments. The South Carolina Department of Revenue has 600 separate computer programs. These systems had already undergone a redesign during 1986-1994, so the Revenue Department was ahead of the game in that respect. Revenue Department officials are waiting however, until the legislature adjourns in June to test the income tax programs, just in case some tax laws are rewritten.

All in all, North and South Carolina are doing a lot better than many state in their computer compliance. Out of 33 states reporting, Alabama came in last with just 27 percent of its state government computer systems Y2K converted and put back into service.

LOOKING BACK



Basketball stars Otis Cole, right, of Kings Mountain and 7-foot-4 Tommy Burleson, left, of Avery County meet with the officials at center court prior to the Bi-Conference tournament game at KMHS in 1970. Both Cole and Burleson went on to star for major college teams - Cole at Florida State and Burleson at N.C. State.

Assembly was committed to education

The General Assembly session that adjourned Wednesday should be remembered for its commitment to children and education - and for its efficiency.

The 102 working days for the House was the fewest since 1973. In addition, lawmakers passed a two-year budget before July 1 for the first time in 20 years.

We went to Raleigh, kept our commitments to raise teacher pay and make Smart Start available to more children and adjourned. I am very proud of what we accomplished - and the way we did it.

The budget followed through on a pledge to raise teachers to the national average salary by next year. Teachers received a 7.5 percent pay raise this year, the third step in the four-year plan. Smart Start got a \$58 million boost in the budget, and community colleges got their best budget in decades.

Lawmakers also agreed on a plan to make refunds to those who paid the intangibles tax without protesting and approved a distribution formula for North Carolina's \$4.6 billion share of the national tobacco settlement.

In addition to raising teacher pay, the General Assembly approved several bills designed to make schools safer. One of the measures makes parents liable if their child makes a bomb threat at school. Parents are liable for up to \$25,000 for bomb threats and up to \$50,000 if a bomb actually explodes at school.

A bill to crack down on repeat drunken drivers also passed the General Assembly.

On the environmental front, the legislature passed the state's first major piece of air quality legislation and a clean water bill. One disappointment was the lack of a bond package to help universities and community colleges catch up on their construction and renovation needs. Both the House and Senate passed bond bills, but the two reached an impasse on a referendum. A majority of the House insisted that people have to vote.

On the local front, I am very proud of the fact that we were able to save the Cleveland County Correctional Unit and those very important jobs. I also was glad to be able to obtain funding for the merger of the Cleveland Center and the Gaston/Lincoln Mental Health Authority. I am hopeful that this will provide continuation of good mental health services at a more economical cost.

Overall, the session was a successful one. We showed that the General Assembly can go to Raleigh, take care of business and adjourn at a reasonable time.



Andy Dedmon

NC State Representative

Growth good, but it needs to be controlled

A recent trip to the other side of Mint Hill below Charlotte gave me another case of the "urban sprawl willies." Having grown up in Charlotte, I was one of those who witnessed that town's explosive growth from a smallish city to a sprawling megopolis determined to devour everything in its path.

Once urban sprawl gets going, it's like atomic kudzu - there's no stopping it. Once upon a time, Gastonia, Charlotte, Matthews, Indian Trail, and Monroe were distinct entities with areas of open land between them. Now, that stretch of U.S. 74 is just one gigantic strip mall.

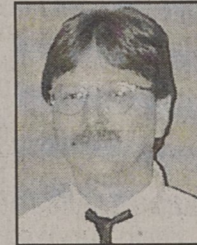
Anyone who lives in or visits Gastonia is familiar with the new development that has taken place on Franklin Blvd. over the last couple of years. Where once a person had to go to Charlotte to shop or dine out, now there are restaurants selling everything from fried alligator to designer jeans along Franklin. Don't even mention how traffic on Franklin has exploded in volume, not just on weekends but during the week-day too.

Now, growth is not all bad, it certainly beats the alternative that many cities up North have seen in what is now called the "rust belt" of our nation. The challenge that planners, developers, and citizens have got to work out is how to control growth before it becomes like Frankenstein and controls those who made it.

Kings Mountain is situated right in the crosshairs of urban growth between Shelby and Gastonia. From where I sit, it's possible to be in the heart of either of these towns in less than ten minutes. This situation reminds me of that line from the poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade" that goes... "cannons to the left of me, cannons to the right."

Rather than sitting still and being caught in an enfilade fire, Kings Mountain looks ready to annex some land and take control of its own fate. With thoughtful consideration given to both developers and property owners, this annexation can be done in a way that allows growth, but keeps it managed so that it doesn't swallow up the quality of life that makes Kings Mountain such a good place to live and work.

I believe that the leaders and planners of Kings Mountain are intelligent, far-sighted folks who will address the issue of urban sprawl correctly. If they drop the ball, however, the citizens of this area will one day end up feeling like Jonah did when he got a his first whiff of the whale's bad breath.



Alan Hodge

Staff Writer

YOUR VIEW

Illiteracy is everyone's problem

To the editor:

The problem of illiteracy directly affects 27 million American illiterate adults. But it indirectly affects all other Americans. You may think that, because you can read this, illiteracy is no problem for you. You need to think again.

Illiteracy lowers business productivity. Illiterates may not be able to learn enough to know the difference between low and high quality. During training, everything must be explained orally to illiterates. These costs are passed along to the consumers - us.

Illiterate workers are prone to have accidents because they cannot read. Literate people can be hurt by the accidents.

Illiterates who cause accidents are more likely to draw worker's compensation and other insurance benefits, sometimes involving lawsuits. Insurance rates are based on averages, and ultimately we all pay higher insurance because of accidents resulting from illiteracy.

Illiteracy drives people into low-paying jobs, unemployment, even welfare. Thus illiteracy weakens the tax base while increasing the benefits paid. The federal debt, over \$5 trillion, has partly arisen from unproductivity rooted in illiteracy. The federal debt hurts each of us when we borrow money and face high interest rates.

In turn the federal debt worsens the illiteracy problem because the government cannot fund programs to attack illiteracy when so much is going into welfare and other needs resulting from illiteracy.

Companies leave America to go where the workers can read. The jobs go too. Revenues decline while the government's bills continue. Companies are especially reluctant to invest jobs in areas where illiteracy and resulting problems are ubiquitous.

Now is the time to stop illiteracy. The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, Laubach Literacy Action, Literacy Volunteers of America and other worthy programs deserve our help. Inquire about literacy programs at your local library. We are all paying for illiteracy.

Tracey Efferson

Letter Policy

Keep your letters short, no more than two pages double-spaced or one page single-spaced. Handwritten letters are accepted, but must be legible.

We will not publish letters from anonymous writers; names, addresses, and phone numbers must be included. We reserve the right to edit letters for grammar, punctuation, clarity, brevity and content.

Letters must be received no later than 5 p.m. on Monday of the week they are to be published. Mail letters to The Editor, P.O. Box 769, Kings Mountain, NC 28086 or fax them to (704) 739-0611.

SIDEWALK SURVEY

By ALAN HODGE
Herald/Times

What is your favorite summer food or refreshment?



My favorite is a banana pudding blizzard from Dairy queen..

Jennifer Foster
Administrative Assistant



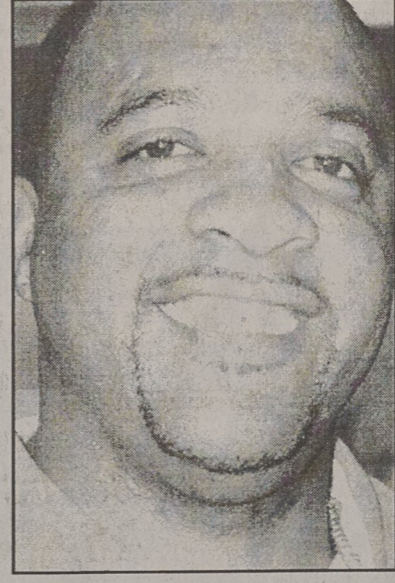
I like fried fish and cole slaw in the summer.

Delilah Bess
Cook



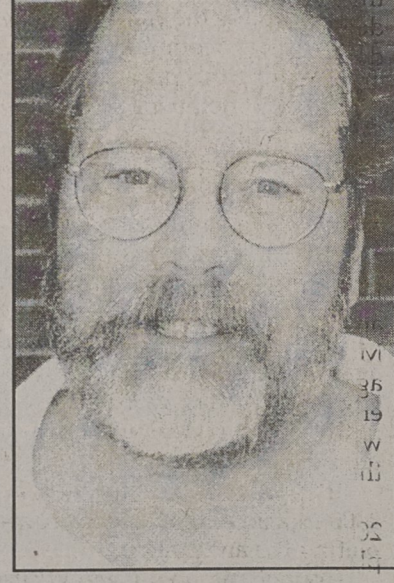
My favorite summer food is fried chicken and rice.

Ryshawn Gardner
Student



My favorite summer food is a grilled steak and salad.

Lamont Jeffries
Teachers Assistant



The best summer food is a tomato sandwich and a glass of iced tea.

Ellis Noel
Video Producer