

KINGS MOUNTAIN The Herald

Thursday, December 23, 1999

Vol. 111 No. 51

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Maney resigns Chamber position

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

Kings Mountain City Manager Jimmy Maney has resigned his position on the



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Advisory Board of the Cleveland County Chamber of Commerce after being "embarrassed" in a meeting when he proposed that the Advisory Board go on record as opposing a merger of the county's three school systems.

At the December 7 Advisory Board meeting, Maney made a motion that the Board oppose the merger. His motion was seconded, and eventually approved, but not before a heated discussion during which time a Chamber official reportedly called for the resignation "of anyone that could damage the relationship between the Kings Mountain Advisory Board and Cleveland County."

The next day, Maney resigned in a letter to the Advisory Board Chairman, David Faunce.

In the letter, Maney stated that "from the beginning of the meeting it was clear the position of Cleveland County Chamber Board Chairman (Jim Allen) regarding school merger."

"Many times this Advisory Board has asked me in my position as City Manager for information regarding city and community interest," Maney wrote. "This type of relationship must have a two way communication avenue. I don't think anyone enjoys being embarrassed publicly. If the Kings Mountain Advisory Board cannot make suggestions, position statements, or recommendations without such embarrassment or resentment then what is its purpose?"

The Advisory Board's position on school merger was submitted to the Cleveland County Chamber Board of Directors on December 14. The Board noted receiving the statement but delayed any official action of its own because "insufficient information is available about the commissioners' intentions and the rationale behind them."

The Chamber Board also issued a statement on Maney's resignation, stating that "it is regrettable that Jimmy Maney was offended to the level of resignation by some comments during a Kings Mountain Advisory Council discussion...that differed from his desire that the council go on record immediately as opposing school systems merger."

"During that discussion, some others suggested delaying any definitive action until more is known about what the commissioners may or may not have in mind and why."

The statement also noted that "Jimmy Maney has been a valuable member of the Chamber's Kings Mountain Advisory Council. The Chamber hopes that he will reconsider his position."

Advisory Board Chairman David Faunce said he was not at the meeting, but had been told what happened, and said that merger is "such an impas- See Maney, 3A

KM hires lawyer to fight merger

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

The battle lines are apparently being drawn for a school merger fight between the Kings Mountain Board of Education and Cleveland County Commissioners.

Responding to the Commissioners' hiring of the Raleigh law firm of Smith, Helms, Mullis and Moore at a meeting Thursday in Shelby, the Kings Mountain School Board met in special session Monday afternoon and hired the Raleigh firm of Schwartz and Shaw to advise and represent them in trying to head off a merger.

Although Cleveland County

Commissioners continue to say they are only "assessing" merger, their action Thursday seemed to convince KM Board members that the commissioners are going full speed ahead with merger.

"It is a shame that we've had to get to this point," said KM Board member Ronnie Hawkins. "I had high hopes after Commissioner Willie McIntosh made the motion to have a forum in January of the three boards and county commissioners to weigh the points of merger and allow citizens to have their input; and immediately following that they voted to hire a lawyer."

After a lengthy meeting in

which the KM board discussed a number of law firms supplied by Supt. Bob McRae, the firm of Schwartz and Shaw was chosen because of Richard Schwartz' previous successful work with the Kings Mountain School Board and their expertise in school law.

McRae suggested that the Board schedule a meeting with Schwartz after the Christmas holidays and get his advice on the appropriate steps to take.

The Kings Mountain Board's first objective would be to avoid a merger, McRae said, but he added that the board would have to go into the matter "with the understanding that you need to listen to them regard-

less of what their advice is, as long as there is legitimate reason in doing so."

If it turns out that merger is inevitable, McRae said the strategy may need to be adjusted.

"I don't think there should be any question in the minds of our community that our board wants to keep Kings Mountain District Schools as a separate entity," McRae said.

Board members pointed out that hiring a lawyer could be very expensive, especially if the matter goes to litigation.

But, they added, it's a necessary step because of the action taken last week by commissioners.

"I don't think we're trying to

rush anything along," said board member Stella Putnam. "I think we're trying to play catch-up. I've had lots of calls from people wanting to know what we're going to do."

Hawkins suggested, and the Board agreed, that any members of the public who want to have input or want questions answered should funnel their comments through Supt. McRae or School Board Chairman Larry Allen and let them work with the attorneys rather than have individual school board members involved in trying to get answers.

"This is a very competent firm," noted Dr. McRae. "I feel

See Lawyer, 3A

Citizens oppose schools' merger

By ALAN HODGE
Staff Writer

Emotions ran higher than a Georgia pine last Thursday when representatives of all three school districts in Cleveland County met with the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners to discuss possible merger of their systems. Nearly 90 people packed the commissioner's chambers for the meeting. Over half were from Kings Mountain.

Even though the meeting was scheduled as a fact finding endeavor, everyone who stepped up to the podium to address the commissioners took the opportunity to express their opposition to merging the Cleveland County, Shelby City, and Kings Mountain schools into one unified system.

Commission chairman Jim Crawley started out the two-hour meeting with assurances that the commission had no "hidden agenda" and that they intended to be "above board" in addressing the merger issue. He also emphasized that the purpose of the special session was to "gather and evaluate information" and that no timetable for merger had been set. "We don't have answers to our own questions," Crawley said emphatically.

After Crawley's remarks, the floor was opened up for school board member and citizens to address the commissioners. It was at this point that the fur began to fly as speaker after speaker

told the commissioners in no uncertain terms their opposition to merger.

Speaking on behalf of the Kings Mountain District Schools, board chairman Larry Allen began by quoting a passage from the Constitution of North Carolina stating the right of citizens to "assemble together to consult for the common good, to instruct their representatives, and appeal to the General Assembly for redress of grievances; but secret political societies are dangerous to the liberties of a free people and shall not be tolerated."

Allen went on to encourage the commissioners to "hear what our board and the people of Kings Mountain have to say" regarding their opposition to merger.

Kings Mountain school board member Stella Putnam also spoke out against merger, and took commissioners to task on merger issues such as time frame, taxation, and the definition of equitable education.

"If you put merger to a vote, it would lose overwhelmingly," Putnam said.

Cleveland County schools board chairman Tommy Greene also expressed his board's opposition to merger and said they had "more questions than answers" on the topic. He also presented commissioners with a list of concerns including what form of representation a merged system would have on district representation, and if the

See Citizens, 3A



GARY STEWART / THE HERALD

Denese and Dr. Martin Stallings of Kings Mountain refer to this Scottish Pine Christmas tree as their "Alabama Tree," since their son, Kenny Houston, a KMHS senior, plans to attend the University of Alabama next fall. Mrs. Stallings' friend, Gilda Martin, suggested a red-decorated tree and helped place red net, poinsettias and clusters of red Christmas balls on the tree

2,000 luminaries will brighten KM cemetery on Christmas Eve

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

The weatherman is calling for clear skies and bone-chilling cold weather Friday night.

That's good news to Jim and Brenda Belt.

For the fourth year in a row, the Belts, assisted by a host of Kings Mountain citizens, will be lighting the streets and some of the graves of Mountain Rest Cemetery with 2,000 luminaries for the year 2000.

The previous three years, rain has fallen on the service but not on the spirits of the participants. All of the services have been impressive.

"The high Friday is supposed to be 44 degrees," says Jim Belt, "so that means it's going to be chilly at sundown."

Kings Mountain citizens are urged to drive through the cemetery from 6:30-10:30 p.m. Enter the cemetery at the Dilling Street gate (in front of the cemetery office). The entrance gate on East Gold Street will not be open. All gates will close at 12 midnight.

Persons interested in helping place the luminaries are welcome as early as 3 p.m. There will be plenty of parking for those helping. Also, luminaries will be provided for persons wishing to place them on the graves of their loved ones.

Belt began placing some of the luminaries along the driveways Tuesday afternoon.

Citizens have been dropping milk and water jugs off at the cemetery office for several weeks, and they will continue to be accepted through

Friday. Although they have plenty of jugs, Belt says they will place as many as the people bring. Despite the rainy weather, the luminary service has continued to grow through the years. The Belts got the idea after Mrs. Belt attended a similar service at a cemetery in Gastonia.

"She came back home and said she wanted to put a few luminaries in Mountain Rest Cemetery for my mother and some friends of hers," Belt recalled. "We put in about 75 the first year, and it just built from that."

"The next year we put in a thousand, and last year we put in 1,800," he recalled. "This year we're putting in 2000 for the year 2000. It's just something we wanted to do to make it a brighter Christmas for everyone."

A number of other citizens have bought into the Belts' idea and have assisted over the years. KM Pools provides trailers for the citizens to place water and milk jugs, and Dorus Bennett and his staff at Mountain Rest Cemetery collect jugs as well as donations to help fund the project.

Harris Funeral Home provides a tent for the workers to get in out of the weather on occasion, and Mike Butler and his family and friends chip in to help light all of the luminaries.

Several others, too numerous to mention, help out in one way or another.

But behind it all, Belt says, is his wife Brenda, who quietly works behind the scenes every year to make it a huge success.

"From the comments we've heard, the service is doing what we wanted it to do," Belt says



GARY STEWART / THE HERALD
Jim Belt goes through a trailer load of milk jugs to make luminaries for Christmas Eve ceremony at Kings Mountain's Mountain Rest Cemetery.



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