

TOP TEN

From 1A

area citizens, high-dollar construction projects in and around Kings Mountain, elections, recreation, gambling, crime and fires.

Judged the #3 story was the concern over the date of January 1, 2000, in which many feared sophisticated computer systems might read the year 2000 as 1900, crash and leave the world in chaos.

Government agencies nationwide spent tons of money and countless hours of employees' time modifying their systems, checking and re-checking them, and then declaring they were "Y2K compatible."

As it turned out, no systems failed and only a few experienced minor problems and the world continued to turn.

Kings Mountain and area folks continued to show their compassion in 1999 after Hurricane Floyd and follow-up floods almost completely destroyed the eastern part of the state.

The day before the storm hit it was on a path that would directly hit Kings Mountain, but several hours later veered to the east and didn't present a single problem here.

But our good fortune turned out to be unfortunate for our eastern neighbors, many of whom lost their homes and had to rebuild their lives. In many if not most cases, they haven't recovered yet.

But almost immediately after the storm passed through North Carolina, area citizens began relief efforts which resulted in a number of tractor-trailer truck loads of food and other necessities of life, as well as cash donations which continue to pour in.

The year also saw the city and area begin, and in many cases complete, massive building projects which will prove beneficial economically down the road.

In the city, a new \$1.7 million dollar police department was completed and a new children's wing at Mauney Memorial Library was begun and is now near completion.

The Kings Mountain Senior Center also completed a successful fund-raising effort to build a new \$1.2 million facility on East King Street to be named in memory of the late Lawrence Patrick. Site preparation is under way and major construction will begin in the spring, hopefully to be completed by the year's end or early 2001.

Also during the year, County Commissioners purchased land west of Kings Mountain for an Industrial Park, and Sara Lee Intimate Apparels announced it would be the first tenant. Sara Lee is under construction now and will employ about 600.

Area citizens also went to the polls to elect new leaders for the city, school board and county.

A special election was held in January for the five seats on the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners, made necessary because of court rulings dealing with previous law suits by the NAACP and Citizens for

Good Government.

Republicans captured three of the seats, but Democrat Willie McIntosh was the leading vote-getter. McIntosh and Republican Charlie Harry were awarded four-year seats because they were the top two vote-getters. Republicans Jim Crawley and Joe Cabaniss and Democrat Joe Hendrick won two-year terms.

Kings Mountain City Council and the KM School Board took on some new faces who were elected in November and took office in December. Ward 5 Councilman Rick Murphrey was elected mayor, replacing Scott Neisler who did not run. Elected to the board were incumbents Bob Hayes, Gene White and Clavon Kelly, and newcomers Howard Shipp, Jim Guyton, Dean Spears and Carl DeVane.

Newcomer Stella Putnam led the ticket for the school board and ousted longtime board member Sonny Peeler. Shearra Miller was re-elected.

Another big story coming out of City Hall occurred in July when the city contracted with the YMCAs of Cleveland County to run the city recreation program. The YMCA is now located in the old Kings Mountain Community Center and officially opened for members on January 1.

Gambling was a big story in the area in 1999. Both the Grover and Kings Mountain Town Councils turned down requests from gaming establishments just across the South Carolina state line from Grover to provide water to those facilities. Later in the year, the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled that video gambling was illegal and that the businesses would have to close by July 1, 2000. A plan by one casino to turn its business into nude dancing was dropped in December.

The #9 story of the year was the attempted May robbery of First Charter Bank. An armed black man banged on the door one morning before bank hours, and when bank employee Libby Blanton went to the door to tell him the bank was closed he shot through the door, striking Mrs. Blanton. She was treated and released later that day from Kings Mountain Hospital.

Rounding out the top ten stories of the year was the Christmas morning fire at the historic Saint Matthew's Lutheran Church in Kings Mountain which resulted in over a quarter of a million dollars damage. The fire started in the old part of the building, which housed the fellowship building and Sunday School rooms. Through the quick effort of Kings Mountain and Oak Grove firemen the fire was contained and did not spread into the sanctuary.

CORRECTION

The women's swim team and the women's soccer team were inadvertently omitted from the list of 1998 Southwestern 3A Conference champions at Kings Mountain High School in last week's Herald.

Black leaders voice concerns about merger

BY ALAN HODGE
Staff Writer

The issue of school system merger once again raised its head at Tuesday's meeting of the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners.

The meeting got underway with acceptance of a new agreement between the County and the Shelby Rescue Squad, then moved on to approval of new members to the Cleveland County Board of Adjustments, Planning Board, Nursing Home Advisory Committee, and Child Fatality Review Team.

Other items on the agenda Tuesday covered appointment of Kevin Myers to the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, and review of a dispute between Shelby developer James Heafner and the Cleveland County Health Department.

When it came time for the Citizen Recognition portion of the meeting, Larry Corry of Shelby stepped to the podium and delivered an impassioned speech on the subject of how minority students in Cleveland County would be affected by school system merger. Attending with Corry were sev-

eral other black leaders and over a dozen members of Palmer Grove Baptist Church in Kingstown.

"We have serious concerns about how school merger will impact minorities in Cleveland County," Corry said. "We haven't decided if we are for or against it, but want to be included in the decision making process. The need to improve the achievement and performance of all children in Cleveland County is a concern of all citizens."

Corry came armed not only with feelings, but with facts showing blacks lagging behind whites in many areas of education in Cleveland County.

Corry's charts illustrated that in Cleveland County for the period 1997-1998, End of Course Testing percent proficiency for high school blacks was 29 percent less than for other ethnic groups, Kings Mountain High School blacks were 28 percent less than other groups, and Shelby City black high schoolers were 35 percent behind.

Other charts that Corry drew on to illustrate the concerns of the African American community regarding school merger

"...the first item...is to provide equitable education..."

-Jim Crawley
Chairman

showed that of 201 students enrolled in advanced placement classes, 190 were white and just 11 were black. For Kings Mountain advance placement enrollment, the figures Corry gave commissioners were 89 whites, one black, and eight of other ethnic origin.

"These figures capture the interest and concern of African American leaders and organizations in the county," Corry said. "There have been retreats and conferences held locally wherein lack of education attainment and achievement has distressed many parents. The long term and continued underachievement and performance gaps between African American students and other ethnic groups deeply concerns parents

and community leaders. Initiating discussion of merger without adequate consideration of those whom the system has failed is one step closer to defining the solution before the problem is stated."

Corry went on to outline nearly 20 specific grievances and concerns the black community has concerning discussions of and actual merger of schools should the event take place.

"The challenge is to know those whom we have failed. To know the characteristics of all those we seek to impact with discussion of school system merger. To avoid the temptation to define the problem's solution before we have adequately stated the need," Corry said.

In response to Corry's presentation, commission chairman Jim Crawley assured everyone present that the needs of minorities in Cleveland County was of major concern to commissioners.

"If you notice," Crawley said, "the first item on our list of things to look at concerning merger is to provide equitable education and financial resources to support each child in Cleveland County."

SCHOOL

From 1A

Hawkins said he looked forward to meeting with the attorneys so each member of the Kings Mountain Board could give their side on what's happened since commissioners circulated a letter on November 18 calling for a "merger assessment." He again chastised the county board for the manner in which they made the merger issue public - through a letter to the Shelby Star rather than to

the three county boards of education.

"If they would have just sent a copy to the boards of education saying that they were concerned and that we needed to get together and talk about it, we could have worked through this and come to some common ground," he said. "The county commissioners, Kings Mountain School Board and Cleveland County School Board would not be paying out big money for lawyers, and we wouldn't have all the anxiety and hard feelings that we're not going to be able to adjust to overnight. Honestly, I think

they now realize they made a mistake but they could come back right now and put a halt to it. We could start having some meetings, discuss each issue, compile information from all three systems and see if there's a possible way of keeping all three systems or having it put to a vote of the public. I think then they would be doing what they were put in office to do."

Hawkins said he has had numerous calls from other areas of the county since he filed for County Commissioner Monday. "They wanted to let me know that they stand with me in the sense that the county has treat-

ed this in an improper manner. This is just going to tear the community apart."

Meanwhile, Supt. McRae said he had received a memo from the law firm hired by the County Commissioners asking that any information that the system wants considered in the merger issue should be provided by January 11.

The County Manager and the superintendents from the three systems met Wednesday morning to prepare an agenda for the January 25 public forum on merger which was approved at last month's meeting of the County Commissioners.

HAWKINS

From 1A

The recent school merger issue prompted Hawkins to file for the Board of Commissioners. He said he is against school merger but even if a forced merger occurs before he takes office he would still be a "champion" for the children of Cleveland County.

He said his campaign platform will be twofold: opposing school merger and seeking district representation on the county board.

"I have always been, and would always want to be a person who would prefer to serve as a school board member," said the 10-year KM School Board member. "My main interest in life has always been in working with children and helping them to the best of my ability."

"But during the process of what I'm going to start calling the letter of November 18 (when Commissioners called for a merger assessment), I've basically been shown that commissioners are handling this in a manner that I don't think any government should handle its business. They should not be listening to one aspect of the community and trying to make such a large decision that affects so many people."

Hawkins said a second part of his opposition to merger happened when the County

Commissioners scheduled what was supposed to be a "dialogue" with the county's three school boards and turned it into a "monologue."

"I was really thankful that Willie McIntosh was willing to make a motion that we be given time to sit down as school board members and commissioners and discuss the issue, and it passed, but at the very same time a motion was made and passed that a lawyer be hired which further strengthened the concept that there is some type of an agenda out there or this thing would not be speeding along as fast as it is," Hawkins said. "I was appreciative of Joe Hendricks in that he did do a little homework and had some questions that need to be answered, and could have been answered by board members and superintendents that were present if we had been in a situation where we could have sat around a table and discussed the issues one by one."

Hawkins criticized commissioners for not passing district representation "when they had the opportunity several years ago."

"I think the part of equitable distribution of the commissioners or re-districting should have been implemented by them," he said. "Even though they say they represent everyone, it's still not the same if you don't

have someone from your area that you know and can call. If we do get into a situation where the county commissioners force a merger, we are going to need someone on the board that will champion the public schools. The needs of the kids are still going to be there. We need to make sure that we have facilities for our kids, and we need to make sure that those facilities are the best we can possibly give to them. You can't take a look at what is needed in the county and then just sit on it."

"I have a strong feeling that however the merger issue turns out, that an awareness has taken place across the county and that people are going to have to be more involved in their government and demand that the government be more open to all the issues. I think we just can't go into another situation like this merger situation. People should be educated enough to be able to do their homework and study all of the issues, listen to the people and then make a good, correct decision."

Hawkins said he feels the trend nationwide will be to smaller school systems and smaller classrooms.

"Just because the state has a hundred counties that doesn't mean there has to be a hundred school systems," he said. "I think Governor Hunt was right on target when he said we're doing everything we can to prepare our children for the workplace and reduce class sizes. If reducing classroom sizes is important then that means to me that one on one relationship is good, and it means that the local community can work a lot better if they can work with local boards of education rather than one big group. Members of the Cleveland County School Board say they are hard-pressed just to get around to the number of schools they have, and we in Kings Mountain are hard-pressed just to get around to the number of schools we have. The people of Kings Mountain have spoken out and I hope the people of Cleveland County will speak out. What they want is a smaller local government and to be able to see and hear and be able to speak with their board members. They would also probably want to be able to speak one on one with county commissioners, but sometimes you feel like what you're saying is falling on deaf ears."

COMPUTERS

From 1A

sult, we had very little congestion."

Computer systems at area schools slid into the new age in smooth fashion. Kings Mountain School District superintendent Bob McRae reported the good news.

"We had no major problems, and nothing that would have kept us from operating," McRae said. "There were a few problems in older software, but it's all been handled."

On the banking scene - one of the areas of the entire Y2K situation that had people perspiring most of all - of the banks

in Kings Mountain reported smooth operations with no Y2K problems in evidence.

"Everything was calm and collected at our bank," said Ed Blackburn of First Citizens. "A few people came in and got fifty dollars or so extra cash, but there was no run on money."

BB&T also experienced a smooth Y2K transition. First Charter and Central Carolina Bank in Kings Mountain entered 2000 glitch-free as did First Union.

"Everything went great," said First Union's Dot Kelly.

All in all, Y2K was like the big bad wolf who huffed and puffed, but didn't blow anyone's house down.

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