

WILLIE

From 1A

Although there was no planned agenda, people in the audience backed up their position with qualified questions and comments. Teachers who have taught in many different systems said students are better educated in small, local school systems and some who teach in Kings Mountain and whose children attend school in Shelby or Cleveland County praised the achievement of all three systems.

Grace Costner, a teacher/counselor at East Elementary, said one of the reasons Kings Mountain schools have fared so well in state testing is because the system is small and that educators and parents have a personal relationship with Central Office administrators.

"Kings Mountain has taken hold of what needs to be done in this town," she said. "The administration knows us by name. They know our children. That's one of the reasons we've done so well. Small school systems are much more effective."

Costner also said that numerous problems that come up from time to time would require a 30-minute drive to Shelby if systems are merged. "We won't have access to services we need immediately."

She pointed out that West and East elementary schools are among the top schools in the county in achievement scores, and they're also among the smallest in enrollment.

Ron Massey, football coach at KMHS, noted that he had taught at one of the poorest systems in the state and two of the largest (Wake County and Cumberland County) and told McIntosh he never "shook the hand of a superintendent or assistant" in those systems.

"If you think merger will cut the fat, you're fooling yourself," he said. "Everybody's going to have an assistant."

School Board member Stella Putnam echoed that position, stating that she had contacted an auditor for a system that recently merged and the merger resulted in a larger administration.

Speaking to McIntosh's point that part of the merger assessment is to address equality, Patti Weathers, who lives in Shelby and teaches in KM, said the people in Kings Mountain are putting money into programs that result in student achievement "and you're going to take their money and solve Cleveland County's problems. Kings Mountain doesn't have inequality. We get the money to support the need. Everybody wants to be as good as we are."

Don Champion added, "we have a good system and we shouldn't take our system and bring it down to their level. If they want to bring theirs up to ours, let them work for it just like we did."

Walt Hovis, a resident of Bessemer City, related to McIntosh some of the problems brought on by the merger of Gaston County Schools in the late 1960s. He said he was in elementary school at the time, and all the promises made by those pushing merger never materialized.

"I brought my kids to Kings Mountain schools because of what merger has done to Gaston County," he said. "We were promised everything under the sun. Bessemer City is still unimproved and Cherryville was condemned. We have to beg Gastonia for their leftovers. If you don't want to run to Shelby for leftovers don't let this happen."

Several speakers pointed out that Kings Mountain's academic success is a result of the combined efforts of educators and parents. Norman Pressley said one of the reasons for the success at East School is because teachers stay after school to work with students that need extra help.

Putnam said that type of volunteer spirit may be lost if there is a merger.

Gail McDougal pointed out that students don't understand why county commissioners are studying merger and asked McIntosh if he and commissioners had read the papers that students wrote and presented to commissioners at the recent summit in Shelby. McIntosh said that he had "not received" the letters.

"Students are terrified of what's going to happen,"

McDougal said. "They feel like if they have to go to Shelby to school it will be worse than death. They're concerned about violence, they're concerned about time, and they're concerned about their athletic programs. Students have concerns that you guys haven't thought about."

Dr. Pam SherGill and many others criticized the commissioners for hiring a lawyer to assess the school merger, rather than a team of professional educators. They questioned how a lawyer could conduct a thorough study "by the end of February" when most studies done by professional educators take "18 months." Comparing a merger assessment to a patient, SherGill said a diagnosis should be done first, and then the cure prescribed.

"You're trying to analyze and you don't know what you're fixing," she said. "Having a law firm look into it doesn't make sense."

"If you came to me with a broken arm and I put plaster on your leg, would you come back to me? Would you trust me?" SherGill asked.

McIntosh replied that he wouldn't, but later in the meeting did tell SherGill his back was hurting and asked if she could do something for it.

"Let me talk to some lawyers and I'll see what I can do," she said.

A number of people also were critical of the apparent pull that a few businessmen - specifically the 20 members of the Business Roundtable - have in the merger issue.

Stella Putnam said the "business leaders" that are pushing the merger "have never been in our schools. There's no reason why our boards can't work together and look at things we can do to make things better."

Liza Dellinger, a vocational teacher at KMHS, said it is the responsibility of business leaders to become involved in schools.

"Business people that I've talked to get involved," she said. "The Roundtable is asking an institution to fix their problems."

Ron Humphries, a graduate of Crest High School, suggested that the people behind the issue is the "small group of people in power" in Shelby, and reminded McIntosh that in the 1970s when Cleveland County Schools asked Shelby City Schools to join them in merger, Shelby declined.

Mearl Valentine also suggested that the real reason behind the merger talk was to benefit Shelby High School.

"I've always said if it's not broke, don't fix it. We all know the real problem is Shelby High School. They're forcing this issue. We've always heard of the Battle of Buffalo Creek. If this thing goes through there will be a big battle."

Kings Mountain School Board member Ronnie Hawkins told McIntosh there was "no crisis in the school systems" until November 18 when Commission Chairman Jim Crawley circulated a letter stating that the board would assess merger. The letter was reportedly prompted by business leaders "crying out for merger."

MERGER

From 1A

sary if the county is willing to give the Elizabeth School district to Shelby.

"The attendance line issue doesn't seem to affect us," said Miller, "but there may be other areas that we can have input on."

Hawkins said if the Shelby and Cleveland County boards discuss re-drawing lines, he is certain they will handle it "differently than the commissioners handled merger and seek input from citizens."

Kings Mountain Board

CENTER

From 1A

ty was zoned R-10, but has been changed to R-20. The site has 1,295 feet of road frontage and is 886 feet deep. The road front will have two double entrances and exits.

Services to be offered by the new facility will include overnight respite care. Patrons will be admitted on a temporary basis. The idea is to allow a family to keep loved one's at home as much as possible, but have the adult day care center

"If you don't want to run to Shelby for leftovers don't let this happen."

-Walt Hovis
Bessemer City

"Who are these people that you can take advice from and turn this county upside down?" asked Hawkins. "Why would you sign such a letter without talking to the School Boards?"

McIntosh admitted the chairman wrote the letter after attending a meeting of the Business Roundtable....but "If I had it to do over I probably wouldn't have signed that letter."

Hawkins also criticized the commissioners for calling for a two-hour public meeting to discuss merger with the school boards, but commissioners took "an hour and 10 minutes and gave the three boards only 50 minutes combined."

"It's frustrating to go to a meeting and not get answers to your questions," Hawkins said. "If the majority of the people are saying no, that's what you should be listening to. Your constituency has already told you how to vote."

Don Smith told McIntosh the decision should be easy. "Eighty percent of the people say they don't want it."

Hawkins and Kenneth Ledford of the Cleveland County School Board, said merger is not needed because the three school systems are working well together now to provide the best education possible for all county students.

"This will tear up the systems," Ledford said. "If you would go to the North Carolina School Boards Association you would find out that merged systems have as much or more problems than they had before merger. The three systems have been working dependently in a lot of cases, but our purpose is to see that our children have the best education possible. We're trying to look at ideas and ways not to merge the three systems. We have problems, but we will have a lot more if we merge because taxes are going to have to go up."

Hawkins said merger would cost a lot of money and would not raise achievement.

"And the real battle will start when you start re-districting," he said. "The interim school board is going to have to take the heat for the county commissioners' decision."

KM School Board member Shearra Miller asked McIntosh to push to give the three systems the estimated \$3 million that implementing merger would cost.

He said if merger is not approved, he would pursue that.

"Certainly, with all the energy we're putting into this we should put some effort in enhancing the schools another way," he said.

Chairman Larry Allen said he can envision ways all three boards can work together.

"All of the systems have some good things going on," said Vice-Chairman Melony Bolin. "There are many ways we can help each other and still keep our systems intact. The number one thing is all the students in Cleveland County."

"We're working together," said the Kings Mountain board's newest member, Stella Putnam. "I knew the boards always did that, but we're working together in a lot of ways I wasn't aware of before I got on the Board."

available for respite. The rezoning application stressed that the facility would "be both safe and aesthetically pleasing."

Plans to achieve the aesthetic goals of the site include "more than adequate setbacks and buffering to preserve the natural integrity of the property." The developers feel that the center will have no more intensity than a church and will "certainly be less than a school."

"This adult day care facility will be good for Kings Mountain and Grover when it is completed," said Brooks.



EAST ELEMENTARY SECOND GRADE A HONOR ROLL - First row, Elizabeth Sheffield, Tara Harbison, Brent Stevens, Sara Thompson. Second row, Haley Britton, Karen Self, Chasity Llewelyn, Destiny Ivester, Megan Davis, Amanda Dotson. Back, Katelynn Daniel, Ansley Putnam, Tyler Black, Benjamin Wilson, Tyler Spain.

Always be prepared for severe weather

By ALAN HODGE
Staff Writer

Spring and its sometimes turbulent weather is not far away. Recognizing that fact, the North Carolina Emergency Management Division and county Emergency Management officers across our state have declared February 20-26 as Severe Weather Awareness Week.

Last year, 36 tornadoes struck North Carolina. Luckily, only two people were injured. In the past, folks have not always been so lucky. Three twisters on March, 1998, November 1988, and March 1984 claimed 45 lives. With this in mind, the theme for the Year 2000 Severe Weather Awareness Week is "Be Alert, Be Prepared, and Be Safe."

"We have seen deadly weather systems move across the southeast, touching down first in one state and then another," said Gov. Jim Hunt. "Our citizens need to be ready in case this happens again."

As part of Severe Weather Awareness Week, schools, government agencies, and businesses across the southeast, including North Carolina, will take part in the annual tornado drill scheduled for Wednesday morning, February 23. In case of actual severe weather on February 23, the drill will be held on Friday, February 25. Cleveland County will be participating in the drill.

"In Cleveland County we will be announcing on television that the drill is taking place," said county Emergency Management Director Beau Lovelace. "We probably won't be sounding sirens. We will also be working with the schools in helping them organize and carry out the drill."

Lovelace and his Emergency Management crews are highly trained and experienced with severe weather.

"The main thing for people to keep in mind this time of year is that severe weather can strike quickly," Lovelace said. "You have to take shelter at a moment's notice."

Understanding what broadcast announcers are saying in relation to severe weather is important. A severe weather "watch" means conditions are favorable for the development of a particular weather event. A severe weather "warning" means that particular type of event is actually oc-

curing and you should take protective action at once.

Planning for severe weather is important. Tips to help you and your family get ready for severe weather can include developing an overall emergency plan, preparing a disaster supplies kit, having drills, knowing your location in relation to storm paths, and having a NOAA Weather Radio at home.

Items that should be included in an emergency kit are one gallon of water per person per day, hand operated can opener, three to seven days rations, flashlights, battery powered radios, first aid kit, prescription drugs, and reading materials to pass the time.

Thunderstorms and tornadoes are the most frequent type of severe weather to occur in Cleveland County in spring. Tornadoes are usually preceded by heavy rain and often hail. Winds in a tornado can reach 250 m.p.h. or more. The average tornado travels in a path from southwest to northeast, but can move in any direction. Tornadoes are most likely to occur between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., but can strike at any hour.

Thunderstorms can be 15 miles in diameter and last an average of 30 minutes. Lighting associated with thunderstorms can strike up to 10 miles away from the storm cell. North Carolina ranks third in the nation in number of lightning related deaths. Most lightning deaths in North Carolina occur at ball parks or in open areas. Besides trees, the next most likely place to be struck by lightning is on the water.

When thunderstorms come to your area and they will - the best thing a person can do is get into a building or hardtop car. If you are in the open, drop to your knees and bend forward, putting your hands on your head. It is important to remember not to lie flat on the ground. Indoors, unplug TV sets and stay off the telephone. Do not take a shower or bath when a storm is in progress.

Following these and other common sense safety tips can save property and even lives. For more information on severe weather preparedness, visit the Education and Emergency Information Section, North Carolina Emergency Management Division website at www.ncem.org, or call Cleveland County Emergency Management at 484-4841.

DOCTOR

From 1A

Women's Clinic to open the only Ob/Gyn clinic in Kings Mountain by September 1. To be called Kings Mountain Women's Care, the office will be located on King Street at the site of the old Kings Mountain Motel. Chamberlain says his current office is simply too small for the number of doctors on board.

"We have seven doctors in our Shelby office," Chamberlain said. "I will be coming to the new Kings Mountain office when it is completed. There are also plans for a physical therapist and a nurse/midwife from the Health Department to occupy the building as well."

Chamberlain said that in addition to offering service in Kings Mountain, his group is also considering opening a practice in Boiling Springs. Kings Mountain Women's Care will offer most Ob/Gyn services but will probably not do on-site mammograms.

Also on the medical office move in Kings Mountain are plans for CLECO Primary Care physicians in the Kings Mountain Medical Center at 711 W. Mountain Street to move into larger quarters at the old Revco building on King Street near the hospital.

Dr. Everette B. Thoms will move his office from its current location at 103 W. King St. into the CLECO location.

GROVER

From 1A

Cleveland County who would be entrusted to see that an accurate census was done in their location. The list was provided by mayors from each of the 12 towns in the county.

In other business Tuesday, commissioners served notice that their March 7 meeting

would be canceled.

In a bit of a surprise ending to their session Tuesday evening, chairman Jim Crawley announced that he had received a petition against school merger. A letter attached to the petition outlining the feelings against merger was signed by citizen Barbara Edwards. Over 300 names appeared on the attached petition.

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