

Incentive grant approved

BY ALAN HODGE
Staff Writer

Besides electing a new school board Tuesday night, the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners also looked at an economic incentive plan for a new business and also approved the county budget for the coming fiscal year.

In a unanimous vote, the commissioners agreed to offer an economic incentive grant to Commonwealth Aluminum Tube Enterprises LLC. Based in Delaware, Commonwealth plans to operate a plant at 133 Industrial Drive, off Shelby Road in Cleveland Industrial Park. The operation will create

at least 40 new jobs and have an anticipated net new investment of at least \$3,775,000. Industrial Drive will be annexed in the Kings Mountain city limits as of June 30.

The commissioners determined that the value of the industrial incentive grant would not be more than \$18,874.80 per year for five years. Commonwealth plans to complete the anticipated net new investment of \$3,775,000 in machinery and equipment by October 2001.

The commissioners also approved a county budget of \$84,578,153. The budget has been available for public perusal since May 22 and has been

in the works since February of this year. This year's budget was up \$7.2 million over last year.

Several items on this year's budget ran the numbers up. Current projected cost to implement the merger plan will be \$3,749,526. Other departments that saw budget increases included the Department of Social Services which was up \$700,000 over last year, Cleveland County EMS which had to hire 11 new members and new equipment to the tune of \$740,000 over last year, and the Cleveland County Health Department, which saw its budget needs increase \$379,000.

Baker in Circle of Champions

Local New York Life Insurance agent Steve R. Baker, CLU, was recently named as a member of the company's 1999 Long-Term Care Circle of Champions. New York Life's Long-Term Circle of Champions honors all agents who achieve specified sales goals.

Baker was recognized for his exceptional sales efforts in 1999. His outstanding performance in long-term care sales earned a bonus cash award and a plaque honoring the special achievement. Baker has been a sales agent for New York Life for 13 years.

New York Life Insurance Company, a Fortune 100 Company, has been in existence since 1845 and is one of the largest mutual life insurance companies in the nation. The Long-Term Care Division offers insurance coverage for nursing home and home care.

MERGER

From 1A

the legality of the plan - and coming just days after judges in Cleveland and Wake counties who denied an injunction also gave indications that the questions about the Gaston County issue had merit - seemed to pump up some KM board members.

"I feel just as good now as I did before," said Allen. "Both judges have told us that we have significant legal issues that have to be addressed. They basically said, 'after the State Board acts, bring it back to us.'"

Both Judge Bridges in Cleveland County and Judge Bannette in Wake County denied the preliminary injunctions because they said "irreparable harm" to Gaston students could not be caused before the State Board made a decision.

"If we're going to stop it at all, it has to be stopped by one venue or another," Allen said. "We're either going to get a stay or an injunction until a judge can make a decision."

Allen said he agreed with Douglas's statements during the State Board meeting that the Gaston County students have been a part of Kings Mountain Schools for at least 25 years.

"We've danced around it, but the State has been funding them for 24 years and you can't deny that fact," Allen said.

Douglas suggested that the Cleveland County Commissioners get the approval of Gaston County Commissioners and re-submit its merger plan to the State, but the approval of Boyles' motion stopped that possibility.

KM Board member Ronnie Hawkins said he, too, is convinced that KM still has a good chance of getting an injunction by July 1.

"The only way we can win now is in court," he said. "We'll have to prove that they voted on an illegal plan. If that's found to be true, the commissioners would have to take a revised plan back to the State

Board for approval, and if that revised plan should mean that Gaston County should sign off on it that's something they'd have to work through to get."

Hawkins said KM Schools are not willing to dismiss the Gaston County students without a fight.

"They've always been a viable part of our community and will remain so," he said.

"I was pleased that most of the discussion that took place at the State Board meeting was whether or not those kids actually belong to us. I think there's enough doubt at the State Board level, but the way it was told to us they were supposed to vote on the merits of the plan and whether or not it was legal within guidelines set by the General Assembly. The issue of the Gaston County kids is a legal issue and it's got to be decided in the courts. If they had taken care of the legal issue first it would have become a moot point when it came before the State Board."

Hawkins said he would like to see an injunction hearing soon, so school officials can get back to the business of educating children.

"I think if the courts would have heard us earlier we could either be getting on with regular business or coming together and making the merger happen in the best interest of the children," he said.

Though obviously disappointed by the State Board decision, KM Board member Stella Putnam said Kings Mountain "has one more shot (seeking an injunction), and the hunter in me says we need to take it."

"I am committed to doing everything we can do to stop it," she said. "I do not see how this is going to benefit children. I was encouraged when the State Board had some problems with their vote. It's a very murky situation."

Putnam said, if KM's injunction efforts fail and the plan is implemented July 1, the interim school board faces a "monu-

mental" task.

"I just can't imagine what they're going to have to deal with," she said. "If they leave everything the same for next year, then come back in 2001 and start moving kids around we're going to go through another time when children are hurt, and that's a shame."

Board member Shearra Miller said she, too, was disappointed, "but not surprised" by the State Board's decision.

"The biggest surprise was that they deliberated as long as they did (2 1/2 hours) and that there was actually a split vote," she said. "That let me know that we're right in our assumption that the merger is illegal and should not be taking place because at least some of their board members felt the same way."

"I'm just to the mindset that we don't give up until a judge rules that we don't have any other choice."

Vice-Chairman Melony Bolin said there's "always hope" that an injunction could stop the merger, but it was obvious she was disappointed with the State Board's decision.

"I am very disappointed that they didn't take into consideration the 183 Gaston County students," she said. "One of the members even made the statement that they were letting 200 students make the decision for the whole system, but whether it's one student or 183 it should matter. Their rights should not be violated."

"I understand that the system has not been fair up to this point in regards to this merger issue, because we've had five county commissioners who are supposed to be open-minded - and I believe one of them was - but the other four had already made up their minds back in December and that's unfair for Kings Mountain students who will suffer in a merged system, because bigger is not better."

INTERIM

From 1A

charged with the responsibility to "provide representation to the people of Cleveland County as a whole." A large contingent from the black community attended the meeting which saw two blacks, Mary Evans and Richard Hooker, elected to board seats.

The entire voting process took less than 15 minutes. Voting for the six members from the current school board was accomplished on the first go. Selection of the at-large members took two tries. On the first ballot, Litton and Evans were selected. Evans received three votes and Litton four. This left one seat still open since none of the other candidates received the three votes needed to win. On the second ballot, all commissioners voted for Curtis except McIntosh who again cast

PAVING

From 1A

fresh coat could be put down "After the paving job is completed on Gold and Mountain streets, we'll resurface part of Cherokee Street behind the police station and Ridge Street," said Jackie Bannette

his vote for Jose Espinal Sr., of Kings Mountain.

After the new board was selected, Middlebrooks took another turn at the podium to speak to the commissioners and the audience about the legal ramifications since the board had been named.

"From this moment forward, the board is bound by the same laws that govern you concerning open meetings," Middlebrooks said. "They have to give notice of any meetings they intend to have, and they must be open to the public."

In a gesture towards Gaston County students who attend school in Kings Mountain,

Crawley laid out an olive branch by saying the commissioners and new board wanted to "work with the students." Commissioner Charlie Harry also said he encouraged cooperation regarding the Gaston student situation.

Though the selection of the new school board seemed to be the final icing on the merger cake, some folks vowed to fight on against the deal.

"I'm looking forward to the opportunity serve on the new board - if it in fact becomes a reality," said Dr Larry Allen. "In the meantime, we will continue to work with our lawyers to see merger defeated."

CENTER

From 1A

er organizations, and individuals.

Thornburg said the center will feature an 86' by 52' multi-purpose room for socials and large activities for both Senior Citizens programs and other community activities. A ceramic shop, exercise room, game room, craft room, library, commercial kitchen with walk-in freezer and refrigerator, two dining rooms, and a suite of offices and a gift shop are also included in the plans.

The one-story structure will be more than three times the size of the current Senior Center, located at the old Kings Mountain Depot.

"We're hoping the facility will be used by the general public, businesses, and other organizations," Thornburg said. "It's going to be a nice building and we're looking forward to getting into it."

The Senior Center program has been in existence since 1975,

starting out in the basement of the Kings Mountain Community Center. The program served as the initial Meals on Wheels program for Cleveland County.

The program moved into the Depot in 1976 and now serves over 1,000 people annually. Daily attendance averages from 60 to 80 people in a number of programs, and Thornburg expects those numbers to increase substantially once the new building is occupied.

The program now serves the Kings Mountain School District.

Mayor Murphrey said he is excited to see the new Center come to pass.

"We all take a great deal of pride and personal satisfaction in making this dream come true," he said. "It's been a real effort by a lot of people, our city council, city staff, Senior Center Advisory Board, and a number of volunteers. We're real excited about this new facility which will improve the quality of life for the citizens of Kings Mountain."

BLAST

From 1A

Three prizes will be given away during a special drawing, with the grand prize a 15' x 4' above-ground pool donated by KM Pools. Second prize is a BMX bike, and third prize is a kiddie pool.

Tickets for the prize drawing may be obtained at Kings Mountain financial institutions and other downtown businesses.

Linda Allen, secretary of KMBPA, encourages all area residents to take part in the Beach Blast, which the KMBPA hopes will become a summer tradition.

"Even though this is our first year, we're hoping for a very large crowd," she said. "We've really gotten a lot of good responses so far."

Beach-goers are encouraged to bring beach blankets, lawn chairs and umbrellas. The mural dedication at 5 p.m. will be an event that has long been anticipated by many Kings Mountain folks.

Forest City artist Clive Haynes has been busy for months painting the giant mural on the side of the Plonk Building at the corner of Railroad Avenue and East Gold Street, and except for a few minor finishing touches it will be completed by Saturday.

Shirley Brutko of the Kings Mountain Branch of the Cleveland County Chamber and a member of the Mayor's Mural Committee, will make re-

marks along with Mayor Rick Murphrey.

Mayor Murphrey will briefly review the history of Kings Mountain and Clive Haynes will talk briefly about the mural. Brutko will speak briefly about the dreams of future murals.

"I'm really looking forward to this," said Murphrey. "This is something the people are going to take a lot of pride in."

Dale Putnam will be dressed in his mountaineer outfit and fire his musket.

Brutko pointed out that all but one of the scenes on Haynes' mural depicts Kings Mountain as it was in 1780, when the Battle was fought. It includes farm land, planes, trees and streams, bare ground, the old Frederick Hambright cabin near the entrance to Kings Mountain National Military Park; the John Wells cabin on Stewart Road, now owned by Letha Stewart and is the house where wounded soldiers were brought for treatment; the Ormand furnace near Long Creek, Long Creek Presbyterian Church, and the Long Creek cemetery tombstone of a soldier who was killed in the battle.

The mural also includes patriot soldiers and several animals that roamed Kings Mountain during that period of time, including a hidden buffalo.

Included in the mural is one animal that was thought to be native to this area, but later found out not to be. Brutko said it will be left so school children can identify it.

The Herald

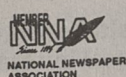
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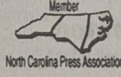
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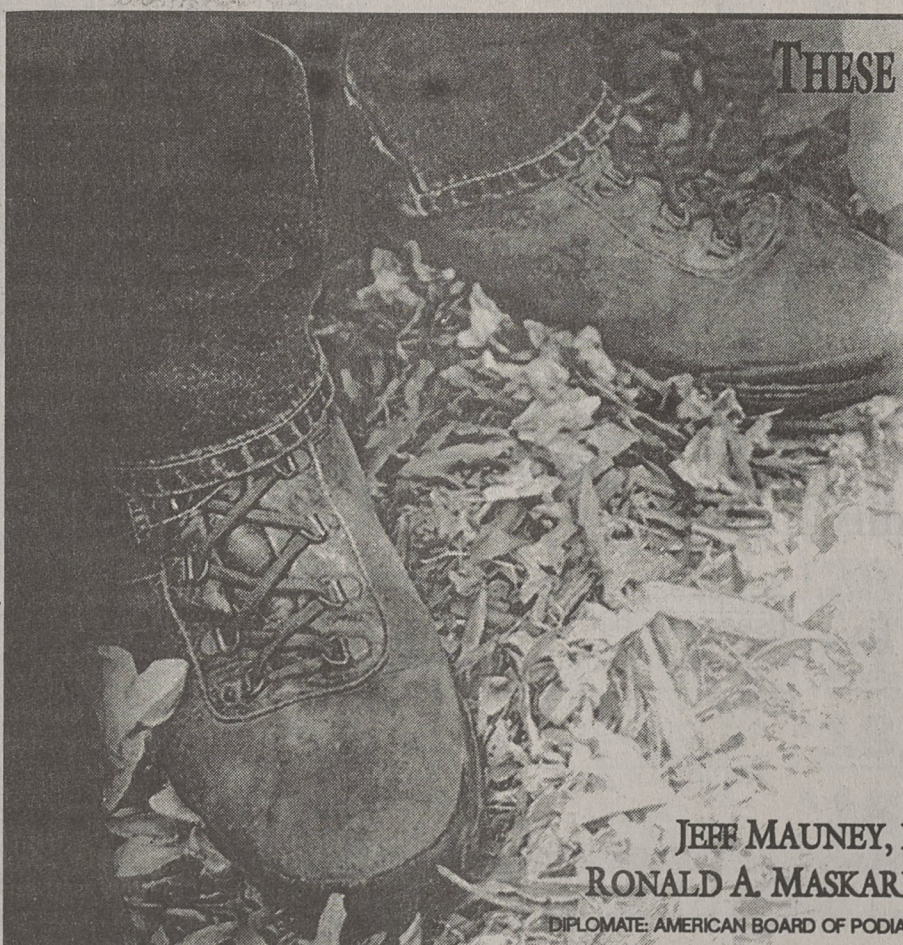
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