

# Economy looks bright for Southern Piedmont

BY ALAN HODGE  
Staff Writer

When Professor Bill McCoy, director of the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, recently gave his presentation on the growth and changing demographics in the 14 county Southern Piedmont region, Cleveland County figured prominently in the stats.

Having studied the region for a quarter century gave McCoy a unique perspective on area trends in education, transportation, sprawl and the environment. Counties discussed at his seminar included Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly,

and Union in North Carolina. South Carolina counties analyzed were Chester, Lancaster, and York.

In addition to looking at current situations in each county, McCoy also offered some projections through the year 2010. Beginning with some regional medians, here are some of the things that McCoy examined.

For the 14 county area, McCoy has determined that the average price of a home in 1997 was \$141,011. The median household income was pegged at \$34,321 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Region population was figured to be 1.93 million in 2000, with a projected increase to 2.21 million by 2010.

In 1995, the 14 county region

had a total over 900,000 inter-county commuters. The number of Cleveland County commuters was around 40,000 - a far cry from Mecklenburg's 314,000 daily drivers. Anson County brought up the rear in inter-county commuting with just 10,000 drivers.

Employment for the region and Cleveland County appears to be good for the coming year. A recent report by Manpower, Inc. indicated that hiring intentions in the county are expected to see a 33 percent number of firms planning to increase staff. Companies planning on cutting back on staff are expected to be 13 percent. Firms predicting no change in their work forces are at 51 percent and three percent remained uncertain of needs.

was 3.6 percent and the national rate was also 3.6 percent.

Per capita income from the Bureau of Economic Analysis shows that per capita income in Cleveland County stands at \$19,618. North Carolina per capita income is estimated to be \$23,168. In South Carolina, the figure is even lower at \$20,508. Leading McCoy's 14 county region in per capita income is Mecklenburg at \$32,295.

When it comes to retail shopping, folks in Cleveland County are sort of middle of the road in their spending amounts. Low spending county in the region is Chester in South Carolina with retail accounting for 13.4 per-

cent of revenues. In North Carolina, Cabarrus County leads the retail sales race with 57.4 percent. Cleveland comes in eighth place with 29 percent.

Education is an important element in the Southern Piedmont and its future. Scholastic Aptitude Test scores for the area range from a high of 1,034 for Hickory City Schools to a low of 871 for Anson County schools. Of the 26 school districts that McCoy looked at, Kings Mountain City Schools came in 22nd with SAT scores in 1998-1999 of 937.

Poverty levels in the region McCoy has studied vary widely. The average 14 county poverty rate is just under 12 percent.

According to the Census Bureau, Cabarrus County had the lowest poverty rate in 1995 with 8.4 percent. Cleveland County's poverty rate for that period was 12.8 percent. In Anson County, one out of five people were living in poverty with a rate of 20.2 percent.

"There is no doubt that this region has experienced significant growth in the last 20 years," McCoy said. "But some counties have grown more than others and some have been more successful in managing growth and diversifying their local economies."

McCoy's lecture was part of UNC Charlotte's "Spotlight on Research" series.

## HEAT

From 1A

change," Thomas emphasized.

Thomas said that unless the weather gets worse, his company has enough oil to supply its customers through the winter.

With the increases in natural gas and oil, many people are looking for ways to turn the thermostat down and still stay warm. Kerosene heaters are one source that is finding a resurgence of use.

"We have been very busy repairing and servicing kerosene heaters," said George Melton at Bridges Hardware in Kings Mountain. "So far this season, I estimate we have worked on about 125 heaters."

The current price of kerosene is around \$1.44 a gallon. Users of kerosene heaters need to be careful regarding their operation. Besides having the unit inspected by a technician like Melton, heater owners should make sure they use only fresh kerosene and not gasoline or other fuel.

Kerosene heaters also need plenty of "breathing room" and should not be used in a small, enclosed area. Finally, never go

to bed with a kerosene heater burning - carbon monoxide is a killer.

For people who are having trouble paying their heating bills, there are sources of help. Piedmont Natural Gas has a line at 1-800-752-7504 for this purpose. Donations can also be sent to a fund that Piedmont has set up to help others with their bills at P.O. Box 33068, Charlotte, N.C. 28233-3068. Jot "Share The Warmth" on your check's memo line. Make the check out to one of these groups: Salvation Army, Gaffney; Crisis Assistance Ministry, Charlotte; Co-op Christian Ministries, Hickory; Christian Ministries, Lincolnton.

In Cleveland County, the Department of Social Services has a crisis intervention program that will help low income people who are having trouble meeting their heating bills. To find out if you qualify, call 487-0661.

On the national scene, President Clinton recently released over \$150 million in emergency funds to help low income folks stay warm. Of this amount, \$2.6 million was earmarked for North Carolina.

Also according to Manpower, this winter personnel gains are expected in construction, non-durable goods, manufacturing, wholesale/retail and services. Reductions are possible in education and public administration. In October, Cleveland County had a 6.7 unemployment rate. The statewide rate

## KM wrestlers win in West Lincoln event

Five Kings Mountain High wrestlers finished 4-0 in their weight classes in the West Lincoln Duals Saturday.

Michael Bell won at 119 pounds, Matt Bridges at 130, Shane Short at 135, Tanner Putnam at 145, and Matt Ash at 171.

The Mountaineers finished third as a team, winning three of their four matches.

The Mountaineers will compete in the 32-team West Henderson Tournament December 29-30. The field will include teams from North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Pennsylvania.



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