

The Herald

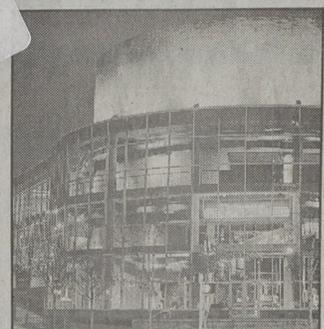
Thursday, February 8, 2001

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Students report attempted abduction

By GARY STEWART
 Editor of The Herald

Three 9-year-old East Elementary School students reported Tuesday that a man attempted to pick them up as they were leaving school Monday at 3 p.m.

According to Det. Derek Johnson of Kings Mountain Police Department, the children walked out of school at the bus parking lot, and were walking around the front of the school in the area of Cleveland Avenue.

The children said a Black man in a Red Honda Civic approached them and said, "your grandmother has sent me to pick up you," according to Johnson.

Johnson said the children did exactly what they needed to do: they kept walking.

"As they kept walking he said, 'I'll just meet you up at the store,'" Johnson said. "But they walked around to the other side of the school where the parents park and got into the car with their parents."

Johnson said the children did not report the incident until the following day, when they told a school employee, who notified Principal Jerry Hoyle. Hoyle interviewed the children and called the police and a report was filed at 2 p.m.

See Students, 3A

Freeze saved gas customers 44 percent

By GARY STEWART
 Editor of The Herald

Many Kings Mountain citizens may have been alarmed at the drastic increase when they received their January utility bill from the city.

Because of unusually cold weather during December, everyone's bill, especially the natural gas part of it, was much higher than the month before.

But, says City Manager Jimmy Maney, they would have been 44% higher had the city not frozen residential gas rates for a month.

Mayor Rick Murphrey had announced on January 11 that the city would freeze the rate for January based on the December wholesale rate. He estimated the cost to the city - and the savings to the over 4,000 residential customers - would be about \$150,000.

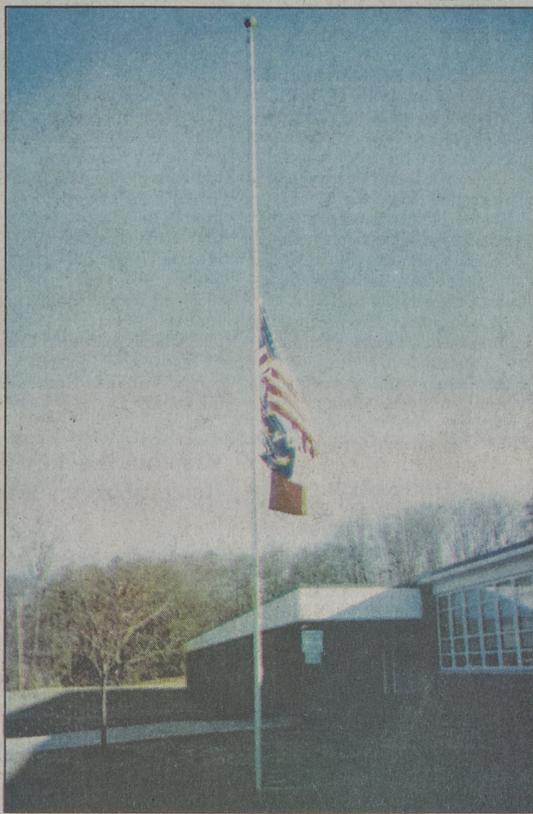
As it turned out, City Manager Jimmy Maney said the savings to customers was \$325,000.

Maney, who monitors gas prices on an almost daily basis and "locks in" a price when he feels it is as low as it's going to get for a certain period of time, said all cities are experiencing drastic rises in gas rates because of recent shortages and higher wholesale prices.

For example, he said, in December 1999 the city paid \$373,000 for the wholesale cost of gas. In December 2000, the cost was \$1 million.

"As we move forward, you can't absorb too many \$325,000 expenditures," he said. "But, the good news is that gas prices

See Freeze, 2A



GARY STEWART / THE HERALD
 Flags fly at half-mast at North Elementary School in memory of guidance counselor Judy Howell, who lost her life in a ski tubing accident Saturday evening at Beech Mountain.

Snow tubing accident fatal to KM educator

By GARY STEWART
 Editor of The Herald

A family outing to the ski slopes of Western North Carolina to celebrate her son's 10th birthday turned tragic Saturday for Kings Mountain teacher Judy Howell, who died following a ski tubing accident at Ski Beech.

Mrs. Howell, a guidance counselor at North Elementary School, was an experienced skier but was tubing for the first time when the tube she was riding overshot the finish line and went over the 6-to-8 feet sloped stopping area. Mrs. Howell was caught by a safety net, but she dropped out of the net on her neck. She was airlifted to a hospital in Johnson City, TN where she died.

According to officials at the ski slope, it was the first fatal accident at Ski Beech.

The accident occurred around 6:25 p.m. Mrs. Howell's close friend, Betty Eaker, said they had planned to go tubing earlier in the day but tickets were sold out.

"She had skied before," said Eaker. "She loved the outdoors. They just decided to do that because the slopes were so crowded."

Mrs. Howell's son, Jeff, who recently turned 10 years old, had gone to the mountains two weeks earlier to try snowboarding, and the Saturday outing was a part of his birthday celebration, Eaker said.

Friends and colleagues recall Howell as a dedicated teacher, mother and friend who loved children and sports. She was an avid supporter of her son's 10-under AAU baseball team. Her husband, Scott, was one of the team's coaches. The team

traveled every other week during the past season, and finished high in a number of tournaments across the state.

"She was the backbone of the team," Eaker said. "The daddys coached, but the mommas always ran the team. She was the big cheerleader, and if they needed anything done she was the one that did it. There were 14 boys, and all of their parents were involved in it."

Howell's dedication to children was evident in her recent decision to return to college to get a Master's degree so she could be a school counselor. Kings Mountain School Supt. Bob McRae said she had worked as a teacher assistant at Grover Elementary for several years before becoming a counselor at North at the beginning of the current school year. She also did her semester counseling internship at Grover under Janet Smith.

"Although she was at North for a short time, she endeared herself to the faculty with her energy and compassion," McRae said. "She is certainly going to be greatly missed. In a system of this size - it's so related to a small community that when a tragedy like this happens the impact is felt even more to the school system because we have such a family feeling."

North teachers were notified of Mrs. Howell's death on Sunday, and they spent most of the afternoon and evening calling parents of their students to encourage them to explain the situation to their children so school counselors and ministers could begin the healing process on Monday

See Howell, 3A



ALAN HODGE/THE HERALD
 With Valentine's Day just around the corner, kids at Bolin Day Care in Kings Mountain spent some time making decorations for the event. Showing off the artwork, youngsters (from left) Robbie Lysek, TaTa Nixon, Chelsea George, and Haley Camp were also looking forward to some Valentine sweets.

Board members defend hiring, salary of Allen

By GARY STEWART
 Editor of The Herald

While the hiring of Dr. Larry Allen and his \$100,000 per year salary approved by the Kings Mountain Board of Education Wednesday is being judged as unnecessary and too costly by proponents of school merger, members of the Board are defending their action and say it is actually saving the county and the state money.

Board members say Dr. Allen's appointment as superintendent is necessary because KMDS is still a viable school system and needs experienced leadership.

School officials say Dr. Allen's salary, including state and local funds, is less than the salary of current superintendent Bob McRae, and Allen's contract does not include any funds for insurance coverage or a buyout clause.

According to KMDS Director of Finances, Mary Jo Lindquist, Allen will be paid \$77,830 per year in state funds and \$22,170

in local supplements. McRae is paid \$86,002.56 in state funds and \$21,372 in local supplements. Dr. Allen's contract is effective April 1, 2001 through June 30, 2004. Dr. McRae's will be paid through March 30. He becomes superintendent of Randolph County Schools on April 1.

School Board Vice-Chairman Melony Bolin said Allen's insurance benefits are provided under his retirement plan, and estimated because of that and the difference in Allen's and McRae's salaries there would be a savings of about \$75,000 over the three-year period of Allen's contract.

Bolin said Southern Association regulations state that the superintendent must be the system's highest-paid employee and that KMDS's second highest employee, an administrator, makes \$91,300 per year.

"Dr. Allen is only receiving a little bit over \$8,000 per year more than the highest paid em-

See Allen, 3A

Eden Gardens plans major expansion

By ALAN HODGE
 Staff Writer

EdenGardens assisted living facility in Kings Mountain will soon be having a major expansion.

Scheduled to begin in mid-summer, the growth could eventually consist of 56 single family homesites and a 30 unit independent elderly apartment building. A minimum 30-foot greenspace will be maintained around the property.

EdenGardens has 9.4 acres of land adjacent to its current 12 acre plot for the project. Cost when completed will be \$12 to \$14 million. The project will also include a new dementia unit. "When the project is finished,

EdenGardens will be the only facility in the area to offer the full continuum of care for seniors," said EdenGardens marketing director Vickie Husband.

Plans are for the first phase of the three phase endeavor to begin in a few months. Buildings will consist of a three-story apartment with 30 units. That figure could grow to 90 apartments by the time the project is completed.

There will also be 12-14 independent garden homes on the site. These will offer at least six floor plans with around 1,300 to 1,400 square feet of heated space. Pulliam Investment Co. of Spartanburg will be handling

See Eden, 2A



ALAN HODGE/THE HERALD
 EdenGardens of Kings Mountain will expand its facilities into the surrounding forest beginning later this year. A community of independent living residences will be built there by Pulliam Investment Co. of Spartanburg.



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