

ALLEN

From 1A

ployee," she said. "Kings Mountain is still a viable system and it is our responsibility to have a superintendent in place to oversee the daily operation of our schools. Our children deserve no less."

Kings Mountain has come under fire from some county leaders and the Shelby media for hiring a permanent superintendent while the proposed merger of the county's three school systems is still in limbo. However, Board members have been assured by their attorneys that until the merger issue is settled all three systems are still separate and may function as they always have.

Bolin said the Board struggled with offering Allen a two-year contract, but the handbook for retired state public school officials requires no less than a three-year contract for someone coming out of retirement. Allen retired in 1995 as Associate Supt. of KMDS.

"The bottom line is that our job is educating children," Bolin said. "So whether or not others across Cleveland County question what we did, I know that what we did, after careful consideration, was to put our children first. They deserve, and we are obligated to provide them, a superintendent."

Bolin said she is confident Dr. Allen "will keep us moving forward in fighting merger, and in keeping high expectations for all students while we focus on closing the gap and bringing all students to their highest possible achievement level."

Board member Stella Putnam echoed Bolin's feelings.

"This wasn't a decision that was made lightly," she said. "I lost sleep over it. I wanted to do the right thing. We needed stability and we needed someone who knew the people here, and our climate in Kings Mountain and what our vision is. It was a good decision."

Putnam said the Board was only trying to "preserve and protect" the quality of education in KM Schools.

"We didn't create this mess," she said of the merger issue. "We didn't ask for it and we're doing the best we can do with the cards we've been dealt. We saved the county money. Dr. McRae has a buyout clause, and if he'd stayed he could have gotten into his new position (Deputy Supt.) and in six months decided he wasn't happy and requested a buyout. I'm not saying he would have done that. But we didn't give Dr. Allen that option. I haven't had a call from anyone about this. I don't think our people are as concerned as they seem to be across the creek."

Putnam said it could be "six months to a year" before the merger issue is even heard in the Court of Appeals, and if the merger is upheld there it would still have to be pre-cleared by the U.S. Justice Department.

"What are we supposed to do, stop everything?" she said. "We're still Kings Mountain Schools. We're a viable system and the people put us in office to look after the situation. We have some other situations we have to address. I don't think people realize that we've lost a lot of people in the district office. It all can't be blamed on merger, but some of it can. We're the ones that are suffering."

Putnam said she is confident merger will eventually be defeated, and she won't give up the fight until the people in Kings Mountain tell her to.

"The fat lady hasn't sung yet," she said.

"But this is frustrating. We're so busy putting out fires that we haven't focused on the most important thing - the children - and that's a real shame."

"They (the critics) need to be thanking those county commissioners," she added. "I don't know why people in Shelby don't remind them that they're the ones that created this. If

they had come to the school boards and talked about it, things could have been worked out."

Putnam said it would have been virtually impossible to find a permanent superintendent or an interim from outside the school system until the merger issue is decided.

"Why would someone come in here knowing that in six months to a year you could be demoted?" she asked. "The opinions of people in position to know is why would someone come in here when they know if we merge Gene Moore is going to be the superintendent. Common sense tells you that's not going to happen."

Putnam said the School Board received several suggestions about current or retired superintendents who may be interested, but none of them panned out.

"Every lead was checked out," she said. "Most of that was just talk around town. But every name that was brought to us we contacted either directly or through a family member."

"But, really," she added, "I don't know that bringing someone in that doesn't know the system and people would be the smart thing to do. They don't know the people and our needs and where we're weak or strong. Dr. Allen does. I believe Dr. Allen will be an asset."

"And, I would like to know what the other systems (Shelby and Cleveland County) would have done if they were in the same situation. Would they have just left it alone? If you're a viable system, you have to have a superintendent."



ALAN HODGE/THE HERALD
Sara Rhea of Kings Mountain poses with Carolina Tree Service workers Chris Bumgardner and Kenny Bumgardner as they cut down the oak her parents the late Betty and David Mauney planted at 203 E. Gold Street 50 years ago. The Bumgardners said it was one of the largest they had ever tackled.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Sponsored by the Kings Mountain Business and Professional Association, a 1950s style Sweetheart Sockhop will be coming to Bethware School gym Saturday evening, February 10 from 7 p.m. until 11:30 p.m. Music will be provided by Band of Gold. All dressed up for the event in their 50s outfits are, from left, Megan Neely, Linda Allen, Bernice Chappell, Kathy Neely, Karen Bess, and Kay Hamilton. Call 734-0333 for more information.

HOWELL

From 1A

morning. Principal Joey Hopper said some students took the news hard, but the school was "moving on with education and our lives and just trying to pick back up as normal as possible."

Hopper called Mrs. Howell a "very positive person and a strong educator who made people feel good to be around her."

Both Hopper and McRae said they were appreciative to staff and parents for helping make the adjustment period easier for

the students. School was dismissed early Tuesday so students and faculty could attend Mrs. Howell's funeral at Saint Matthew's Lutheran Church.

"This is a tragic loss," Hopper said. "She was a good friend and a good colleague."

Grover Principal Jackie Lavender, who worked with Mrs. Howell for four years, echoed those statements.

"She did a great job and was always positive," Lavender said. "She always had an encouraging word. She was always talking and laughing and made you feel good to be around her."

STUDENTS

From 1A

Johnson said the suspect is described as a Black man about 5-10, 190 pounds. He is of muscular build, has a mustache, is completely bald, and possibly has a scar on his neck, Johnson said.

Kings Mountain Police notified law enforcement agencies within a 25-mile radius to be on the lookout for a suspect of this description who may be attempting to lure children into his car.

"We're trying to get the word out for everybody to be on the lookout," he said. "If anyone sees anything suspicious, even if it's in another school system, they need to call their teacher, parent or respective jurisdiction and let them know what they've seen."

Johnson commended the children for "doing the right thing" in this incident.

"They kept on walking," he said. "They didn't get in the car and that's the biggest thing. They didn't let him lure them inside the car."

"They notified their teacher, even if it was a little late. They need to notify a parent or somebody from the school, and the police."

Johnson said the children also did the right thing by walking in threes.

"You don't want to single yourself out," Johnson said. "If you are walking single, you need to know your surroundings at all times. If someone approaches you, run and scream at the same time. Loud noise draws attention."



ALAN HODGE/THE HERALD
Plumber David Holland said his job on the Kings Mountain Woman's Clinic was about half over. Holland was moving some materials while he waited for inspectors to arrive.

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