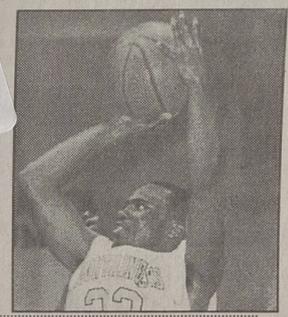


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**BEN LEDBETTER / THE HERALD**  
 U.S. Senator John Edwards answers a question Tuesday at Cleveland Community College during a town hall meeting. Edwards' visit to Shelby was part of his quest to visit all 100 NC counties.

## U.S. Senator Edwards visits Cleveland

By **BEN LEDBETTER**  
 Staff Writer

During a stop at Cleveland Community College, U.S. Senator John Edwards addressed several questions concerning the economy and the loss of jobs in Cleveland County.

The rooms at the college used for the

town meeting were packed, and had a number of people standing.

The visit to Shelby was part of the Senator's quest to visit all 100 North Carolina counties. His scheduled 2:15 p.m. visit to West Montgomery High School in Mt. Gilead marked the 100th county he visited.

Former Governor James B. Hunt said

Edwards' visit to all 100 counties is proof of the senator's hard work.

"I'm so proud of Senator Edwards' commitment to serving all the people of North Carolina. His visits to all 100 counties are evidence of his hard work for our state," Hunt said.

Edwards had also made stops in  
 See Edwards, 5A

## Hospital goals to be discussed at board meeting

By **BEN LEDBETTER**  
 Staff Writer

At the annual Kings Mountain Hospital Board of Directors meeting next Wednesday, the medical facility's strategic plan will be presented. The meeting will be from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. in the hospital's boardroom.

But while the possibility of a merger with its sister hospital, Cleveland Regional Medical Center in Shelby, has been discussed, there have been no further moves planned, hospital officials said.

The strategic plan, which was recently approved, outlines the goals the hospital wants to accomplish for the new year.

"We're still in the discussion phase of what we can do to move the hospital further," Trustee Advisory Council member Stella Putnam said.

But if a merger of the two hospitals did occur, it would need approval of Cleveland Regional, the Carolinas Health Care System Board in Charlotte, and the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners, KM Hospital Board chairman J.C. Bridges said.

"There's nothing really to be said other than it's to be looked at," Bridges said.

Both hospitals are leased to Carolina's Health Care System

in Charlotte, with the flagship hospital Carolinas Medical Center.

Hospital Board member Scott Neisler said talks of merging the two hospitals in Cleveland County has received a stigma since it could be perceived as an issue between Shelby and Kings Mountain.

Neisler said the hospital is looking for financial partners, and the hospital is expected to ask Charlotte for additional funds before it would begin negotiating with Cleveland Regional.

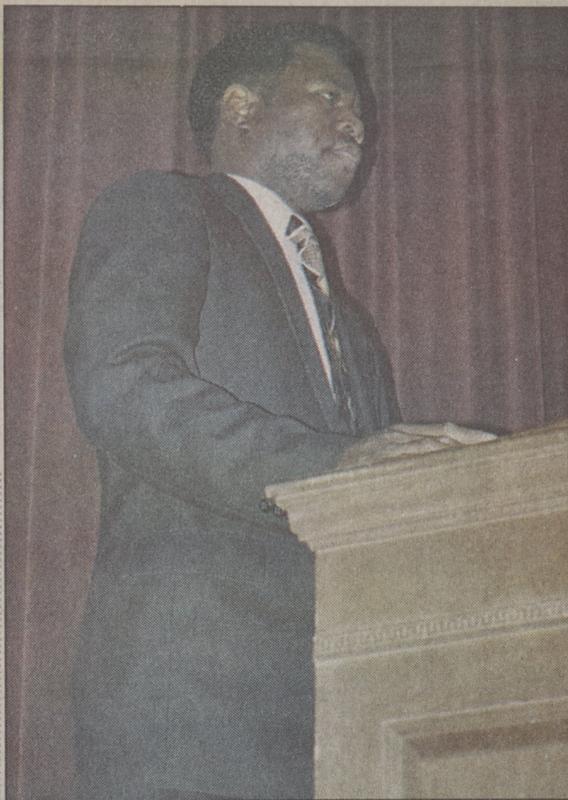
The hospital had financial difficulties in 1996 when Carolinas HealthCare System acquired the medical facility. While hospital profits have increased, Neisler said the hospital does not have enough to compete financially.

Other big issues facing the hospital are a shortage in the reserve budget and low reinvestment in the hospital, Neisler said.

"We don't have any pressure to do this," Neisler said. "It's advantageous for us to negotiate and talk to Charlotte while we're strong."

Neisler said the additional funds or merger would also help Kings Mountain compete against Gaston Memorial Hospital, which is owned by CaroMont.

See Hospital, 5A



**BEN LEDBETTER / THE HERALD**  
 Lester Williams, the winner of the Martin Luther King Oratorical Contest, recites Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech Monday at Kings Mountain High School.

## First M.L. King oratorical contest draws big response, excited crowd

By **BEN LEDBETTER**  
 Staff Writer

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. recited his "I Have a Dream Speech" on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963.

To honor that moment in history the city of Kings Mountain held the first Martin Luther King Jr. Oratorical competition at Barnes Auditorium at Kings Mountain High School.

But renditions of Dr. King's speech were not the only things scheduled for the evening as several church groups had choirs, dance groups, and soloists performing Monday.

Kings Mountain Special Events Public Relations Director Ellis Noell said the event was a departure from events he was used to organizing.

"For me, this a little bit of a departure from concerts and festivals, to actually do a theatrical performance," Noell said. "I had a lot of resources with the talent here."

But although this was one of his first times, Noell said he had little difficulty with the event. "I was pleased with it, it worked out well," he said.

See King, 5A



**BEN LEDBETTER / THE HERALD**  
 Phillip Hager, left, speaks with Dr. Forrest Toms Monday at Bynum Chapel AME Church's Family Life Center. Toms was the speaker for a breakfast the church hosted on Martin Luther King day. Hager was one of the organizers of the church's event.

## Bynum Chapel breakfast honors Dr. King

By **BEN LEDBETTER**  
 Staff Writer

Monday's weather may have been rainy and cool, but inside the feeling was warmer as people gathered to remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Bynum Chapel AME Zion Church hosted a breakfast at its Family Life Center with educational consultant Dr. Forrest Toms as the speaker.

After recounting the days he had spent in Cleveland County as a student at Shelby High School, then later as an

employee of the Kings Mountain District Schools, Toms went over biographical facts about King.

Dr. King was born in Atlanta, his father was a pastor and his mother was a teacher.

When King was younger he encountered several instances of racism, Toms said.

One of those was when he was 11 when a white woman struck him and called him a racial epithet beginning with "n."

Despite the early brushes with racial

injustice, King was admitted to Morehouse College before completing high school.

At age 18, he was ordained as a minister in his father's church.

In 1955, King received his doctorate in Theology from Boston University.

King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

Toms said his education would help him later on in life.

"This was a man who was prepared in a lot of ways," he said.

Other people King was influenced by

included Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Ghandi.

King's career could be separated into two parts, Toms said, and they were before and after Selma.

During the pre-Selma phase, Toms said King fought for basic rights while he sought goals related to economic development in jobs after Selma.

Toms mentioned two protests that defined each era, the Montgomery bus boycott, and a demonstration in Chicago for jobs.

See Dr. King, 5A

## Prayers needed for Pete

By **GARY STEWART**  
 Editor of The Herald

While a 50-year-old Kings Mountain man fights for his life in a Charlotte hospital his family and church family in Kings Mountain pray that he will prove doctors wrong and not only live but return to his normal lifestyle.

John Bernard "Pete" Leach was critically injured December 23 when he was struck by a car at his home on Watterson

Street. He has been in Carolinas Medical Center in a coma ever since.

His mother, Margaret Leach, has spent every day since at the hospital. For several days following the accident, she was at the hospital 24 hours a day and most recently she has left home early in the morning and returned late at night. She's able to see him for a brief period of time during intensive care visiting hours.

Although Pete hasn't moved since the accident and the doctors say he may not regain consciousness, Mrs. Leach said he has begun opening his eyes on occasion. He suffered severe injuries to his head and right side of his body.

"He's still in a semi-coma," Mrs. Leach said. "It's been devastating to me."

See Pete, 5A



**LEACH**

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