

Mistrial declared in Crocker murder case

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

After a two-week trial, Kings Mountain resident Scotty Wayne Crocker will have to wait longer for a verdict in his first-degree murder case. He is accused of murdering his son.

Last Friday, Judge Timothy L. Patti declared a mistrial in the case, citing widespread juror misconduct.

According to initial news reports, Assistant District Attorney Michael Muskus overheard juror Mary Jane Hambright discussing the case with a man at the Dover YMCA in Shelby last Thursday. Closing arguments were

expected to start last Friday morning. Muskus reported what he heard to his boss Friday morning.

Instead of closing arguments on Friday, Patti called Hambright to testify away from her fellow jurors. She denied discussing the Crocker case, but acknowledged talking about serving on a jury.

Patti also questioned all 12 jurors and two alternates individually.

Jurors also acknowledged debating on Thursday whom they should pick to serve as a foreman. That is a step that usually comes before the jury's deliberations.

After berating the jury for squander-

ing the court's time, Patti said he might order some jurors back to court to explain why they should not be held in contempt. According to NC law, there is a maximum penalty of \$500 fine and 30 days in jail for a criminal contempt charge.

The jury included a stockbroker, teacher, restaurant owner, bank employees, and retirees.

Shelby attorney David Teddy, who was representing Crocker, was surprised to hear about the problems with the jury.

"It's always a shock to hear there are those kinds of problems going on in the midst of a trial with somebody's liberty

at stake," Teddy said.

While Patti said Crocker could not get a fair trial with the current jury, Teddy said he will decide whether he wants to file a motion for a change of venue for the next trial.

Teddy said he would have liked to have found out what the jury thought about the case.

"Even with the problems, it would have been nice to see what they thought about the case and whether they would be in a position to reach a unanimous verdict," he said.

This was not the first time Teddy had been involved in a case with juror misconduct.

During a case he tried in Rutherford County, Teddy said jurors read an article in a Forest City newspaper that contained an item that was excluded from the trial.

The judge did not accept the verdict initially, but later accepted the jury's decision and sent Teddy's client to prison.

The decision was eventually reversed, Teddy said, but not without the case being heard in front of the NC Supreme Court.

Crocker may be retried by the end of the year in the April, 19, 2000 shooting death of his 15-year-old son.

No plans yet for merger of EDC and Chamber

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

The Cleveland County Economic Development Commission-Cleveland County Chamber merger study committee discussed the results of their first meeting last Thursday in Shelby.

The monthly EDC meeting was the second one since a potential merger of the county-funded office and the Chamber was approved.

The study committee was approved in December by Cleveland County Commissioners, and was part of a plan proposed by Charlie Harry.

EDC Director Steve Nye said no

plans for a reorganization came out of the first study committee meeting.

"Everybody started talking about a specific plan," Nye said. "But there is no plan on the table."

Nye said the ex-officio members of the committee, of which he is a member, are expected to bring something back to the committee in about one month.

Although EDC Board members did not explicitly state an opinion on a possible merger, Nye said the Chamber wants to do what is in the best interest of economic development. He also said

the county wants to continue their involvement.

Board member Ken Ledford said approximately 14 merged EDC-chamber organizations exist in the state. Ledford wanted to know why others in North Carolina have not yet merged.

"Why haven't a bunch of others jumped on the bandwagon?" Ledford said.

In Gaston County, three public and private groups exist for businesses and economic development.

Other notes from the EDC meeting:

- Nye said in an activity report Encompass, which recently announced plans to locate on U.S. Highway 29 between Kings Mountain and Grover, has begun to operate in the former Alstom Power Building, which will give the company 82,000 square feet of manufacturing space. Approximately 50 people are employed, Nye said. Products created from the Kings Mountain plant will go into the power generation market. The company is expected to continue building renovation through the first half of the year.

- The EDC's annual report for 2001

was presented. According to the report, six companies invested and estimated \$67.7 million in Cleveland County and created approximately 655 new jobs. Those numbers were positive, Nye said.

"During 2001 Cleveland County experienced the best year of investment and job creation since the establishment of the CCEDC," he said in his report.

But not everything was positive in 2001.

"This was overshadowed by a faltering economy that caused massive layoffs and plant closures," Nye said.

County redistricting committee in planning stage

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

Two commissioners appointed by the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners to study changing the method commissioners are elected met Monday in Shelby to decide how a committee should be formed.

Recommendations from Mary Accor and Ronnie Hawkins, the two commissioners appointed to be on the committee at the board's last meeting, are expected to be brought before the

board during its Wednesday morning work session.

Accor and Hawkins said they will recommend the committee be comprised of 15 members and include:

- Cleveland County Republican and Democratic Party Chairmen.
- A member from the county chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
- A representative from the Cleveland County Chamber.
- Two members from a previous committee that studied district repre-

sentation.

- Three representatives of county churches.
- Five volunteers appointed by commissioners.

Historically, many county commissioners have been from Shelby, although several have served from other parts of the county. Currently, three of the five commissioners are from Kings Mountain.

While the committee is expected to study the issue of district representa-

tion, its first task will be less difficult, Hawkins said.

"They are on a fact finding mission to find if the county wants it," Hawkins said.

Hawkins said he also thought a deadline should be set for the committee's information gathering.

"We need to set a deadline so it's not this time next year," he said.

Accor said any method can be used to inquire about district representation. "We're not going to limit how they

do it," Accor said.

Hawkins said the findings should be documented and should be presented as facts to the board.

Commissioners took up the district representation issue last year when Hawkins said he wanted the matter studied. This summer the board, met with Raleigh attorney Michael Crowell, who later issued his findings which were sent to county officials in October.

School Board work session Friday

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

Kings Mountain Board of Education will meet at 8:30 a.m. Friday for an all day work session at Central School.

The meeting is open to the public.

Although the Board normally does not take action during a work session, it is possible it will take action on a proposal to build a new field house at Kings Mountain High School to serve the baseball and softball programs.

The Board will also discuss a controversial "virtual charter school" which a group of educators and private investors hope to put on the Internet beginning with the next school year.

The charter school would serve students

from all across the State who elect to enter the online program. Local school systems would lose the State and Federal per pupil money for those students.

The proposal is supposed to come up at next week's meeting of the State Board of Education, which must approve any charter schools in the State. Calls to the State School Board, representatives of the State School Board Association, and KM Supt. Larry Allen were not returned.

But KM Board chairman Shearra Miller said she is "scared" of the proposal and what it could lead to. She said she has been told the online school would recruit a "few hundred" students for next year but in the future would want to expand to "thousands."

She said local school boards have "loose"

oversight of charter schools "but they don't have to follow the same rules as far as state and federal regulations. If any of our students chose to go to that school versus one of our schools then we would have to release them, and any money we would receive from the State or federal government would have to go to that charter school."

Other topics on the work session agenda Friday include a property issue; 2003-04 calendar, employment vacancies, student projections for next year, update on the new intermediate school, budget preparations for next year, closing the gap recommendations, textbook adoptions, results from the KMHS first semester end of course tests, plans for summer school, and gateways for third, fifth and eighth grade students.

KM Closing the Gap Committee meets

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

At its second meeting, the Kings Mountain District Schools Closing the Achievement Gap Monitoring Committee reviewed local data for the fall semester.

Kings Mountain High School Assistant Principal Valerie Boyd said although, Project TEACH is expected to lose its state funding for next year, the three top administrators at Kings Mountain's three secondary schools have pledged financial support.

New Kings Mountain Intermediate School Principal Ethel Pedersen said she has seen the positive impact the program.

"We had a large turnout. We had positive

kids," she said.

High School principal John Yarbrow and new Middle School principal Lynda Stewart have also given their support for the program.

Boyd said another group has also supported the TEACH program.

"I'm proud to say parents are proud supporters of Project TEACH," she said.

Another club at the high school has also started this school year with similar goals.

Distinguished Gentlemen, which was established by high school teacher Lamont Littlejohn, has a goal to help minority ninth and tenth grade students achieve higher test scores and recognize their potential.

To do that, Littlejohn has been asking for

help from juniors and seniors.

"The helpers will be responsible for encouraging ninth and tenth graders to follow in the right direction, and to depend on them for support," Littlejohn said.

While clubs have been established to help minorities, a high gap remains for one class at the high school.

According to school system data for the 2001-2002 fall semester, a 25.2 percent gap exists between black and white students at Kings Mountain High School.

KMDS Director for Curriculum and Instruction John Goforth said Kings Mountain High School is below state aver

See Gap, 5A

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