

KM would be major contributor to EDC/Chamber merger

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

While no official action has been taken, officials with the Cleveland County Chamber and the Cleveland County Economic Development Commission discussed where they were in merging the two entities. The proposal was approved by county commissioners late last year. And while the merger is still being discussed, other units involved have or are considering being part of the new economic development effort, EDC Director Steve Nye said during last Thursday's EDC meeting. The city of Shelby has passed a resolution of support for the merger and Cleveland County Manager Lane

Alexander said it plans to contribute \$60,000. Alexander said he has also been talking to the Cleveland County Sanitary District and the town of Boiling Springs. Kings Mountain has invited county officials to talk about the merger plan at an upcoming budget session in April, he said. The city would be one of the major financial contributors in the plan. "We're still in the process of putting the structure together," EDC Board Chairman Ralph "Scoot" Dixon said. With the reorganization being discussed, EDC Board member Richard Hord asked if all county municipalities have been represented on the EDC board.

That was not the issue, according to Alexander. "We've got two people working in this capacity," Alexander said about the reason for the EDC-Chamber merger proposal. "It allows 117,000 net new dollars to come in to the organization." That would be the figure if Kings Mountain decided to contribute \$60,000, he said. "It will give two people, who are stretched thin, the opportunity to have some help," Alexander said. And while EDC and county officials have been trying to get public funds for the merger, Chamber President Rob Youngblood said his organization would work on raising money from the private sector. EDC Board member Kenneth

Ledford wanted to know how the proposal would work once the economy turns around, especially with asking industries for money. "What happens when the economy turns around and the unemployment goes from 12.5 percent to 1.5 percent?" Ledford said. Fielding a question from Hord on what additional tasks a merged EDC-Chamber could perform, Alexander said it would allow the current EDC staff more help. "We've got two people involved in a multitude of things," he said. "I'm telling you they need some help." One of the things a merged EDC-Chamber would allow is for more visits to existing industries, something Alexander said the current EDC staff

has not been able to make enough. But while the merger may be accomplished soon, the new board's economic development efforts could take time to see, according to EDC Board member and Shelby City Manager Grant Goings. "At least I think we've got to give it three to four years," he said. And while many county-funded departments and agencies have been asked to cut their budgets by five percent, both Alexander and County Commissioners Chairman Willie McIntosh said they do not expect the EDC's budget to be cut. At its last meeting, the EDC prepared a budget with a five percent increase.

County's unemployment rate drop seen as positive news

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

Cleveland County's February jobless rate dropped seven tenths of a point and an official with the county's Employment Security Commission Office said the drop is a positive step. The county's jobless rate for February was 13.2 percent, but 6,160 people were still unemployed, according to ESC figures for February. Cleveland County ESC Office Manager Antwon Keith said while the drop is a good sign, it does not mean everything has changed. "I think it's too early to say things

have definitely changed," Keith said. "I think it proves we were headed in the right direction." The location of a plant by Michigan-based Blachford would also help put people to work in the county as the company is expected to hire approximately 100 people in the next three years. The company's plant would be in one of the former Wix/Dana Buildings on Broadview Drive in Kings Mountain. "They're going to start off sort of small," Keith said about Blachford. "It should be a good, solid company with good, competitive wages."

While jobs may be on the way, Keith said extended benefits are expected to start and that could also factor into an increase in the jobless rate. Extended benefits would also give people money to spend that could help the economy and decrease the number of people who have exhausted claims, Keith said. Starting in Nov. 2001, Keith said he has averaged 200 people per month who have exhausted their benefits. There was only one month out of the first half of 2001 that had 100 or more people with exhausted benefits, he said. After talking with temporary agen-

cies, Keith said a higher amount of companies have been contacting the agencies and that could bring more long-term hiring. "They're seeing an increase in job orders," Keith said. "Once you start short term hiring, long term hiring should be right around the corner." While things are expected to improve, Keith said it may take some more bad news before the good starts arriving. "Unfortunately it will be a few not so pleasant announcements coming, but I still think things are looking pretty positive overall," he said. But while Cleveland's economy is

expected to improve, Swain County had the state's highest jobless rate in February for the third consecutive month. Swain's February rate, 17.7 percent, decreased from 18.5 percent in January, with many of the layoffs coming within the county's service and trade industries. Another western county, Cherokee, had the largest increase, rising from 7.6 to 11.7 percent. Orange County had the lowest jobless rate for the second consecutive month at 2.6 percent.

Abuse Prevention Council wants home in KM

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

The Abuse Prevention Council is looking to get back to Kings Mountain. The agency, which previously had an office in Kings Mountain Hospital, left that facility and moved back to Shelby. But according to one representative of the APC, the agency is looking to move back to town. During a meeting Monday night at the Kings Mountain Woman's Club,

Kings Mountain Response Coordinator Sara Pemberton, members of the Womans' Club and Kings Mountain Mayor Rick Murphrey met to discuss how money could be raised for a new facility for the APC in the city. Pemberton said 51 women and children from Kings Mountain used the Battered Womens' Shelter in Shelby. Murphrey and Woman's Club representative Karen Roy said Kings Mountain has had people with multi-

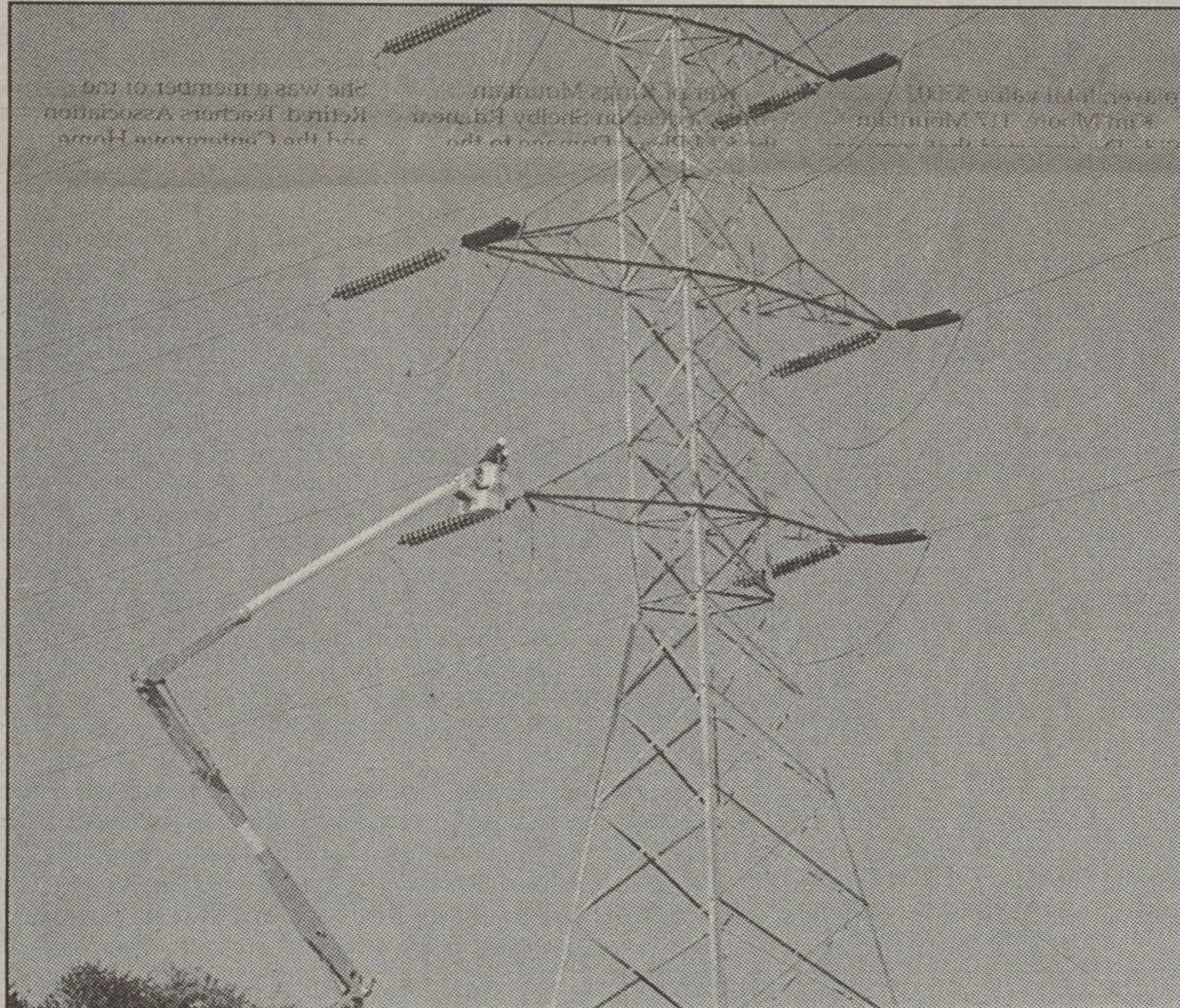
ple domestic violence infractions. "If we had a place here it would make it a whole lot easier," Pemberton said about counseling Kings Mountain cases in the city. Murphrey agreed and said the city needs a facility that could offer counseling to abuse victims. Previously, Pemberton shared an office at the hospital and said she moved back to have more space to work.

According to a sheet distributed at the meeting, the APC is looking for a house with at least three bedrooms and a monthly rent of \$500 to \$600 monthly. The target date for moving in would be July. Pemberton said the APC could furnish part of her office in Kings Mountain while other office supplies, utilities and rent may be figured into a grant. Things the office would be seeking from donations would be items such as

couches, chairs and microwaves. While some of the fund raising would come from the community, Pemberton said she would also like to utilize money from the Governor's Crime Commission Grant. "They just can't dunk everything into this office," she said. Another meeting was scheduled for Monday, May 6 at 7 p.m. at the Kings Mountain Woman's Club.

Barrett, Evans bowl 400 sets in duckpins

Two more bowlers topped the 400-set mark in mixed duckpin bowling league action Thursday night at Dilling Heating. Tommy Barrett rolled a 156 line and 410 series to lead the All-Americans (14-18) to a split with Ed's Raiders (13-19). Barrett also had a 145 game in his three-game set. Allen Myers bowled a 137 line and 367 set, and Ed Philbeck added a 143-356 for the Raiders. Greg Evans rolled a 153 line and 400 set for Strike Force (15-17) in its 6-2 loss to Hard 8 (22-10). Chris Hullender led the winners with a 137 line and 368 set, and Zeke Rybczyk added a 122-360. In Tuesday night action, S&M defeated the KM Warriors 6-2 and R2 defeated No Prisoners 6-2. Mark Abernathy rolled a 128 line and 367 set, and Sue Abernathy added a 117-313 for S&M (21-11). Chris Hullender rolled a 136-356 and Ed Philbeck added a 120-337 for the Warriors (10-22). Zeke Rybczyk rolled a 117 line and 335 set to lead R2 (17-15) over No Prisoners (16-16). Colleen Philbeck led No Prisoners with a 115 line and 298 set.



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