

KINGS MOUNTAIN The Herald

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1B

KM budget will show increases in services

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

No property tax increases are in the proposed \$25,487,931 budget for the upcoming fiscal year, but a series of rate increases are.

City council members agreed to go with the rate increases during a work session at the Patrick Center Wednesday afternoon.

The new fees that will be discussed during the April 30 council meeting are a gas availability charge of \$3.50 a month, an automobile tax of \$5 a vehicle, increasing cemetery lot sales and opening/closing of graves by \$50.

City Manager Jimmy Maney said tax increases could be reoccurring budget issues in the next two years.

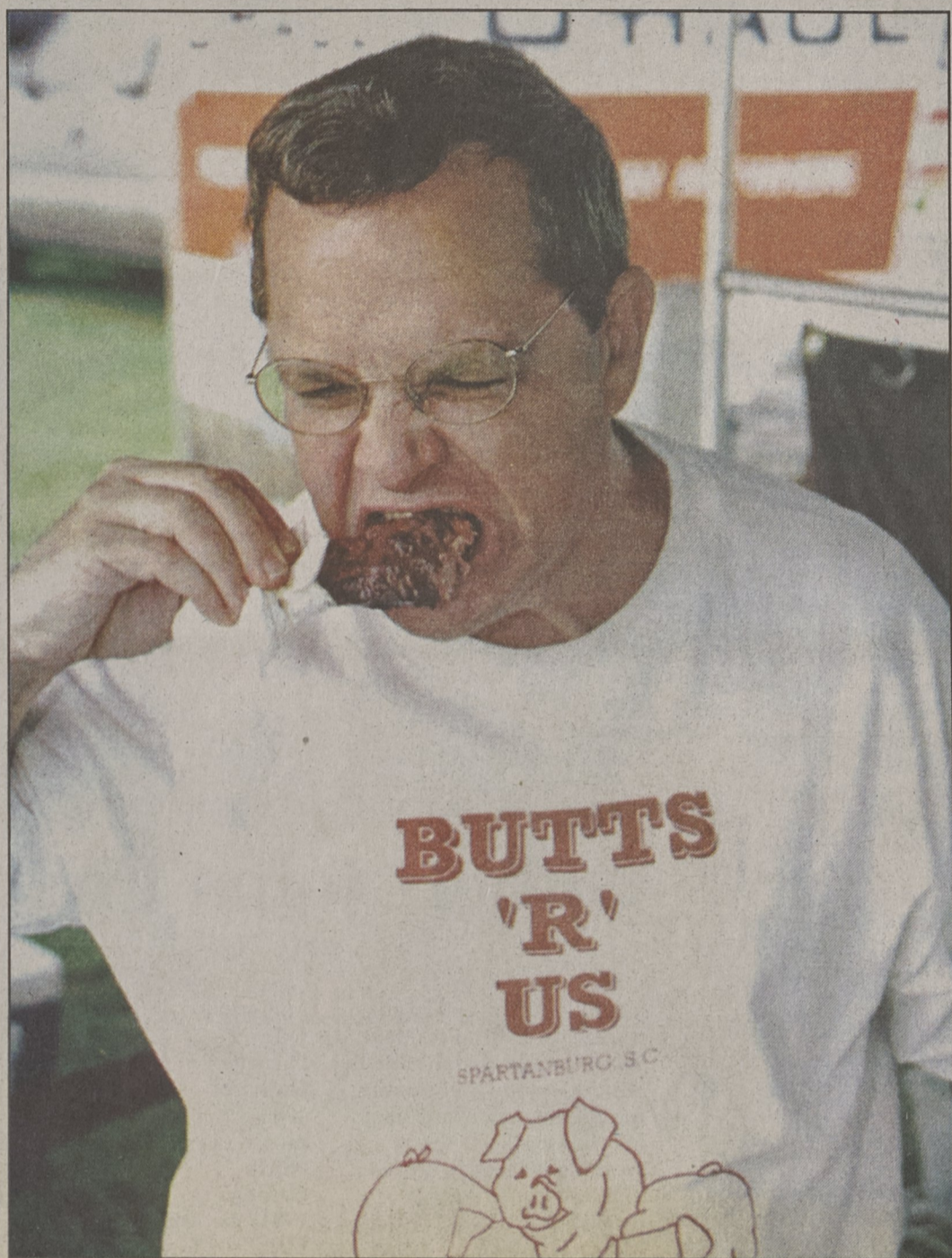
"It's coming in the next two years," he said. "No matter how you do it, it's coming."

Council also recommended contracting with Cleveland County for animal control, contributing \$30,000 to a merged Cleveland County Economic Development Commission/Chamber of Commerce, giving \$3,000 to the Kings Mountain Historical Museum and giving \$10,000 to the Kings Mountain Crisis Ministry.

City council member Jim Guyton said Kings

See Budget, 11A

STICK TO YOUR RIBS



GARY STEWART / HERALD
 Mike Mikina of the Butts 'R' Us cooking team of Spartanburg, SC samples some of his barbecued ribs during Saturday morning's cooking competition at the sixth annual Kings Mountain Firehouse Cookoff at the Cleveland Avenue walking track. See story and other photos on page 3A.

MERGER CLOCK TICKING

County letter to DOJ started 60-day review

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

A recent letter from County Attorney Bob Yelton to the U.S. Justice

Department has started the school merger clock ticking and the Justice Department could decide to preclear the merger by next Monday.

The letter was authorized by the Board of Commissioners, some of whom say they did not realize at the time that the letter would result in the Justice Department evaluating any material before all court cases were cleared.

Apparently what happened was that a pro merger group learned of a letter that was written from the DOJ to merger attorney Gil Middlebrooks on September 19, 2000 that stated when all stays and injunctions were lifted in Kings Mountain School Board's suits against that the Commissioners were to notify the Justice Department in writing. Kings Mountain representa-

tives said they felt they were obeying the law by authorizing the letter, but were not told by anyone that the letter would put the merger wheels in motion.

The letter was mailed to the Justice Department on February 27, placing the 60-day deadline for the evaluation period for preclearance or denial on Monday, April 29.

Kings Mountain School Board's merger attorney, Brian Shaw, was in Cleveland County Court Monday trying to get an injunction to stop the Justice Department from acting until Kings Mountain's pending appeal against the NC School Board is decided. According to Supt. Larry Allen, Judge Tim Patti agreed to grant a stay "in the event the Justice Department rules against us," but would not approve an injunction against the DOJ studying the material and making a decision.

See Merger, 10A

Four inducted into Hall of Fame

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

Influence of family, teachers, coaches and friends were the keys to their athletic success, the four newest inductees to the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame told the audience during their induction speeches Tuesday night at B.N. Barnes Auditorium.

Football standouts Jack Ruth, Jerry Adams and Calvin Stephens and basketball sensation Butch Blalock comprised the 2002 induction class at the 15th annual ceremony.

A large crowd was on hand to support the inductees. In addition, the Hall of Fame presented special achievement awards to the KMHS conference cham-

pion men's basketball and swim teams, the State 3A champion KMHS volleyball team, and the State's Volleyball Player of the Year, Shonda Cole.

All of the inductees stressed that they were members of teams and could not have been successful without the help of others.

Betty Kate Ruth, who inducted her husband, Jack, who was a 3-sport star at KMHS in the late 1940s and earned a full scholarship to Davidson College, said his idols were always his coaches - particularly Shu Carlton and Don Parker at KMHS and Crowell Little and Bill Dole at Davidson.

"They still keep in touch today," she said.

See Hall, 10A



GARY STEWART / HERALD
 Four of Kings Mountain High's all-time great athletes were inducted into the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame Tuesday night at the Hall of Fame's 15th annual induction ceremony at B.N. Barnes Auditorium. Left to right are football stars Jack Ruth, Jerry Adams, Calvin Stephens and the school's all-time leading scorer in basketball, Butch Blalock.

Hospital merger reaction mixed

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

During Tuesday's community meeting, a small group of Kings Mountain residents told members of the Kings Mountain Hospital Merger Study Committee they did not want the medical facility given away.

The committee was appointed by the trustee advisory council to draft a proposal about merging with Cleveland Regional Medical Center. Both hospitals are managed by Carolinas Healthcare System in Charlotte and owned by Cleveland County citizens.

It presented a lease that is being negotiated between the two Cleveland County hospitals.

After going over where both hospitals are in the process, the committee took questions from a group that included citizens, doctors and hospital employees, a city councilman and a county commissioner.

Ron Humphries said the hospital was given away when CHS took over management of the hospital.

"The hospital was literally given away for nothing," he said.

See Hospital, 11A

KINGS MOUNTAIN PEOPLE

Blanton, Rescue Squad a perfect match

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

Joni Blanton keeps busy with a variety of activities ranging from civic clubs to civil servant.

Blanton works at the Kings Mountain Post Office and the Kings Mountain Rescue Squad. He also has been involved with the White Plains Shrine Club.

Community service and being single are reasons he likes to be involved with the amount of activities, Blanton said.

"Being single makes it a lot easier," he said about his schedule. "If I had a wife and kids, there would be no way I could keep the schedule that I keep."

He has been working at the post office since 1988 and has worked with the rescue squad for almost 20 years.

Although he is involved with a variety of activities, Blanton said the rescue squad is his pas-



BLANTON

"I started in it when I was 22 years old," he said. "I was just a young kid. It just grabbed a hold of me and I enjoyed it. I just basically spent my life there. It's like my family to me."

Blanton's involvement in the Kings Mountain Rescue Squad stemmed from an old relationship.

"Well, the way I got started in it was I used to date a girl from Bessemer City who used to be on Bessemer City rescue," he said.

"And she would tell me about doing things with the rescue squad."

She told him about activities such as going to classes.

And while she helped him, people he played softball with also were instrumental in telling Blanton about the rescue squad.

"Some of the guys I played softball with in Bessemer City were on the rescue squad in Kings Mountain," he said.

See Blanton, 11A



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