

BRIEFS

Event to focus on osteoporosis

The North Carolina Division of Public Health will host an osteoporosis workshop on Wednesday, January 22, 2003 from 9 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. at the Council of Aging of Cleveland County, 1266 Fallston Rd., Shelby.

Cost is \$15 which includes registration, materials and lunch. Topics up for discussion highlight the psychosocial aspects of osteoporosis, physical activity, medications and nutrition. In the event of inclement weather, the program will be held on January 29, 2003.

For registration information, call Emmie Whitley at (919) 715-3339.

Gallery to present photo competition

Art 1 Gallery and Instructional Center in Gastonia is hosting Carolina Lens Art, an open photography show and competition now through February 21, 2003.

The event is being held in conjunction with the exhibition, 'Natural Roots,' which features photography by Eustace Conway related to the book, 'The Last American Man.'

For more information, call (704) 854-8800 or visit online at www.art1gallery.com.

Service to present beekeeping course

The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in Gaston County and the Gaston County Beekeepers Association will sponsor a beekeeping class beginning Monday, January 27, 2003.

The class will be held on Mondays from 7 - 9 p.m. at the Gaston County Citizens Resource Center in Dallas and run through March 24, 2003. Cost is \$15, which covers materials and refreshments. The class is ideal for those interested in beekeeping as a hobby.

Deadline to register is January 17, 2003. For information, call (704) 922-2110.

Applicants wanted for Gaston program

Gaston Community Action, Inc. is accepting applications for its 2003-2004 Head Start program, which begins in August 2003.

Head Start is a health, education and social services program for three and four-year-old children from low-income families who are not eligible for public kindergarten in Gaston and Lincoln counties. Eligible handicapped children between the ages of 3-6 are also accepted into the Head Start program.

Those interested in Gaston County should call (704) 866-8721 and those in Lincoln County should call (704) 732-1216 for more information.

College radio station to host benefit concert

The Gaston College radio station, WSGE 91.7 FM, will host a benefit concert featuring local artists on Sunday, January 19, 2003 at 2 p.m. at Puckett's Farm Equipment, 2740 W. Sugar Creek Rd., Charlotte.

The concert titled 'WSGE Radio Bennie' will feature some of the regions most talented artists. Admission is \$5 and proceeds benefit the station's programming efforts.

"This benefit concert will truly be a showcase of what great music we have in our area," said Jeff Powell, station manager. "We are delighted to have the music community come together like this to show their support for what we are trying to accomplish here at the station."

For more information, call (704) 922-6552.

COMMENTARY

EYE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Program needed to keep electronics out of landfills

By STEVE WALL
Guest Columnist

Currently, there are almost two million computers and seven million televisions in North Carolina homes with countless more in businesses across the state. Have you ever wondered what happens to obsolete computers and out-of-date television sets? It's in your health interest to know the answer.

Yesterday's computers turn into today's electronic waste and more is expected in the next few years as the sales of flat screen monitors and digital televisions continue to rise.

Many obsolete computer monitors and old television sets are stored in closets and attics. Most are eventually destined for landfills. Therein lies the problem.

On average, each computer monitor contains about four pounds of lead, while televisions contain about six pounds of lead. As a result of this high content of lead and other heavy metals found in electronics, the dumping of monitors and televisions are contributing to an ever-increasing volume of toxic metals in our landfills. Unless we keep toxics out of these landfills, which have the potential to leak and pollute surrounding ground water, our drinking water supplies are at risk.

Public policy makers across the nation are debating the issue of electronic waste. Discussions underway on the national level appear to be years away from a solution. Consequently, many states are stepping up their own efforts to address this growing problem. In over a dozen states, including North Carolina, legislation has been introduced to address the problem of electronics waste.

Earlier this year, a state legislative committee of the North Carolina General Assembly supported a measure to establish electronics recycling programs in North Carolina. The programs would be run by local governments and would be funded by an advanced recycling fee. The bill would also prohibit the disposal of computer monitors and televisions in landfills by 2006.

The electronics waste measure is modeled after the successful "white good" program that has been in place for over a decade. The white good program requires consumers to pay a small upfront fee when they purchase household appliances such as refrigerators or washing machines. The money collected from the fees funds local solid waste programs that divert the old appliances from landfills

and recycle the scrap metal. White goods have one of the highest recovery rates of all discarded products in North Carolina, providing valuable resources to a steel industry increasingly dependent on scrap to make new steel.

A similar program for electronics would be just as viable and successful for our state. North Carolina has the opportunity to be a leader on this issue.

Markets are in place to recycle old computers and television sets. For example, Computel, an electronic recycler in Charlotte, is already a regional leader in this business serving area school systems that have large numbers of obsolete computers. In addition, a handful of local governments, such as Cary and Wake County, are serving their citizens by providing electronics recycling programs. However, due to budget constraints, other municipalities and counties that would be interested in running such programs lack the financial resources to put these programs in place, despite the fact that the programs are a win-win situation for public health and the environment.

The governor of California recently vetoed a bill passed by the California Legislature similar to the one proposed in North Carolina.

California's Silicon Valley produces an inordinate amount of electronic waste, as does North Carolina's Research Triangle Park and the financial services industries in Charlotte.

Manufacturers and retailers claimed in the California effort that advanced recycling fees would drive customers out of the state. Critics of the North Carolina bill are making similar arguments. But increasingly, consumers in California as well as North Carolina have concerns that obsolete electronics create a serious threat to both public health and our natural resources. An advanced recycling fee is small cost to pray for

maintaining the health of the public and the planet.

Although the North Carolina "e-waste" bill was not voted on this year before the legislature adjourned, the growing amount of electronics waste is not going away and our health and environment will suffer in the meantime.

When elected officials return to Raleigh this month, they need to take steps to make sure today's hard drive isn't tomorrow's electronic waste for the landfill.

Steve Wall is the director of governmental relations for the Conservation Council of North Carolina.

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