



City workers spent Friday with scouts teaching them about their jobs. Participants included (left, rear) Derek Johnson, Jerry Canipe, Frank Burns, Jacob Bridges, Rick Murphrey, Dennis Wells, Ellis Noell, Matt Bumgardner, Rick Chapman, Ben Hardee, Tommy Morgan, Ryan Simpson, Walter Crocker, Matthew Ford, Tanner Deaton and Josh McAbee.

ANDIE BRYMER / HERALD

# The Shadow Knows

## Scouts learn about city government by spending a day with employees

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER  
Staff Writer

Last Friday the city's fire department was in the hands of Boy Scout Josh McAbee.

"I told him if we had a train wreck, hazardous spill or fire he had to make all the decisions," said Fire Chief Frank Burns.

While Burns did not literally hand over the reins to the scout, he and the department did show McAbee and fellow scouts how they protect the city from fire.

McAbee rode in a fire truck, slid down the pole at the station, watched firefighters inspect the trucks and reviewed a business' fire safety plan with the chief.

"It's been fun," McAbee said.

Boy Scouts in Troops 92, 93 and 95 and the Kings Mountain Police

Explorer Post spent the day with city workers including building and codes, police, electric, library, water and sewer and special events personnel.

Walter Crocker may have been the most popular scout with city workers.

"I gave raises," he said.

Crocker spent the day with Mayor Rick Murphrey. While Crocker enjoyed the make believe pay hikes, he realized being mayor was not a job he wanted.

"It's too much stuff to do," Crocker said.

After spending a day with police, Tommy Morgan came away convinced his first impression of law enforcement was correct.

"I still admire them. I still don't want to be one," he said.

Morgan says the job is too dangerous, though he would not mind working in dispatch.

He and Jacob Bridges rode in a

police car to Shelby to visit court and watch police obtain warrants. They also got a taste of being on the other side of the law. The youth were fingerprinted.

Matthew Ford found his morning with city electric crews fascinating. He enjoyed learning about roadside transformer boxes and identifying where different wires go.

Ben Hardee tagged along as code's inspector Mike Brown inspected a church's gas furnace, a private home's gas logs and new insulation in a utility building.

Matt Bumgardner got to see a part of the city most folks take for granted. Working with the water and sewer department, he helped operate a camera that looks inside sewer pipes.

The scouts and city workers had lunch together at the Patrick Senior Center.

## MOORE

From 1A

"As you know there are one or more council members making threats about firing various employees. Their favorite expression, 'we have four votes.'"

The ad also encouraged city employees to attend next week's council meeting

to "listen to the human relations director and city attorney explain whether you are entitled to rights as an employee."

As of Monday afternoon, the City of Kings Mountain's human resources director had not been asked by officials to be at the meeting.

Council members

Houston Corn and Howard Shipp are also on the utility committee and were at that meeting. They agreed with Moore.

Corn, newly elected, assured department heads that any time he calls requesting information he is trying to educate himself, not interfere.

"I don't like to make deci-

sions without asking," he said. "I have a whole lot to learn. If I call you up, don't draw up."

Shipp, who is a long time councilman but is new to the utility committee, said basically the same thing.

"Likewise, the same goes for me," he said, referring to Corn's remarks. "I hope we can work together as a team."

## TAX

From 1A

in the next two weeks, Green said. Property owners may request that they be present when the appraiser visits the property.

Persons who are age 65 and older or are disabled as of January 1, 2004 may qualify for exemptions of up to 50% of the value of a home and up to one acre of land, based on an income that does not exceed \$18,800 from all sources, Green said. Those applications must be filed by June 1.

Persons whose property is located in flood zones or are tied up in utility rights-of-way that the county is unaware of should also contact the tax assessor's office and they may receive a lower value, Green said.

Green said revaluation is done "in-house" because Cleveland County has over 52,000 parcels of real property and hiring outside assessors would be very expensive.

The county's base tax rate

is currently 62 cents per \$100 valuation and commissioners said they hope to make this year's rate "revenue neutral," meaning that the tax rate would be decreased so that the actual tax money collected would be about the same as last year.

For someone's total property tax to reflect that philosophy, County Manager Lane Alexander pointed out that all of the county's municipalities and entities for which the county collects taxes must also reduce their rates accordingly.

Giving Lawndale as an example, Commissioner Jerry Self said it would take a tax rate of about 56 cents to be revenue neutral.

"If everybody drops their rate back to about the same, the tax bills will be about the same," he said.

Alexander and commissioners pointed out that they cannot adopt a rate at this time, because the cost of several programs such as Medicaid is mandated by State and federal government.

"The commissioners are

committed to reduce the tax rate," said Commissioner Ronnie Hawkins of Kings Mountain. "We'll have to get all data in before we can set that rate."

"We're trying to collect the same amount in gross tax that we did last year," added Commissioner Tommy Bridges of Kings Mountain. "There are some programs, such as Medicaid, that we don't have control over. We have to put our match in there too."

Alexander said county commissioners have no authority to collect less than what is mandated by the State for such programs.

"We're trying to keep it neutral with what we have to deal with," Bridges said. "We're trying the best we can."

Chairwoman Mary Accor of Kings Mountain said, as an educator she has seen the unemployment and other problems facing property owners, and "it is my desire to see the tax rate lowered."

"People are struggling," she said. "We need to look at different areas of our responsibility and do everything we can to cut. The things that we can change, we'll change."

"Taxes will always be a frustrating issue," she said. "But as commissioners we want to listen to the people and take to heart what they're saying."

The tax rate will be set by July 1 and will apply to property owned on January 1, 2004. Tax bills are mailed in late July and are payable by January, 2005.

## Board of Adjustments approves poker requests

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER  
Staff Writer

During a Tuesday meeting, the Kings Mountain Board of Adjustment unanimously approved conditional use permits allowing video poker machines at two locations.

Ken Hamrick of the Silver Villa, and Mike Heath, who owns a convenience store on South Battleground Avenue, received the go ahead from that board. The permits must be renewed in one year.

In other business, Tommy Hall of Hall Builders was granted a variance allowing him to build a residential dwelling at the corner of Woodside Drive and Rhodes Avenue.

Clarence and Mary Philbeck were granted a variance to build a carport at their York Road home.

## MAYOR

From 1A

pose was to discuss concerns I and some of the members of the council had about the manner he was performing his duties and to address other areas in which I felt he could perform more efficiently," Murphrey wrote.

Council member Howard Shipp, who was serving during the time the alleged demands were made, said he did not believe Ponder was entitled to severance pay.

"We didn't fire him. I hate to see him leave. That was his decision," Shipp said.

Shipp said he was not present when the alleged demands were made.

City Council member Kay Hambright, who was sworn in after the alleged events took place, said she was glad the issues finally had been made public. She had asked for more information during the Jan. 29 city council meeting.

"The citizens are entitled to know," she said.

Hambright said she knew paying a severance package would hurt the city but she felt like Ponder was entitled

to the money.

Hambright said if the city will appropriately follow the city manager form of government these problems will not happen again.

City Councilman Houston Corn who also was sworn in after the alleged demands were made, said he could not comment because the matter was a personnel issue. He referred the Herald to City Attorney Mickey Corry who could not be reached by press time.

City council members Carl DeVane, Rick Moore, Jerry Mullinax and Brenda Ross could not be reached by press time.

Mullinax and Ross have spoken out in favor of Ponder in the past.

City council members serving during the time the alleged demands were made include Clavon Kelly, DeVane, Jim Guyton, Moore, Dean Spears, Shipp and Gene White.

Kelly, Guyton and White have also spoken out in favor of Ponder.

Ponder's last day on the job is Friday. He starts a new job as director of budget and purchasing for the City of Gastonia on Monday.

## MEETING

From 1A

"The public has a right to know," he said.

The list is open to anyone who makes the request and pays the \$10 fee. The money covers the cost of copies and postage.

During the Thursday meeting, the council will go into closed session to discuss hiring an interim city manager. They will re-enter open session for the vote. According to council member Jerry Mullinax, the per-

son being considered is Gary Hicks.

The council will then hold an open work session to discuss hiring procedures for a permanent city manager.

## GASTON

From 1A

limits. Under the merger, the lines were redrawn to match county boundaries.

The Gaston board did agree to allow Gaston students to transfer into Cleveland, however, county per pupil funds will not follow. The transferring students may have to pay a fee to attend Cleveland County Schools, though the board has not yet taken action.

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