

The Herald

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MONSTER TRUCKS



The Buffalo (front) and Cougar were on display Friday at Ultra Machine & Fabrication in Kings Mountain. Below is the fork that the KM company makes for the Buffalo to dig up and destroy land mines in Iraq and Afghanistan.

KM company helps build heavily-armored trucks which make war safer for military

GARY STEWART
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Frank Stewart's face beams when he talks about his 41 employees at Ultra Machine & Fabrication and what they're doing for the war effort in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Stewart's business builds components for heavily armored vehicles called the Buffalo and Cougar, which are resulting in fewer deaths to U.S. military personnel because of exploding land mines.

Force Protection of Latta, SC manufactures the monster vehicles but most of the armored components are made in Ultra's 50,000 square foot plant near I-85 and Highway 161. Ultra moved there in September from a 30,000 square foot facility it outgrew in the Gaston County Industrial Park near Kings Mountain.

Stewart received word last Thursday that two of the armored vehicles - one Buffalo and one Cougar - would be brought to the KM facility.

As soon as he told his employees, the excitement began because it would be their first live look at the finished product. Previously, they had only seen the trucks on brochures and TV.

Stewart told all of his employees to invite their families to the plant on Friday for barbecue and an opportunity to see, climb inside and take pictures of the trucks. A huge crowd attended, including some dignitaries.

"Our employees have worked very hard," he said. "They've sacrificed a lot of family time and I wanted the families to know how their husbands are spending their time."

The Buffalo is especially impressive. It is used by Army and Marine personnel to interrogate land mines - or Improvised Explosive Devices as the military refers to them - and explode them without danger to the 10-to-12 soldiers inside.

The truck is equipped with a 30-foot long arm with fork at the end of it which digs into the ground and explodes the bomb. To date, not a single

See Trucks, 8A



Hawkins, Murphrey OK with 20/20

ELIZABETH STEWART

Herald Correspondent

Cleveland County Commissioner Ronnie Hawkins says Cleveland Chamber is delivering on its contract to aid economic development in the county and until it fails to do its job he will support the joint 20/20 public/private initiative which has come under scrutiny in recent weeks.

But possible changes in the contract drawn up last year for the Chamber to run the county's economic develop-

ment program could come March 23 at the commission's 6 p.m. work session at the county office building.

"I think the contract needs to be reviewed by all the commissioners," said commissioner Johnny Hutchins, who called for the termination Monday of the county's Cleveland 20/20 agreement with the Chamber in order to review the contract before it comes up for renewal in July. The motion died for lack of a second.

Hutchins voted against the original contract last year. He said he has ques-

tions about 20/20 that haven't been answered.

Hawkins told the Herald that he supports reviewing the existing contract and invites commissioners to contact him or county manager David Dear with their recommendations.

Scott Darnell's dismissal from his post as the Chamber's Senior Vice President for Economic Development prompted several meetings this month that included an emergency meeting of the county commission March 3 in which

See Hawkins, 7A

ELIZABETH STEWART

Kings Mountain city council is hopeful that county commissioners will approve their requests for additional funds for several projects in next year's budget.

County commissioners met with city council Monday night for a round-table discussion and heard budget priorities or a wish list by council.

Commissioners said the meeting with Kings Mountain was the first with a municipality on needs this budget season but it won't be the last since they hope to meet with other municipalities before the new fiscal year budget is completed. County Manager David Dear was also present for the meeting at the Patrick Center.

Mayor Rick Murphrey welcomed the group to the 6:30 p.m. meeting which followed an afternoon meeting of city council with Becky Veasey of MAPS Group Inc. who presented a pay classification study, comparing the pay of local employees with those in other cities working the same jobs. No action was taken by council.

Council members communicated on these projects which they hope can be get additional funding and several new ones for consideration by the county.

See Money, 6A

KINGS MOUNTAIN PEOPLE

Mom's prayers brought Dave home

ELIZABETH STEWART

Herald Correspondent

"We do lots of reminiscing," says David Saunders, one of the regulars at the first Tuesday of the month meetings of area veterans at H. Lawrence Patrick Senior Center.

Saunders, who is spearheading the 3 p.m. monthly meetings, gives the credit for the group's founding in 1996 to Charlie Carpenter, also a World War II veteran, and former Mauney Memorial Librarian Rose Turner who got the first group of WWII vets together to transcribe their memories on tape for the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

The membership has grown to include veterans from the Korean Conflict and Vietnam representing all branches of the military.

The war years come alive again in the stories the vets relate - from their time of enlistment or as draftees to boot camp and training and service duty, all in audio and videotapes.

Saunders lost "real good" friends during WWII. They were Manley Morehead who was killed in France; Jimmy Darracott, a Navy pilot on an aircraft carrier that went down in the Solomon Islands.

See Dave, 2A



David Saunders talks with a fellow vet as, left to right, Joanne Pulley, Laurence Anthony and Fred Hamrick listen at the Patrick Center.

Joseph Brymer photo