

## LOCAL

## City approves law restricting registered sex offenders in KM

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Just one day after one of the toughest laws against child sex offenders was signed into legislation in North Carolina, the City of Kings Mountain followed suit by adopting an ordinance of its own.

The City Council unanimously approved its first sex offender ordinance at Tuesday night's meeting. The legislation prevents registered sex offenders from using recreation facilities or any public property, belonging to the city, "for the protection of children and everyone." Places, now off-limits to registered sex offenders include, Mayor Rick Murphrey said, the boat landing and campgrounds at Moss Lake.

He added that the city will be posting signs to let the offenders know they are no longer allowed on the properties, which will be restricted. "We

don't want to provide the opportunity for these people to go in our parks and molest or recidivism, that means to regress back to your criminal activities," Murphrey said.

As far as concerns as to who exactly will be banned from properties, Murphrey claimed that in an area with at least 450 registered sex offenders between Gaston and Cleveland counties, public property owners can go on the internet to check the registry. The website <http://ncfindoffender.com/status.aspx> gives an up-to-date register of the sex offenders living in the vicinity of where you live and work.

"This has been a long time coming. I can't wait to press that button (to vote 'yes' for the ordinance)," stated Councilman Howard Shipp.

"This is something I think is needed. One of the best ordinances I think we've ever had," Murphrey said.

## City approves the use of golf carts on roads

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Golf carts may become a common sight on the roadways in Kings Mountain. The City Council passed an ordinance at its Tuesday meeting to permit these economically-friendly carts on certain roads within city limits.

"The Operation of Golf Carts" ordinance is based off of state House Bill 538 which permits carts on roads.

Streets where the buggies will not be allowed include, "N.C. Highway 216, Piedmont Avenue, Battleground Avenue, Grover Road, King Street, Shelby Road, Kings Mountain Boulevard, Cansler Street from its intersection with King Street to its intersection with Piedmont Avenue; Waco Road from its intersection with U.S. Highway 74 to its intersection with Watterson St.; Cleveland Avenue/NC Highway 161; and York/NC Highway 161."

City Attorney Mickey Corry, Jr. said that if a driver has at least two

offenses (from this ordinance) then they will lose their permit. "It will be strictly enforced," he stated.

"You must apply for a permit or sticker to be used on the operation of golf carts. There would be one application per household," Murphrey said.

As worded by the ordinance it says that an owner must have liability insurance and have a seal affixed to the golf cart. It must be renewed annually on June 30 of the following year. The fee is \$20. Drivers must also have a valid driver's license and photo I.D. of their golf cart.

"You have to be 18 years or older, but a driver or operator with a medical or physical condition that prevents them from obtaining a valid NC driver's license may also be able to operate a golf cart with certified medical proof of their condition," Murphrey said.

The mayor said that he believes it should help golf cart owners who could save gas money by not taking their cars to the grocery store.

## Jessica Lunsford Act becomes law

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Nine-year-old Gaston County native Jessica Lunsford was kidnapped, raped and murdered by a repeat sex offender in Florida in 2005. Reps. Tim Moore and Debbie Clary were the main sponsors of a bill to ensure that type of terror would not happen to children in North Carolina.

House Bill 933, coined "The Jessica Lunsford Act," has been approved in the state House and Senate. Gov. Mike Easley signed it into law Monday afternoon in Gastonia.

Convicted sex offenders of children under the age of 13 will no longer be able to hide under the new legislation. Their crimes will be as obvious as their location on a map, if prison doesn't kill them first. According to House Bill 933, any adult (18 years or older) convicted of specific sex crimes against a child will be punished with a sentence of at least 25 years-life in prison without parole; after any term of imprisonment they will be tracked by satellite-based monitoring for the remainder of their lives.

Under the new law, students on the sex offender registry can be expelled from educational institutions, if school boards choose to do so. If allowed to stay, the law requires them to be watched at all times.

Registered sex offenders will still have the right to vote, but when they enter a polling site they must do only that and leave. If the site is at a school, the principal must be made aware of their pres-

ence, according to the law.

For at least 30 years after their sentence, sex offenders will have to register in the community in which they reside. The law allows offenders, who are not required to register for life, the option of seeking removal from the registry after 10 years, through a hearing in superior court. In most cases sex offenders will not be allowed anywhere near children. When they are permitted, the law requires, they be escorted and watched at all times.

Reps. Clary (R-Cleveland, Gaston) and Moore (R-Cleveland) filed the first bill of this nature in 2005. For both of them to represent the homeland of Jessica Lunsford, her death and the desire to protect others from that fate has become a personal crusade. Three years later, the battle has been won.

"Many times good legislation does take a long time," Clary said. "Our continued push was it doesn't matter how much it costs, it's worth protecting our children."

"It's a very far-reaching bill and it probably makes NC's laws one of the toughest in the country when it comes to dealing with child predators," Moore said. "It's especially appropriate for the governor to come to our part of the state to sign this bill."

Clary, Moore and state Senator David Hoyle were present at the signing on Monday. But also in the midst was another who considers this new law a personal victory - Mark Lunsford, Jessica's father.

The new law also:

- Increases the penalties for vari-

ous sexual exploitation offenses involving minors: first, second and third degree exploitation, and promoting prostitution of a minor (felony penalties increased one level)

- Makes it a felony for a registered sex offender to be on premises primarily intended for the use, care or supervision of minors. It also prohibits offenders from being within 300 feet of such places when they are not on "premises" that are intended primarily for minors (like a youth day care, located in a shopping center with other stores). These provisions do not apply if the parent or guardian of a minor is a registered offender and they are taking the minor for emergency medical care. The bill also allows a person subject to the restrictions to be on school grounds in limited circumstances, with notice to the school principal and while under supervision. A juvenile, who is a registered sex offender, may be on an otherwise prohibited location to receive medical treatment or mental health care, if under supervision.

- Shortens the required time for registered sex offenders to register changes (like address or place of employment) from 10 days to three business days.

- Requires judges to rule whether a sex offender, who is arrested for an offense while on probation, is not a danger to the public before the offender is released with or without bail.

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