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First National will remain a 'hometown' bank

Kings Mountain's First National Bank will soon sport a new logo — Bank of the Ozarks.

Local branch manager Brenda Lovelace said she and her staff are excited about the upcoming partnership with the large community bank from Arkansas with a lot to offer Kings Mountain.

Lovelace said she is impressed with Ozark officials and the bank's reputation for being community-oriented. "This is a very sound and profitable institution that will offer new services to our customers and

we will continue to be a hometown bank with a name change," she added.

First National Bank, Cleveland County's "Hometown Bank" for 139 years, has been sold and the \$67.8 million deal is expected to close during the second or third quarter of this year.

First National has grown from its original location in downtown Shelby, currently employing 200 people at 14 locations in Cleveland, Gaston, Lincoln and Rutherford counties and the surrounding areas.

"Bank of the Ozarks is one of the strongest banks in the U.S. with over \$4 billion in assets," said Helen Jeffords, president and CEO of First National. Jeffords said in a press release, "It was of great importance to us to join a company with a strong sense of community, outstanding financial strength and progressive leadership. Our customers, employees, communities and stockholders will all benefit from our partnership with Bank of the Ozarks."

Bank of the Ozarks has been operating in Charlotte for over a decade.

Kings Mountain Mayor Rick Murphrey said, "The city has always had an excellent relationship with First National, a community involved bank and important leader in the quality of life for our community. We look forward to working with the new Bank of the Ozarks."

"Community-oriented is what sets First National Bank apart and at the top in our community, an outstanding corporate citizen supporting Cleveland County," said Ronnie

Hawkins, chairman of the Cleveland County board of commissioners. He said the bank leadership and its many employees are active in the community and the bank has long been a corporate sponsor of Life Enrichment Center, the YMCA, LeGrand Center, Heart Ball Gala and other events. Hawkins said that he has seen during 16 years on the county board how First National left its fingerprints on all the happenings in Cleveland County. Hawkins said he looks forward to the same spirit of community from the new bank.

Bessemer City to re-launch police dept.

BETH BROCK

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BESSEMER CITY — Mayor Becky Smith broke the tie vote (3-3) Monday night to re-launch after 14 years the Bessemer City Police Department.

The mayor first wanted to make it clear that Bessemer City never took advantage of Gaston County. Smith said "Bessemer City paid every cent we were charged. How did we know we were being subsidized by Gaston County?"

The county had quoted \$430,000 a year to Bessemer City with a 5% annual increase. Smith stressed that the charges for some years were a 7-8% increase, and Bessemer City never complained or questioned the charges.

In 2013, the cost to Bessemer City from the county for police patrolling would be \$640,000 dollars with increases for the next three years bringing the total cost by 2016 to \$1.2 million dollars.

Smith said that the citizens of Bessemer City had no idea how many hours were spent in decision-making.

Council had mixed opinions on whether to stay with the county police. Twenty minutes into the called meeting, Councilman Dan Boling made the motion to have the town responsible for its police force. He had backing from councilmen Donnie Griffin and Alfred Crawford. Councilmen Howard Jones, Joe Will and Kay McCathen voted against.

Said Jones, "I never had any problems with the county. If there was a lawsuit, the county would handle it. And what would the city do with drunk drivers. I would like to stay with the county at least one more year. We don't want any part-time officers. We need a full-time force."

Carpenter said that he would like to stay with the county if it wasn't for the increase in coverage. He stressed that Bessemer City never knew if hours reported for coverage in Bessemer City were correct.

Wills called for council to renegotiate its contract with Gaston County. He said that \$1.2 was way out of the ballpark. "Make a counter offer to Gaston County," he said. He stressed that Gaston County was charging the city for services such as the bomb squad and the SWAT team which should have been provided to them whether or not the city is covered by county police.

Councilwoman Kay McCutcheon said that she just hopes that they don't do anything prematurely.

Responding to Jones' question about jailing, Boling said the county would have to provide jail for Bessemer City regardless of which way

See BESSEMER CITY, 7A



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Ice Storm



While the ice storm last week did not cause the predicted wide spread damage to our area, it did leave behind some delicate beauty as seen in this photo.

Photo by WAYNE CONNER

Board of Education Budget a work in progress

A budget calendar, submitted by schools finance officer David Lee to the school board last week, is the first step in a process which months from now will result in a budget which could equal the \$150 million figure from the current year.

"I don't think the budget will be dramatically different but feedback is always needed from our board," Lee said. Preparation work begins this month and continues in February to determine goals. By the end of February he said staff may receive some insight into new legislative "leanings."

Lee said that local payroll expenditures are \$2 million more than last year through December and loss of federal stimulus funds and increased staffing levels in the schools will impact the 2013-14 budget. He also pointed out to the board in his presentation that local supplies, materials, services and equipment expenditures are \$900K more than last year. Lee noted that the \$1 million that remained in stimulus money was spent this school year and those funds expire with this year's budget. The initial presentation of the superintendent's proposed budget to the board of education will be given the last meeting in March. Feedback and direction from the board members and the executive team will be slated in April, with any revisions based on feedback received to the superintendents proposed budget. In May the board of education will make its budget request to county commissioners.

By June 30, county commissioners and North Carolina both adopt budgets and provide actual funding allotments to Cleveland County Schools. In August the final 2013-14 budget will be presented to the school board for adoption based on actual county, state and federal funding provided.

Title IX requirements

Girls' sports facilities are in the process of being brought up to the standards of boys' sports facilities at all four high schools in the county — Kings Mountain, Shelby, Burns and Crest.

Kings Mountain Board of Education members heard a progress report of upgrades to meet Title IX requirements at last week's work session. School officials said other upgrades are still in the works.

During the 2009-2010 school year, Title IX representatives visited the four school campuses and interviewed coaches and players. They then returned to the schools with items that had to be

See BOARD, 7A

Members of crime ring sentenced

Six members of an organized family retail crime ring that sold and distributed over \$16 million in stolen over-the-counter products were sentenced Jan. 24 in US District Court in Charlotte.

Anne M. Tompkins, US Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina, said the defendants included two sisters, their husbands and their mother with Kings Mountain and Bessemer City addresses.

Tompkins said that the sisters, Kimberly Bridges Morris and Darlene Bridges Schoener, participated in the theft ring with their husbands, their mother, Bonnie Knight Bridges and Darryl Keith Brock.

The six pleaded guilty to the charges of conspiracy to

commit interstate transportation of stolen property.

Bonnie Knight Bridges, 63, and Kimberly Bridges Morris, 37, are both from Bessemer City, Michael David Morris, 40, is from Charlotte, Darlene Bridges Schoener, 39, and William Christopher Schoener, 33, are of Kings Mountain, and Darryl Keith Brock, 45, is from Cowpens, SC.

Bonnie Bridges, Kimberly and Michael Morris, and Darlene and William Schoener were also charged with and pleaded guilty to one count of tax evasion conspiracy.

US District Court Judge Max O. Cogburn, Jr., sentenced Kimberly Morris and Darlene Schoener to serve

See CRIME RING, 7A

Hamrick, Sr. receives Circle of Friends Award



Larry Hamrick Sr., Kings Mountain insurance man, received the Circle of Friends Award, the Y's highest award, from Kings Mountain Family YMCA at the recent annual meeting of Cleveland County Family YMCA. Hamrick was instrumental in starting the partnership with the City of Kings Mountain and YMCA. He also worked with Cleveland County Hospital's partnership with Dover Foundation YMCA. He is pictured with his wife, Evelyn, and son, Larry Jr., accepting the award.

Moore to focus on job creation

Kings Mountain attorney Tim Moore, who is beginning his fifth term in the N. C. legislature today, Jan. 30, is heading back to Raleigh with high expectations that the 2013 General Assembly will approve voter ID laws, tax and budget reform, among other



Tim Moore

issues.

Moore, a Republican who represents Cleveland County in the House and is chair of the important rules committee, said that his major focus for Cleveland County is more jobs. He said he will continue to stress economic recovery and job creation while maintaining a sense of limited government and preserving freedom.

In his newsletter, Moore said he and his staff are ready for the opening session today and offered congratulations to Governor Pat

See MOORE, 7A



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