My Hometown

Civic pride - with an eye toward service

by Dave Blanton

Gold was discovered in White Plains in 1834. Seventy-five years later, the textile boom was beginning to shape our town, which by then was called Kings Mountain. It wasn't long after that, in the time between the turn of the century and World War II, that club life was beginning to take hold.

First came the Woman's Club, the town's oldest existing civic organization. In 1905, monthly dues were a nickel. By 1932, it found a permanent home on Mountain Street. The group's 100plus year tradition of annual Floral Fairs continues to this day, although for many years now it's been called the Fall Festival.

the Following in Woman's Club footsteps came a burst of new club be-

ginnings. From the town's first Boy Scout troop, in 1908, to The Thursday Afternoon Book Club, in 1913, to the Daughters of the American Revolution, which saw its first chapter chartered here in 1916, Kings Mountain was ascending as a town with strong civic ties.

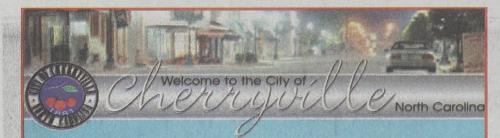
By the 1950s and 1960s, Kiwanis, Lions Club, the JayCees, and, later, a Kings Mountain chapter of the International Rotary had became powerful engines of fundraising and civic movements.

Dave Baity remembers when the Mountain Street bridge that passed over the train tracks downtown had two lights and lots of traffic, often moving very slowly on the weekends.

"We peddled Pepsi between those two stop lights and raised a heck of a lot of



Boy Scout troops from the Kings Mountain area gather in 2009 to commemorate 100 years of scouting.





Scouts camp out at a Hickory gathering in 1960. "There's a lot of shared responsibility in Boy Scout life," says Tommy King, who has served as a merit badge counselor, a scoutmaster, an assistant scoutmaster, district commissioner and an assistant district commissioner with the Boy Scouts of America.

rush, its schools, businesses,

sports teams and civic clubs.

money for charities," he said referring to the time when he was still fresh out of high school and a member of the Jaycees. This was a good twenty years before the U.S. 74 Bypass skirted north of town. Before that time travelers headed toward the mountains or Charlotte had few options other than streaming through the center of Kings Mountain.

Baity went on to learn a lot more about the town, continuing his work as a reporter for the Kings Mountain Herald before becoming an editor at the Belmont Banner in the early 60s. He retired after a long run as a reporter and columnist for the Charlotte Observer. A few year ago, he wrote and published "Tracks Through Time: A History of the City of Kings Mountain, 1874-2005," an illustrated history of the town's many facets, with chapters devoted to the area's 19th century gold

Baity said he grew up poor, in one of the town's many mill villages, but he service has its roots in one "never felt substandard." He recalls

that many of his peers in school left the life of books for a job in the textile industry, which was in those days powered the local economy. But for many of those

who stayed in school and pursue higher education, there was a bridge that helped get them there.

'The civic clubs really helped in that transition," he said. "There were scholarships available to kids who wanted to go farther but didn't have the means.'

Indeed, from the Kiwanis and Rotary to the Woman's Club and the Boosters Club and the Daughters of the American Revolution, it has been service clubs that have historically established some of the most generous scholarships in the post World War II years.

The tradition continues today. "Local organizations giv-

come together on that front." For Tommy King, this strong and long-running sense of civic pride and

The

young

United

King,

place: Boy Scouts. King has spent For every group a lifetime with that has grown the man's outdoor lean as times and adventure change... organization, which began others spring in England and up and become the States in the robust fixtures... first decade of the 20th century.

> who is 71, was a scout here in Kings Mountain as a boy and, much to his chagrin, missed becoming an Eagle Scout by just one badge. He later served as a merit badge counselor, a scoutmaster, an assistant scoutmaster, district commissioner and an assistant district commissioner with the Boy Scouts of America.

"There's a lot of shared responsibility in Boy Scout life," King says, rattling off the number of ways the youngsters work together to accomplish goals or look out for each other, from camping and learning about wildlife to providing assistance at the annual Over the Mountain Triathlon hosted

Kings laments that interest in the Boy Scouts has declined in the last generation or so. In the heyday of the organization in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, nearly every able-bodied boy was -or wanted to be - in the club that organized camping trips, built things for the community and served as the primary source of youth fellowship.

Today, the Boy Scouts of America can claim 207 youngsters total in the Kings Mountain area. That accounts for membership in all the organization's subgroups, which includes Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts and Crews. Crews are groups that specialize in hiking and camping and include males and females, ages 14-20.

King estimates those numbers are down four or five hundred percent from the 1960s, a drop he blames on the popularity of TV and video games. "Back then, being inside was the last thing you wanted to do," King said. "We blame the kids, but you got to blame the parents, too."

For every group that has grown lean as times change and schedules become more fractured, others spring up and become robust fixtures in the fundraising arena.

The Kings Mountain Touchdown Club is only seven years old. It was started with a clear and defined mission: to improve equipment for Kings Mountain's student athletes. That included facilities, locker rooms, weight rooms. The group raised \$15,000 in its first three months, according to its founder David Brinkley. It also gives a \$500 dollar scholarship every year to a football player who has been on the team all four years of his eligibility.

The Touchdown's Club biggest project has been raising the funds to build a new 12,000 sq. feet state-ofthe-art field house for the KMHS athletes at John Gamble stadium. The field house, which has cost nearly \$900,000, is nearing its December-January construction goal. Much of the work and supplies were donated. The Touchdown Club, which boasts around 100 members, has gotten a lot of

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ing scholarship money is a huge help to our students," according to Leigh Bell, a guidance counselor at the Kings Mountain High School who aids students in the hunt for the right college and the funds to pay for their education. She said that many organizations also continue to support students past their first year of college through continuing scholarships.

That certainly resonates with Baity. A favorite seventh grader teacher fostered his love of stamps and his budding hobby of stamp collecting by directing her husband, a comptroller at Neisler Mills, to give the young student all the postage from his incoming business mail.

"I had stamps from all over the world," he said in a recent talk from his home in Gastonia. "I think now how much that broadened me. The teachers in the schools in the schools encouraged kids to be better than they ever could be. There was a culture there the teacher and the business community did kind of

by the city.

"We don't allow harassment or kids being picked on," said King, who spent his professional life as a magistrate in Cleveland and Lincoln Counties. "The scouts is about service."

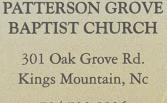
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Julia Wood is seen here in period dress at a special meeting of The Thursday Afternoon Book Club, which celebrated its 100th year in October.







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