



**FRIDAY**  
Partly Cloudy  
38/20

**SATURDAY**  
Partly Cloudy  
47/25

**SUNDAY**  
Partly Cloudy  
50/31

# C THE CARRBORO CITIZEN



**HOUSE Calls**  
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Libby Thomas and son Max are dwarfed at the base of Stillhouse Bottom's sentinel tulip poplar. PHOTO BY JOHNNY RANDALL

## FLORA BY KEN MOORE

### A special place for flora and fauna

Not far from Chapel Hill's Merritt Pasture stands Stillhouse Bottom. The Merritt family's former land included the steep forested ravine known as Stillhouse Bottom, a name that initiates numerous stories from old-timers. The land was used for selective tree harvesting, farming on level terrain and, most likely, as the stories go, moonshining in the ravine bottoms.

Thankfully, the Merritts were thoughtful stewards of the land; the forest on the steep slopes was never timbered, meaning it has been essentially undisturbed since before European settlement. That's why one is able to stumble upon 250- to 300-year-old trees, such as Stillhouse Bottom's giant sentinel tulip poplar (see photo).

The land was sold in the early 1960s and subsequent years have seen ownership of various parcels change from time to time. During the same period, botany professors and students, as well as numerous local citizens, visited the site in the spring to view one of the area's best displays of wildflowers.

The site, part of the greater Morgan Creek Bluffs Natural Area, is described in the *Inventory of Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats of Orange County* as one of the most important natural areas in the county. Additionally, the site is within the larger Jordan Lake Macrosite, which includes the N.C. Botanical Garden Mason Farm Biological Reserve and New Hope Gamelands, all comprising a huge area of natural biological diversity.

As early as 1965, C. Ritchie Bell, the first director of the Botanical Garden, began conversations with various property owners about preserving the site.

SEE FLORA PAGE 8

## Schools to redistrict to ease overcrowding

BY SUSAN DICKSON  
Staff Writer

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Board of Education next week will take another look at redistricting plans to ease overcrowding at district elementary schools.

At a December work session, most board members indicated they were likely to choose a spot-redistricting approach that would move a limited number of students, over an approach focused on balancing student

achievement levels. The spot-redistricting approach focuses on Morris Grove and Glenwood elementary schools, which are 55 and 42 students over capacity, respectively.

If the board votes for the spot-redistricting approach, several neighborhoods assigned to Morris Grove would be reassigned to other schools to reduce the school's enrollment to within 40 students of capacity. In addition, a mobile classroom would likely be added to Glenwood's campus.

Based on the initial spot-redistricting scenario, as many as 360 students in 16 neighborhoods could be moved, affecting all 10 elementary schools. Percentages of not-proficient students would range from 2.2 percent at Glenwood to 13.7 percent at Carrboro Elementary, while percentages of somewhat-proficient students would range from 5.7 percent at Morris Grove to 35.7 percent at Frank Porter Graham. Student proficiency levels are based on end-of-year reading and math, and sometimes

science, assessments.

"It'd be very difficult to do really any type of student achievement balance with what we have right now," said Kevin Fuerst, coordinator of student enrollment. "It would involve moving a huge number of fragile students. We'd be doing a full redistricting to do that and we may not even end up where we want to be."

SEE REDISTRIC PAGE 7



A stare down for food in the snow

PHOTO BY STAN LEWIS

## Chatham cuts county positions

BY TAYLOR SISK  
Staff Writer

The Chatham County Board of Commissioners voted last week to eliminate four staff positions, discontinue the county's funding of Chapel Hill Transit's Pittsboro Express bus service and delay a consultant's update of the county's land-use plan.

According to figures released by County Manager Charlie Horne's office, the budget cuts will save the county approximately \$2 million over the next four years and some \$275,000 this fiscal year.

The 3-2 vote fell upon party lines, with the newly elected Republican majority voting in favor of the cuts and the two Democratic incumbents casting the dissenting votes.

The commissioners voted to eliminate the positions of director of the Office of Human Relations, held by Esther Coleman, and director of the Department of Sustainable Communities, held by Cynthia Van Der Wiele, and two vacant positions: a health educator addressing obesity and a resource conservation manager.

At a tense and overfilled Jan. 3 commissioners' meeting, Chatham residents reminded the three new commissioners – Chair Brian Bock, Walter Petty and Pamela Stewart – that they had run on platforms of fiscal conservatism, while others spoke against eliminating the positions held by Van Der Wiele and, most particularly, Coleman.

A petition has subsequently been circulated through the community urging the commissioners to reconsider their decision to eliminate the human relations position.

Among the director's responsibilities were to assist in the investigation of discrimination claims and promote the employment of qualified individuals regardless of race, gender, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation or economic background.

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## Takin' it to the streets

BY KIRK ROSS  
Staff Writer

By Wednesday afternoon, it wasn't hard to find some pretty exhausted people. In their respective garages in Hillsborough, Chapel Hill and Carrboro, crews at work on the roads since early Monday were contemplating a long rest and at least a temporary return to normal life.

Richard Terrell, operations manager with Chapel Hill Public Works, said crews are looking forward to a little time off. "We think we're in pretty good shape," he said.

The town will keep at least one truck at the ready, he said, to work with school officials to clear up trouble spots.

Like last year, which saw its share of storms, this has been an unusually stormy early winter.

"It's been a tough year already," said John Howell, Orange County maintenance engineer for the N.C. Department of Transportation. "We started winter the first week of December and it seems like we've had a storm every week including Christmas."

Howell said the crews working the 32 department trucks along with seven contract trucks know full well



Christopher May in the cab of the Town of Carrboro dump truck No. 502. May, who was out sick for part of the recent storm, was back at work Wednesday hitting the remaining trouble spots. "First one I've missed in 10 years," he said. That includes a long stint behind the wheel on Christmas Day.

PHOTO BY KIRK ROSS

people are counting on them.

"We've got a lot of dedicated people."

The DOT's strategy in Orange County focuses on 372 lane miles of key thoroughfares designated as "bare pavement routes." They include the interstates, U.S. 15-501, N.C. 54, N.C. 86, Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, Franklin Street and areas around UNC Hospitals,

including Manning Drive and South Road.

"We keep our resources on those routes until they're clear," Howell said. After that, he said, crews start working on the secondary roads.

In the most recent storm, temperatures made it a struggle to achieve either goal.

SEE WEATHER PAGE 3

## Sorting through recycling options

BY SUSAN DICKSON  
Staff Writer

The holidays are over, Christmas trees have come down and the last of the leftovers have been consumed, and, somewhere, a big pile of trash is all that remains. But in Orange County, it's likely that a large portion of that trash has actually been recycled – though perhaps not as much as one might think.

Countywide, more than 80 percent of people in town and 60 percent of those in rural areas set out their blue recycling bins at least once a month. In the past few weeks, wrapping paper, wine bottles and emptied cranberry sauce cans have all gone into recycling bins and off to their respective recycling sites, while other binned items – like plastic trays and tissue paper – have been sorted out and sent to the landfill.

"The realm of plastics is generally the most confusing, and also the most frustrating for people," said Blair Pollock, solid-waste planner with the Orange County Solid Waste Department.



"It happens not only in our program, it pretty much happens in every recycling program that exists."

The only plastics that should go in curbside recycling bins are plastic bottles of any number with necks that are smaller than their base. Labels are OK, but all bottles should be rinsed clean.

Some residents use plastic bags to collect items in their recycling bins, but the bags aren't recyclable and can hinder the pickup process. The curbside recycling program also doesn't accept plastic lids, toys, trays, prescription containers or wide-mouth containers such as tubs, cups or buckets. Rigid plastics numbered 2 or 5 can be recycled at the

county's 24-hour drop-off sites (except for the Hampton Pointe location), but not in curbside bins.

Other items that residents sometimes put in their recycling bins that aren't recyclable include ceramics, Pyrex glass, paper towels and metallic paper. When these items are placed in recycling bins, they're later plucked out and discarded. Because the county makes money selling recyclable materials to recycling companies, it's difficult to determine the cost of sorting those items. But overall, Pollock says he's been told by companies that buy recyclables that "the stuff from Orange County is remarkably good.... Generally across the board, we have a very high level of compliance."

But while non-recyclables are placed in recycling bins, recyclable items are still put in the garbage, with about 20 percent of the garbage that went into the landfill in 2009-10 made up of recyclable items. Though that's an improvement from about 30 percent in 2005, as Pollock said, "There's still a lot of potential out there."

Items that can be recycled in curbside bins include:

- plastic bottles;
- clear, brown, green and blue glass bottles and jars;
- aerosol spray cans;
- aluminum and steel/tin food or beverage cans;
- aluminum foil and trays free of food residue;
- mixed paper, including junk mail, office paper, paper bags, paper egg cartons, cereal boxes, frozen-food boxes, juice and milk gable-top cartons, paper towel tubes and other single-layer cardboard;
- magazines and catalogs;
- newspapers;
- phonebooks; and
- flattened corrugated cardboard in pieces no larger than 3 feet by 3 feet.

All bottles, jars and cans should be rinsed, and lids should be discarded. Mixed paper, cardboard and other paper items should be placed in a separate bin from cans, jars and bottles. For a complete list of what can and cannot be recycled, visit [www.co.orange.nc.us/recycling](http://www.co.orange.nc.us/recycling)

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### Tar Heels win not so pretty?

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