



FRIDAY
Overcast
41/32

SATURDAY
Partly Cloudy
47/36

SUNDAY
60% Chance of Rain
56/49

‘Find the Pie’
contest
See page 3



There are many uses for Fraser firs.
PHOTO BY KEN MOORE

FLORA BY KEN MOORE

Fraser firs
deserve better

With ally Clay Hudson, I am in dead-heat competition with other “tree ferriers” to deliver the greatest number of orphaned Christmas trees to Diana Steele’s Willow Hill Preschool. For years, Diana has inspired energetic curbside rescuing of discarded trees, mostly native North Carolina Fraser firs, *Abies fraseri*. Under Diana’s supervision, these trees eventually settle into meandering brush piles in the woodlands containing her magical gardens and preschoolers’ discovery ground. The former magnificent North Carolina high-altitude evergreen Fraser fir forests, described as “Christmas Tree Land” by B.W. Wells in *The Natural Gardens of North Carolina*, are much diminished now by the exotic balsam wooly adelgid insect pest. I remember being awed back in 1967 by the solid blue-green Fraser fir ridgetops along the Blue Ridge Parkway’s highest elevations west of Asheville. Those ridgetops today are steep-sloped deserts of giant dead stems of the former magnificent firs. Today we see Fraser firs mostly as Christmas tree farm crops in our western counties. Though helping the economy of the region, those farms don’t replace the magnificence of the former Fraser fir forests. Unfortunately, much of the Christmas tree production depends upon heavy pesticide and herbicide use with resulting toxic runoff. A bright side is that some farms are now moving toward pollution-free organic operations.

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Biz Beat: Locals look ahead
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THE CARRBORO
CITIZEN

In an uncertain economy, towns navigate changes

BY KIRK ROSS
Staff Writer

For the past two years, as officials in Chapel Hill and Carrboro have begun working up their respective budgets, the game has been to tread water through cost cutting and putting off major projects and expenditures. As southern Orange County continues to post anemic growth numbers and stubbornly high unemployment, leaders in both towns profess caution. But this year, out of necessity and opportunity, both towns will try to forge ahead a bit.

Bare necessities

For Carrboro Town Manager Steve Stewart, the biggest necessity is getting the soon-to-be-completed Fire Station 2 — the largest construction project in the town’s history — up and running. “We’ve got our work cut out for us,”

10 for 10
TEN LOCAL CHALLENGES
FOR 2010

Stewart said in a recent interview. “It promises to be a difficult budget year.” Stewart said the town remains in a “soft freeze” on hiring and has delayed purchases of major equipment. He’s also relied on the town’s employees to find ways to cut costs. But the costs of operating the new Homestead Road facility and hiring three more firefighters will put a drag on finances. The station is expected to be completed later this year. The town has spread out the hiring and training of the new fire crew over the past few years. Hiring three more firefighters over the next year should bring the crew to full-strength by spring. Stewart said federal and state grant money, which helped the town defray some of the cost of the new positions in the past, may be available, but as yet nothing is definite. “We’ve got that expense,” he said of the new personnel, “plus the expense of a brand-new building.” Another big-ticket item affecting the town this year will be the reconstruction of Weaver Street and a possible state-mandated increase in retirement contributions. Stewart said the town is likely to go “slow and steady” on the Weaver Street project.

Revenue projections, particularly sales taxes, do not appear to be recovering. Stewart expects to draft another lean budget. He noted that the gloomy 9.3 percent drop in sales-tax revenues he projected last year turned out to be fairly accurate. This year’s budget, he said, will be much the same as last year’s. “We’re going to be very cautious and only do what we absolutely have to do,” Stewart said.

Opportunity knocks

Chapel Hill Town Manager Roger Stancil said the town’s quick action to throttle back in the fall of 2008 continues to pay dividends. He said the money saved by cutting back early not only helped fill a gap in the current year’s budget but set the town up to take advantage of financing opportunities this year.

SEE ECONOMY PAGE 5

A little school with a big heart

BY KATE GRIESMANN
Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL — For the last two years, Nakeizha Robinson, 11, has missed more days of school than she attended. Instead of sitting in math class or going to lunch, three days a week Nakeizha, a sixth-grader from Greenville with end-stage kidney disease, could be found hooked up to a dialysis machine. On those days, about halfway through the three-hour treatments, Karen Weatherly, a UNC Hospital School teacher, would stop in to work with Nakeizha. As other patients in the room dozed or watched television, the pair practiced the same concepts that Nakeizha’s class was covering, helping her stay on top of her schoolwork even in her absence. The UNC Hospital School, founded in 1965, provides instruction and assistance to more than 2000 students with serious medical issues each year. Funded by the Chapel Hill-Carrboro School District, the N.C. Department of Education and UNC Hospitals, the school is largely unknown to people in the community, but affects the lives of children across the state.

SEE SCHOOL PAGE 8



UNC Hospital School teacher Karen Weatherly spends some time in the pediatric ICU with her student Nakeizha Robinson, who is recovering from kidney transplant surgery. Robinson, who will turn 12 later this month, was born with chronic kidney disease and has needed to go to the hospital three days a week for dialysis for the past two years. Weatherly has worked with Nakeizha to keep her on grade level, teaching her during her dialysis treatments. Fortunately, a kidney became available to Robinson, and she received the transplant last week.
PHOTO BY AVA BARLOW

Community celebrates MLK



Longtime community activist and civil rights lawyer Ashley Osment was presented the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Service Award at services at First Baptist Church in Chapel Hill. Osment is a senior attorney for the UNC School of Law Center for Human Rights located in Carrboro.
PHOTO BY JOCK LAUTERER

BY BETH MECHEM
Staff Writer

While most of the community took the day off, more than 100 citizens gathered on a chilly morning in front of the Chapel Hill Post Office, or Justice Plaza, as speakers, presenters and musicians made their way to the podium to express their thankfulness for the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. and the spirit shown by their community. Rev. Robert Campbell was one of the many speakers Monday morning who charged those in attendance

with the task of bringing a change in their social lives. “We must be the voice of economic justice,” he said. “We must act with compassion and love.” Music was provided by the Faith Tabernacle Oasis of Love, and members of the Carrboro and Chapel Hill branches of the NAACP also spoke. Michelle Laws, president of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Branch NAACP, reminded those preparing to march down Franklin Street that they weren’t on their way to a funeral and should be “fired up, ready to go.” Rally participants organized themselves for the march to First Baptist Church as the sun finally began providing warmth, and, with children leading the way, blazed down the street at a pace more suited for a trot than a march. With every possible seat and much of the floor space of the church filled, the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Worship Service Program was ushered in with song by the Community Church of Chapel Hill Universalist Choir.

SEE MLK PAGE 9

Carrboro
loses Barnes
Street case

CARRBORO — Northwest Property Group, which wants to build a shopping center at the intersection of Jones Ferry Road and Barnes Street, has won an appeal in its case against the Town of Carrboro. In September 2007, the developer sued after the town approved its development but limited access to Barnes Street to emergency vehicles due to concerns about safety at the intersection. In a suit heard in April 2009, Northwest argued that the town’s condition, which effectively killed the project, was not backed up by a finding of fact on the traffic and safety concerns. The board of aldermen had sided with residents on Barnes Street and the adjacent neighborhood who said the intersection was already unsafe and a store entrance and exit would make it even more so. In a 2-1 decision handed down in late December, the state Court of Appeals ruled that the trial court had erred in finding in favor of the town. In its 48-page ruling, the court said the town had not presented sufficient facts to back up its case that the intersection would be unsafe.

Town officials, who declined to comment because the case involves pending litigation, are expected to discuss next steps in the case in the next few weeks. The town could appeal the decision to the North Carolina Supreme Court.

— From Staff Reports