



FRIDAY
Clear
47/29



SATURDAY
Partly Cloudy
49/27



SUNDAY
Clear
52/31

C THE CARRBORO CITIZEN

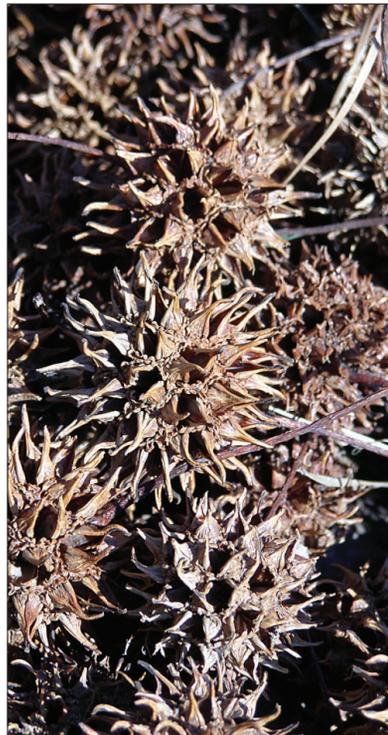


PHOTO BY KEN MOORE

Sweetgum balls are dropping everywhere.

FLORA BY KEN MOORE

Lessons from sweetgum balls

Like any kid, I'm fascinated with sweetgum balls; it's good to stay in touch with your inner kid. This is the time of year when most of those dangling seed pods drop from mature sweetgums, *Liquidambar styraciflua*. You often see kids stooped over observing and touching those curious spiky gum balls wherever they discover them on forest paths and town walkways. Just imagine the wonder of those moments.

Looking closely, I see in each gum ball a nest of baby birds with mouths wide open, waiting for food. In fact, the tiny winged seeds of sweetgum provide food for goldfinches, chickadees, quail and numerous other birds.

Freshly fallen gum balls are beautiful; some even seem polished, in colors varying from copper to burgundy. Each ball, a perfect work of art, would make any handcrafting artist proud.

Walking along Poplar Avenue recently, I noticed a layer of freshly dropped gum balls covering the ground. There were several large sweetgums growing along Tom's Creek, and they were nestled in a beautiful mulch of gum balls. I remember an article in *The Garden*, the official publication of England's Royal Horticultural Society. The writer was praising sweetgum balls as mulch beneath trees and shrubs. The English are ever so practical and resourceful, so mulching with sweetgum balls seems appropriate, if not normal.

In sharp contrast is the chorus of condemnations that those awful sweetgum trees are a menace, with their dropping-gum-balls habit. Folks hate them; or at most, tolerate them. Few folks really value them.

SEE FLORA PAGE 8

Community mourns the loss of Tom Robinson

BY KIRK ROSS
Staff Writer

CARRBORO — For four decades, Tom Robinson sold seafood, much of that time out of a little white concrete block shop in downtown Carrboro. While he's sure to be remembered for that, mostly he'll be remembered for being Tom Robinson — a sharp-witted, sometimes-acerbic, honest and forthright individual. He was his own man until the end.

Robinson died Friday at UNC Hospitals from pneumonia, which resulted from H1N1. He was 58 years old.

Anyone who knew Tom will tell you that he ran at a slightly higher RPM than the rest of us. Anyone who worked for him can relate how particular he was about the way things should be done.

He was, maybe, a little eccentric. He collected things. He raced pigeons. You read that right.

Many of his customers became friends.

Kay Lund and her husband, Mark Price, were in that group. The couple began buying their fish from Robinson in 1982 when he operated out of an outdoor market on the corner of Church and Rosemary streets in Chapel Hill.

Lund said the visit to the seafood shop to provision the family oyster roasts became a tradition, and after Tom moved to Carrboro he became a regular at their Christmas Eve socials.

"He'd be the first person to show up, coming over right after closing up in the afternoon for a single-malt," she said. "Christmas Eve won't be the same without him. I just want to say to him, 'Thanks for all the oysters.'"

PHOTO BY VALARIE SCHWARTZ

SEE ROBINSON PAGE 3



Town council hears concerns on cell phones and driving

BY BETH MECHUM
Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL — The Chapel Hill Town Council opened a public hearing on cell phone and road safety Monday night, and with it came a flood of anecdotes about what is seen as a growing problem.

Council member Penny Rich, who requested the hearing, spoke of an email from a parent of a UNC student who expressed concern after her daughter was rear-ended two separate times by two separate cell phone-wielding drivers.

Chapel Hill Mayor Mark Kleinschmidt spoke of the recent accident in Efland involving a woman who was

seen talking on her cell phone before being struck by an Amtrak train, killing both her and her 5-year-old son.

Coolidge St. resident and former council member Joe Capowski recalled the time a UNC student talking on her cell phone almost knocked him off his bike.

"This is way past an accident waiting to happen," Capowski said.

The council is considering possible regulation of handheld cell phone use by drivers. North Carolina already outlawed texting while driving, but some council members feel that taking it even further would be beneficial.

SEE COUNCIL PAGE 3

Manager lays out budget realities

BY KIRK ROSS
Staff Writer

CARRBORO — Town Manager Steve Stewart isn't known for overblown hyperbole or prone to wild exaggeration. So when on Tuesday night he called this year and the one ahead two of the toughest he's faced in 32 years of drafting budgets, it underlined what town leaders are facing, again, as budget season rolls around.

"Sounds like it's going to be a fun spring," Alderman Jacquie Gist deadpanned after hearing Stewart's reality check at a meeting of the board at Town Hall.

Stewart said that paying for the opening and staffing of the new fire station on Homestead Road and a mandatory increase in the rate the town pays into the employee retirement fund are the biggest fiscal challenges.

He also said he made a pledge to the town's employees that he would do everything he could to avoid any layoffs and furloughs. That'll mean

holding open unfilled positions, cutting back on training and forgoing proposed changes to the town's pay classifications and merit pay system.

In order to avoid a tax increase, the town will have to keep a tight rein on spending.

"We'll be lucky just to continue to do what we've been doing. I don't see that there's any room for new programs or expansion unless we cut somewhere else or we look at a tax increase being imposed," Stewart said.

Carrboro Mayor Mark Chilton said he expects Stewart to try to hold the line on taxes.

"I know the manager will do what he can to make sure there's as little change in taxes as he can figure out how to do," Chilton said Wednesday.

Chilton said he was concerned about the impact on town employees of another year of short staffs and no pay increases.

"I feel like the town's employees have been partners with the taxpayers in trying to deal with the recession," he said.

The board, Chilton said, will need to find a way of letting employees know they are valued by the community.

"We need to find some way to make sure [the employees] are feeling the love," the mayor said.

Also Tuesday night, the board adopted new rules for the design review process for downtown developments. The changes were made to allow for greater flexibility in judging a project's design.

In other action, the board delayed a public hearing on a revision of the town's outdoor-lighting ordinance and on modifications to the town's affordable-housing rules.

The board also delayed a decision on whether to change banks. Chilton said the town's finance department staff is short-staffed and board members wanted to hold off on a decision until the matter could be more thoroughly reviewed and the finance department better prepared to make a change.

Congregations examine issues in mental health

BY TAYLOR SISK
Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL — Like society at large, faith communities often struggle with the complexities of mental illness — how to know, how to help, what to say.

Recognizing the need for better insight, a multi-congregational organization called Faith Connections on Mental Illness convened a forum at Binkley Baptist Church this past Sunday titled "Faith, Hope and Love: When One Suffers from a Mental Illness." This was the second year the forum was held. Approximately a hundred people attended.

A panel of clergy members and advocates, including recipients of mental health care services, stressed the importance of accepting that a person can appear "normal" while experiencing

SEE MENTAL HEALTH PAGE 3

Women's art at heart of fundraising success

BY VALARIE SCHWARTZ

Good ideas, like art and wine, improve with time. In 1983, when Moreton Neal attended a fundraiser for the fledgling Women's Center, she spent her time at the ice cream social held at Pyewacket (a popular quasi-vegetarian restaurant in The Courtyard from 1977-2002) envisioning a better way to raise money.

"Quite frankly, I was a little jealous of Pyewacket," Neal said recently during a lunch of sandwiches from Neal's Deli (owned by son Matt and his wife, Sheila Neal) at her Greenwood neighborhood home.

Twenty-six years ago, Neal was adjusting to life as a single mom while running La Residence, the restaurant she had started with her ex — Bill Neal, whom she had met in French class during their senior year at Duke. The former art major thought of her female employees, many of whom were struggling artists with few options for exhibits, and she visualized a gathering at La Res, with walls adorned with art by women, in her woman-owned-and-run restaurant.

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PHOTO BY VALARIE SCHWARTZ

Perry Deane Young and Moreton Neal surrounded by art collected from her years of curating the Women's Center's annual event.

INSIDE

The facade of saving Bolin Creek

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