

Friday
Partly Cloudy
55/39

Saturday
Clear
57/31

Sunday
Clear
58/39



PHOTO BY KEN MOORE
Tiny speedwells blooming now in local yards

Splendor in the grass

FLORA

By Ken Moore

I'm lucky to live where neighbors have not legislated against hanging laundry out to air dry. In addition to saving electricity and having sun-fresh clothes, I soak up some natural Vitamin D and have the opportunity to enjoy the late February blooming yard.

Many of you have a blooming yard, but you may move over it too quickly to enjoy the diversity of flowers scattered there. But if you have one of those deliberate lawns of turf grass — severely maintained with fertilizers, herbicides and copious amounts of water — you will not have a blooming yard.

To have a blooming yard, you must set about to maintain a "freedom lawn." Such a lawn is not really too much of a challenge to create and maintain. To succeed, all you have to do is nothing. Your yard will become filled with all sorts of volunteer plants that produce flowers during the growing season. In flower now is an assortment of winter annuals that begin growing in the late fall and burst forth with flowers in early February. February and March snows and ice storms merely provide an extra blanket of warmth from freezing temperatures. Flowering close down on the ground seems to be an advantage during typical cold weather.

You may have to get down on hands and knees to conduct some "belly-button botany" observations to appreciate the floral display. One of my favorites is the lowly common chickweed, *Stellaria media*. This bane of the lawn perfectionist can shine up at you like hundreds of little bright stars speckled across a bed of pale-green chickweed foliage. Close observation of the tiny quarter-inch diameter flowers will reveal five pure white petals that are split like rabbit ears, appearing to be ten petals. Gently pull one double petal away from the flower to enjoy

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Cheating scandal rocks high school

By Susan Dickson
Staff Writer

Chapel Hill High School Principal Jackie Ellis said school officials are investigating a cheating incident that students say involved a stolen master key and that dates back several years.

Four Chapel Hill High School students will be suspended and receive zeros on mid-term exams as a result of an incident in which a student took pictures of exam answers on a camera phone and emailed them to other students. While investigating the incident, Ellis said students told officials about a master key to the school that was stolen a number of years ago.

"When one cheating incident was uncovered, a tip led to others with master keys," Ellis said. School officials do not know the last time students used the key, but the cheating incident was discovered last week.

"We have a couple of students who we 100-percent-certain know had access to the building with a master key," Ellis said, adding that school officials are investigating allegations that more students were involved and had keys. According to Ellis, students have said the key was stolen several years ago and has been passed down as students graduated. She said officials might approach graduates regarding the allegations.

According to Stephanie Knott, assistant superintendent for community relations with Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, the school district is treating it as an isolated incident because they lack evidence that more students were involved.

The district held a press conference about the incident Tuesday afternoon, but Knott was the only district official to attend.

"We're concerned about the reputation of the school, of the students, of the district," Knott said. "There are so many instances of students who perform so well, who do so many things, and they do it the right way."

Ellis said she did not know why these particular students felt the need to cheat, but she knows that there is pressure in the school's competitive environment.

"I know what the research says about high schools cheating. I know what the research says about the pressure of students doing well," she said. "We're in a society now that's highly competitive."

"Do I think that students feel pressure to get into the best, most competitive schools? Yes I do," she continued. "I would say that for the most part, I think kids opt to cheat to gain an advantage to do better."

Ellis said the response from the student body has been mixed.

"Some [of the students] are very angry. Some are very sad. It's been unfortunate that ... there's been a divide," Ellis said. "Part of the senior class, they feel that there is a negative reflection on their class and that people will remember their class as the class involved in the cheating incident with the master key."

Ellis said the school is required to notify colleges of any cheating if the schools request a final report on students at the end of the school year.

SEE CHEATING PAGE 8

Teens take charge



PHOTO BY KIRK ROSS

Students, most of them from Cissy O'Neal's ninth grade social studies class at McDougle Middle School, took up the temporary roles of mayor, members of the board of aldermen and concerned citizens offering their opinions to the board at the annual Town Hall Day for Teens Monday at Town Hall. Wendell Rogers, the recreation supervisor with the town's Recreation and Parks Department, who helped organize the event, said he was impressed with the amount of thought and preparation the young people put into the meeting. Town Manager Steve Stewart said he thoroughly enjoyed the discussion,

the student's thoughtfulness and their interest in local government. In the photo above, Mayor Anne Myers (brightly colored hair, in the middle) and Aldermen Alexa Savelli, Chris Rupert, Elizabeth Wilkes, Amelia Riely, William Hutchison and Manoj Paladugu hear a presentation on a proposed new town teen center. Other items on the agenda for the evening included housing for the homeless, sidewalks and bike lanes for Davie Road and/or James Street and, in a demonstration that the students have been paying close attention lately, a proposed new parking lot for downtown.

Buckhorn Village plan draws praise, ire

By Susan Dickson
Staff Writer

County residents were both strongly opposed to and in support of the proposed Buckhorn Village development at a packed Board of County Commissioners public hearing Monday night.

Several residents who live close to the site of the planned development, which is near I-85 and Buckhorn Road at the site of the Buckhorn Flea Market, said they were concerned the development would drive up their property taxes and they wouldn't be able to sell their homes.

"This development is going to be detrimental to my property," said Debra Elmore, a Buckhorn Road resident. "Nobody's going to want to buy my land because it's sitting right beside a mall."

"This township where we're located has always been like the stepchild of Orange County," she continued. "All of sudden, these developers are coming in and we're like the golden child."

"People's lives are going to change in this community."

Others said the development could bring in much-needed sales tax revenue.

"The project will bring more

revenue that can fund a lot of school teachers," said Bill Bunch, chair of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce, adding that the project's developers are locally based and will work to attract local businesses.

Developers and county officials have said the development could bring in sales tax revenue and curb property tax increases. According to county Planning Director Craig Benedict, while county residents lead the state in per capita retail dollars spent, 53 percent of those dollars are spent outside the county.

SEE BUCKHORN PAGE 3

Board approves Roberson Square

By Kirk Ross
Staff Writer

After a long negotiation over parking, a five-story condominium, office and retail project on South Greensboro street won approval Tuesday night from the Carrboro Board of Aldermen.

Construction could begin as early as this summer for the 91,575-square-foot Roberson Square project on the site of the old Andrews-Riggsbee hardware store.

The parking issue had been a main hitch in the plans. Efforts by developer Darcon of NC, represented by architect David Ripperton, to reduce the number of spaces were met with strong opposition from downtown businesses and nearby residents.

In the end, Ripperton and the town agreed on a plan that would prohibit the building from housing a restaurant. Having a restaurant would have required Roberson Square to provide 104 parking spaces. Instead, the building will be configured with three floors of condos — a total of 18 units — and two floors of office and retail space.

Under the town's affordable housing rules, three of the condos will be sold in conjunction with the Orange County Land Trust.

The majority of parking will be underground in a 65-space garage, but the board Tuesday agreed to count an additional seven on-street parking spaces along Carr Street toward the parking goal.

Eliminating the restaurant reduced the number of parking spaces required from 104 to 76 and Ripperton asked that the board again consider eight spaces being built along Roberson Street in the parking-space total. That, the underground garage and the seven new spaces on Carr Street should suffice to meet the goal, he argued. The board had been reluctant in the past to do so since those spaces are already part of the downtown-parking inventory, but agreed to certify the project as meeting the parking goal, clearing the way for final approval.

Ripperton said Wednesday that it will take some time to complete the final construction drawings, but that construction could start in the summer and the project could be well under way by late in the year.

He told the board Tuesday night that the building's design, which includes a number of setbacks, archways, an interior courtyard and other features will be a challenge to construct.



RENDERING COURTESY OF DAVID RIPPERTON
Roberson Square viewed from Carr Street.

Following her heart after saving one

RECENTLY ...

By Valerie Schwartz

When, in the summer of 2004, Maggi Grace learned that the life of her uninsured partner of one year depended upon heart surgery that would cost \$200,000, she responded with both reactions to the fight-or-flight response.

When fighting with the medical community didn't work (her logical approach resulted in cold negative responses), she quickly moved to Plan B provided by her eldest son, Bryan, then a medical student at Stanford University — she looked to India.

SEE RECENTLY PAGE 2



PHOTO BY VALARIE SCHWARTZ
Maggi Grace, in her Carrboro studio, has truly found her way in the world.