

News Briefs

School board member resigns

Orange County School Board member Dennis Whitling resigned last week following his arrest several days prior.

Whitling, 52, was charged with embezzlement, false pretense, obstruction of justice and corporate malfeasance. He had served on the school board for almost four years.

He is accused of stealing more than \$58,000 from the Durham law firm owned by Thomas J. Stevens, where he worked from 1984 to 2007. Whitling left the firm in 2007 to start his own business.

The board decided it would not fill Whitling's seat before the May election.

Hillsborough drought workshop

Orange County will hold an informational workshop about ways to cope with the drought for well water users in rural areas on March 5 at 7 p.m. at Stanback Middle School in Hillsborough.

Speakers will present an update and forecast on the drought situation, information about wells and water production in Piedmont North Carolina geology, how to use sustainable landscaping practices and other basic tips on conserving ground water.

For more information, contact David Stancil, environmental and resource conservation director, at 245-2590 or dstancil@co.orange.nc.us.

Youth charged in shooting

The Chapel Hill Police Department on Monday charged 17-year-old David Earl Ellis Jr. with attempted first-degree murder in the shooting of a 16-year-old victim.

Ellis is accused of shooting the victim on Johnson Street on Monday evening. He is being held in the Orange County jail under a \$200,000 secured bond and appeared in court in Hillsborough on Tuesday.

OWASA meets to discuss shortage

At its meeting tonight (Thursday), the OWASA board will discuss declaring a Stage Three Water Shortage, which would include additional restrictions and surcharges for water use. The meeting is at 7 p.m. at the Chapel Hill Town Hall and will be televised on local cable channel 18. Water reserves have steadily dwindled since last summer. Recent rainfall has not significantly raised lake levels and the current supply would last about five or six more months without further rainfall. OWASA staff recommended that the Stage Three Shortage be declared if lakes were at less than 45 percent capacity at the end of the month. They stand at about 40 percent now.

The board will also consider the use of Jordan Lake as a reservoir in the future, but it would be years before the necessary infrastructure could be built.

MLK resurfacing

Today (Thursday) a company hired by OWASA will repave part of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in Chapel Hill where OWASA recently repaired a water main. The work is expected to last from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. but weather and other factors may affect the schedule. Only one lane will be closed at a time, but drivers are encouraged to use alternate routes. There is also expected to be some noise and dust created by the work.

Census jobs

The US Census Bureau is hiring census workers for Chatham County. About 300 workers are needed in the next three weeks and can earn from \$13.75 to \$15.25 per hour. Most of the available positions are part-time and temporary. Potential workers must take a basic skills test and agree to work about 20 hours a week. English and Spanish speakers are needed. For more information call 1-866-673-2008. The hearing impaired can call (704) 344-6114.

Woman completes 100 trips around the sun

By Kirk Ross
Staff Writer

Madeline Clara Smith spent the first part of her 100th birthday in a way any of us would have it.

"I've been on the phone all morning," she said in a voice that was surprisingly strong and unmistakably that of a true Mainer.

As the calls from family members kept rolling in, the Lewiston, Maine native spent that time on the phone in the comfy confines of her Covenant Place apartment, where she keeps an impressive variety of houseplants.

She is quick to answer one of the most standardized questions in journalism.

Q: How did you live to be 100?
A: Oh, how should I know?

Honestly, she said she never thought she'd live to see Feb. 21, 2008, and then rattled off the age of passing of siblings, parents and friends.



PHOTO BY KIRK ROSS
Madeline Smith jokes with fellow Covenant Place tenant Bettie Graham as Smith's 100th birthday celebration starts up.

She spent almost all of her years in Maine, where she had a career as a nurse. She moved to Covenant Place ten years ago to be close to her son Richard Smith-Overman, her daughter-in-law Patty and

their children. Most days she does some knitting.

"I knit blankets for the children's clinic in Yanceyville where my daughter-in-law works," she said.

BUCKHORN
FROM PAGE 1

According to the developers, if the project is approved they would break ground in mid-2010 and anticipate completion four or five years later. Roger Perry, president of East West Partners, the firm developing Buckhorn Village, said the project could bring in \$6 million a year in sales tax revenue.

The proposed development includes three individual development districts totaling nearly 130 acres, with a proposed maximum of about 1.1 million square feet of building space for the entire property. The first district, about 41 acres, would include no more than four large retailers with a total of 185,000 square feet.

The second district, about 40 acres with 522,000 square feet of buildings, would support mixed-use development including retail, office, restaurants, indoor theaters,

hotels, residential and other similar uses. The third district would be the development's largest district, with about 606,000 square feet on 48 acres. It would include large-scale retail development as well as possible mixed-use projects and an area for local government that would house police, fire or emergency services.

For the Buckhorn Road Associates to begin work on the development, the county must approve the proposed rezoning and special-use permit.

Ben Lloyd, a former county commissioner and a resident of Effland, said that the commissioners need the development in order to bring in additional revenue and curb property tax increases.

"This Buckhorn Village, I applauded. It's the first positive step in years relative to providing the needs for the people and giving us tax relief," he said. "Something has got to give somewhere. People are paying all they can pay."

Other county residents said they were concerned about the effects the mall could have on the county and encouraged the board to pursue other types of projects to bring in revenue and jobs.

"I am almost appalled that the future for Orange County is a mall. This is not why we live in Orange County. We would live in Charlotte or Cary," said Jim Stock. "I think that there is such a lack of leadership that people are being led by developers."

"With more PhDs per square foot that you can shake a stick at, this county ought to be able to come up with something beneficial for the future," he continued. "We can say no to this [development] I think."

The commissioners will discuss the proposed development at their regular meeting on March 6, and could take action as early as May 1. The Orange County Planning Board will provide recommendations to the board of commissioners throughout the review process.

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