

Briefs

140 West Franklin groundbreaking

An official groundbreaking this past Wednesday means construction is about to start for the 140 West Franklin building project at the intersections of Franklin, Church and Rosemary streets in downtown Chapel Hill.

The \$55-million mixed-use development will include 140 homes, 18 of which are affordable units, 26,000 square feet of ground-level retail space and 337 parking spaces. The building will stand four stories tall along Franklin Street and step back to eight stories tall at the center. It is expected to take about 24 months to complete.

Chatham sets landfill meetings

Chatham County will hold a series of four community meetings to present proposed criteria for siting a new landfill and take comments from the public on the process and methods. The criteria will guide the next phase of the siting process, when the county’s project team will narrow the list of nine potential sites down to three.

The meeting schedule is:

- Jan. 11, 10 a.m. to noon at Western Senior Center in Siler City;
- Jan. 18, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Chatham Central High School in Bear Creek;
- Jan. 19, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Chatham Community Library in Pittsboro; and
- Jan. 20, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Moncure Fire Department

Information that will be discussed during the community meetings can be found on the Landfill Information section of the Waste Management department’s website: chathamnc.org/Index.aspx?page=1402

Inactive voters to be contacted

Starting today, the Orange County Board of Elections will mail no-contact voter cards and address confirmation cards to registered voters with whom there has been no contact since the last two general elections.

The forwardable-address confirmation card includes a postage-paid return card and requires a response from the recipient. If the confirmation card is returned as undeliverable or the return card is not returned within 30 days of the date the card was sent, the registrant will be listed as inactive.

Under state rules for maintaining voter rolls, election officials have identified 10,493 voter registrants who have not been active.

If you receive a card addressed to someone who doesn’t live with you, the board asks that you not discard it. Simply write “not at this address” and return. No postage is required.

UNC looses a favorite son

Memorial services will be held Saturday at 1 p.m. at Chapel of the Cross for one of the University of North Carolina’s favorite sons, Douglass Hunt, who died on New Year’s Day in the hospice at the Meadowlands in Hillsborough. He was 86.

After a long legal career and a stint as assistant to the secretary of the treasury in the Johnson

Administration, Hunt was successfully convinced to return to his alma mater in 1973 by then-Chancellor Ferebee Taylor. For the next three decades, Hunt, a member of the Carolina class of 1946, served the university, holding the title “special assistant” to a succession of chancellors until his “partial” retirement in 1996.

Chancellor Holden Thorp

lauded Hunt’s dedication to the university and said his passing was particularly sad because of the connection between Thorp’s family and the Hunts.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with Mary Jane and the Hunt family. By any measure, Doug Hunt was one of Carolina’s model citizens,” Thorp said. “His love for and knowledge of the Uni-

versity was especially intense. The University community has lost an incredible resource. I am also proud to have had a long-standing personal connection to Mr. Hunt because he babysat my father when he lived in Rocky Mount. The Thorp family has always considered him a great friend.” — *Staff Reports*

LAWS
FROM PAGE 1

At 42, Michelle Laws is a community leader and the first female president of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro chapter of the NAACP. The fierce desire for social justice that was nurtured on that playground led her, as a UNC student, to hone her chops at the forefront of the drive to establish a freestanding black cultural center on campus.

She’s been a resolute advocate for the civil rights of university employees and recently has spoken on behalf of Kerry Bigelow and Clyde Clark, public works’ employees fired by the Town of Chapel Hill, and against perceived resegregation of the Wake County schools.

Along the way, she’s learned that though the wheels of justice may move slowly, they do in fact budge.

“As Dr. King has said, the moral arc of the universe indeed is long, but it always bends back toward justice. I have to believe that. I do believe that.”



Michelle Laws

PHOTO BY ALEX MANESS

Beyond race

Michelle Laws’ work is about “pushing back” against what she calls the three greatest ills: ignorance, racism and poverty.

“It’s about fighting against those evils, and the way in which they manifest themselves. We have a duty to treat everybody like everybody else. I’ve been blessed to come a long way from public housing, and I believe that to whom much is given much is also required.”

Laws earned an undergrad degree from UNC in mass communications and a master’s in sociology from N.C. Central. She worked in Washington, D.C. for the National Crime Prevention Council, was legislative liaison for the state Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services and now teaches sociology at Central.

She cites a number of mentors, black and white — among them, lifelong community leader Rebecca Clark; her grandmother; her great-grandmother, Annie Cotton; Valerie Foushee, now an Orange County commissioner; and Al Baldwin, a sociology teacher at Chapel Hill High School.

“I know that my path was opened in a very different way,” she says, “and I believe it was to equip me to fight for others. I don’t take that lightly.... It’s a fight for human dignity and human rights.”

It’s a fight, Laws says, that transcends race:

“Right now, I think it’s more of a class struggle, though certainly there’s this intersectionality of race and class that we can’t disentangle.

“I have trouble convincing well-to-do, affluent black folks that they need to be a part of the struggle. I have [black] people who will look at me as if I’m absolutely crazy when I talk about the agenda of the NAACP and why it’s so important to fight for education, to continue to fight for fair and affordable housing, for us to continue to fight for jobs.

defeat, after defeat,” she says, “that battle, in a lot of ways, gives me hope that eventually things do indeed turn out in favor of those who are fighting for what’s right and just.”

But, she adds, the battle was also sad to experience.

“It was sad because most of those residents out there were service workers. They worked for families, they worked for the town, they worked for the university as housekeepers and so forth.” Despite their service, they were abandoned, she feels, in their struggle for fundamental amenities.

Effecting real change will take true courage, Laws says. “We haven’t seen it in our president. It takes courage to say that I’m going to push back because it’s not right.” On the pressure put on President Obama to extend tax cuts, for example: “I dare you. I dare you.” That’s what I was hoping he was going to say. Courage.”

Of the future, she says, “I’m hopeful; I’m hopeful. I don’t know if optimism is warranted at this point. But my faith requires that I be hopeful.”

Her greatest joy, Laws says, is “when I’m part of a movement where there’s such great diversity, and people are coming together in this human spirit, and saying, ‘Doggone it, we may go down like the Titanic, but we’re going to fight.’”

“As Dr. King has said, the moral arc of the universe indeed is long, but it always bends back toward justice. I have to believe that. I do believe that.”

‘No shame in losing’

As president of the local chapter of the NAACP and champion of the disenfranchised, Laws sees education as the first priority: investing wisely in public schools, closing the achievement gap and assuring affordable access to colleges and universities. Economic disparity is of equal concern.

Though not by any means anti-capitalist — she points out that her husband, Quintin Laws, comes from a long line of entrepreneurs — Laws laments “this uncontrollable greed on Wall Street, people going uncensored, unaccountable, and acting like it’s an entitlement.”

Meanwhile, “the unemployment rate in the African-American community is in double digits; it’s awful. Then you dis-aggregate that even more, and you look at black males ...”

“I’d almost rather be on that ship, going down like the Titanic, with people fighting for human rights and social justice, than to be on the other side with the people that we’re fighting against.

“There’s no shame in losing, only in not fighting.”

That fight, Laws says, is in her DNA.

“I don’t know anything but that.

“I still believe in the good in mankind and that if you keep reminding people of that, you keep insisting that that’s indeed the standard — that it’s not an exception; that’s the standard — then eventually that moral arc will bend back.”

And though the merry-go-round may wobble, a solid shoulder, a sound voice, will right it.

PET OF THE WEEK

ORANGE COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES —Meet Princess! This lovable pit bull/Lab mix is around 9 months old and looking for a new place to call home this New Year. She’s a sweet, well-mannered girl who gets along with people of all ages, loves car rides and toys and is eager to do whatever it takes to make you happy! Princess would love a home where she can accompany you on long walks and adventures, and then crash on the couch for belly rubs and cuddling! Visit her today at Orange County Animal Services, 1601 Eubanks Road in Chapel Hill. You can also see her and other adoptable animals online at www.co.orange.nc.us/animalservices/adoption.asp



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