

TAXES

▶ FINAL TWO SESSIONS ADDRESS QUESTIONS

Do taxes confuse you? Were you upset during the 1997 property reappraisal? Are you worried your home's value will skyrocket when Gaston County reveals new property values in February?

Get an insider's view of tax appraisals, and question top taxman Jay Heavner at one of the following sessions:

■ 7 tonight, Gaston Main Library, 1555 E. Garrison Blvd., Gastonia
■ 7 p.m. Thursday, Citizens Resource Center, 1303 Dallas-Cherryville Highway, Dallas

Tax reappraisal notices should hit property owners' mailboxes next week.

MOUNT HOLLY

▶ OPEN MEETINGS TO UPDATE RESIDENTS ON VISIONING INITIATIVE

MOUNT HOLLY — The city of Mount Holly will hold open meetings at noon each Friday to update residents on the Visioning Initiative.

The meetings will be held at City Hall, 131 S. Main St. Anyone interested in the strategic planning initiative is welcome to attend.

BESSEMER CITY

▶ RETREAT SCHEDULED FOR COUNCIL, OTHERS

BESSEMER CITY — Bessemer City council and top administrators will hold a retreat next week at the Comfort Suites in Gastonia.

Hours will be 2 to 9 p.m. on Feb. 27 and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Feb. 28.

FINAL SWEEP

▶ N.C. DOT CONTINUES PICKING UP DEBRIS

RALEIGH — The N.C. Department of Transportation continues to pick up debris from the December ice storm along state-maintained highways and will make a final sweep of roads beginning March 1.

Property owners should bring wood, storm-related debris to the right of way by March 1 for pick up and are asked to cut into 5- or 6-foot pieces.

To date the department has picked up more than 2.5 million cubic yards of storm debris.

For more information, contact the DOT's customer service office toll free at 1-877-368-4968.

GADGET GURUS

▶ GAZETTE WANTS TO KNOW THE STORY

Calling all gearheads. Do computer chips make your pulse race?

Gotta have that satellite radio, handheld global positioning system or a camera phone? We'd like to know how your newest electronic gadget affects your life. Call — satellite, cellular or an old-fashioned land-line will do — (704) 869-1823 or e-mail kevin_ellis@link.freedom.com, and let us tell your hi-tech story.

DEMOCRATS

▶ MEETING SCHEDULED

Gaston County Democrats are getting an early start on the 2004 election.

Local party chairman T.J. Solomon invites all Democrats to a planning session to be held Thursday at Unity Place, 201 W. Franklin Blvd., Gastonia.

The meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m.; arrive at 6 for free food.

COMING WEDNESDAY

A 7-year-old girl received her first haircut for a special cause. She wanted to give her locks to children who have lost their hair.



Mike Hensdill/The Gazette

Mildred Sadler sits in her home on Sugar Springs Road. She will receive the W. Duke Kimbrell Lifetime Achievement award Thursday.

Retired educator to receive lifetime achievement award

Recipient credits accomplishments to upbringing

By NANCY MOORE
Gazette Staff Reporter

Growing up on a farm near Clover, S.C., Mildred Sadler saw her grandparents extend a helping hand to people needing help during the Depression.

"My grandmother was a member of the Betterment Club," Sadler said, as she explained why she feels a desire to help others. "She was always baking and sending food, helping to buy books and supplies for school. My grandfather was always sharing. Both of them helped take care of the sick. We didn't call it volunteering back then."

Sadler, 78, will receive the W. Duke Kimbrell Lifetime Civic Achievement Award on Thursday from the Gastonia Jaycees.

"I was just aghast," Sadler said when she was told about the award. "I didn't know what to say. I'm really humbled."

She credits her upbringing for giving her what she needed to achieve in both her career and non-professional life.

Awards ceremony

The annual Gastonia Jaycees Distinguished Service Awards ceremony will be held at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Gaston Country Club. For more information, call Carey Roberts at (704) 864-2623.

"I am blessed to have overcome so much," Sadler said. "God gave me traits that make me accepted by most people. If I have been blessed, I need to pass it on. I could stay at home and make this house cleaner or better, but I want to go out there and help others."

Sadler worked on the family farm, where her parents and her siblings lived with her father's parents.

"We had our own livestock and grew cotton," Sadler said. "We had chickens and wheat and my mother took in washing to supplement the family income."

Religion has always been important to her, from her childhood days at

Greenpond Church in Clover to St. Stephens AME Zion Church currently.

Sadler was a key figure in St. Stephen's move from Marietta Street to Franklin Boulevard, according to the Rev. Bernard Sullivan.

"She's been a pivotal part of St. Stephen's," Sullivan said. "She's done everything from helping in the kitchen to strategic planning, which led us to our move."

"It was best for us," Sadler said, "but still difficult. We wanted to bring our traditions, but do some new things, too. Change can be difficult. It's so important to keep lines of communication open."

Sadler's active in local, district and regional denomination work.

"I was appointed to a committee formed in October 2001 to study whether we ought to make any changes in the denomination," Sadler said. "We met every month for about six months and presented our preliminary report in July 2002."

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Mike Hensdill/The Gazette

Tyler Horn, 12, holds onto Seth White, 13, as they sled past Tommy Parnelle, 13, while sledding Monday down Bridle Path Trail. Classes at Gaston County Schools were canceled as ice remained on secondary roads in the area. School was canceled again today because of road conditions.

School canceled again today

By JOSHUA LUCAS
Gazette Staff Reporter

The farther into the year Gaston County Schools gets, the harder it's becoming for it to get out.

School officials called off school again today because of poor road conditions, meaning students now have four school days to make up because of winter weather.

In a cruel twist of fate, Monday was to have been one of those days.

The next days available for making up school will be March 13 and 14 and April 14, the first

day of students' spring break.

Administrators had hoped to make up days on March 13 and 14 without having to cut into spring break. That seems unlikely now.

As the calendar stands, the next two days to make up would be on April 14 and 15. Any further days missed also would come out of spring break.

System officials are working with school board members to come up with calendar revisions.

"I've been here since 1991, and I don't remember ever hav-

ing to go into spring break to any degree," Deputy Superintendent Reeves McGlohon said.

Other school systems, buffeted by three serious winter storms this season, are facing the same problem. Lincoln County also has stricken days from its spring break.

State education officials five years ago lost the ability to allow systems to forgive days lost to bad weather. All school systems must attend school for 180 days each year.

Worst of all, there's still an-

other month of winter to go, meaning there could be even more days for the system to make up.

"I wouldn't use the term worried, but we certainly hope we won't have any more winter weather," McGlohon said.

The only alternative to removing days from spring break was holding school on Saturdays, an option the system rejected because attendance at Saturday school has traditionally been low.

You can reach reporter Joshua Lucas at (704) 869-1902.

Frigid temperatures may stunt insect population

By LAURA FIORILLI
Gazette Staff Reporter

The extreme weather that's been bugging Gaston County this winter may help make things less buggy come spring.

Hibernating insects can survive snow and ice. But a night or two of extreme cold can freeze their larvae and their eggs underground, reducing the number that will hatch when the weather warms up.

"The damage is done by the single-digit and teen temperatures over a couple of days," said

Curtis Hopper, environmental health administrator. "If you start out with fewer breeding insects in the spring, then by the time summer's over, you'll see a difference in the insect population."

Local temperatures dipped into the teens and single digits several times in January, according to records from the Gazette weather station.

January temperatures this year in Charlotte were about 4 degrees below the previous 30-year average, according to the National Weather Service. Records show

the average temperature this year was 37.3 degrees.

"It has been a colder-than-normal winter," said David Fogarty, director of the Gaston County N.C. Cooperative Extension office. "You'd hope that would knock back the insect population."

Hopper's office certainly hopes so. Environmental health workers monitor the area for West Nile virus, which is transmitted by mosquitoes. No human in Gaston County has been stricken with the virus, which causes flu-like symptoms, since it appeared

in the U.S. in 1999. But workers have found several birds that have died of the disease.

Fewer mosquitoes means less of a chance Gaston will see its first case of West Nile in a human. The environmental health office doesn't have a way to measure the mosquito population, but workers know that if they're getting complaints about mosquitoes in early March, it's going to be a buggy year.

You can reach Laura Fiorilli at (704) 869-1828.

Hearing to address stormwater runoff plan

By DANA HAYDOCK
Gazette Staff Reporter

BELMONT — When it rains, roads, lawns, parking lots and construction sites all contribute to pollution in the form of stormwater runoff into the Catawba River and its tributaries.

Belmont is among the cities that operate stormwater sewage systems required under the federal Clean Water Act to develop a plan to reduce pollutants from washing into local waterways. Residents can learn more about the plan and possible fees connected to it at a public hearing Feb. 26.

"It's not flood relief," Belmont City Manager Barry Webb said of the plan. "The main effort is to see if there are things getting into runoff that are causing pollution that can be prevented."

The management plan may be a federal requirement, but that doesn't mean the city will receive money to administer it. Money to pay for the program will come from either a fee or an increase in taxes, Webb said.

"The biggest question is, 'What is this going to cost me?'" Webb said. "We don't have that answer right now."

Under the plan, the city will need to pay for an audit of its stormwater sewage system, education about the stormwater program, ongoing construction site erosion inspection and physical changes like wetlands in areas where runoff is a problem.

Webb said he does not expect Belmont's fee or tax to come close to Gastonia's extra \$2.75 charged to utility bills each month. In Gastonia, businesses are charged according to their square footage and the fee can be reduced if the property contains a stormwater retention system.

That's the key to a stormwater management plan. Before development paved and otherwise smoothed out the landscape, forested areas acted as water filters.

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Kings Mountain Board of Education to hire consultant to save on energy

By AMY KENNA
Special to The Gazette

KINGS MOUNTAIN — The Kings Mountain Board of Education is planning to adopt a conservation program designed to cut school energy costs after a discussion at this week's board meeting.

The district will employ a

part-time "energy management consultant" through a company called Energy Education Inc. to help the effort, board Chairwoman Shearra Miller said.

"They will help us cut usage so that we can conserve more energy in schools," Miller said. She said the energy consultant would move from school to

school, educating employees on energy-saving techniques.

"They'll go to offices and tell us about the little things you just don't think about," she said.

The conservation plan comes with a guarantee: If Kings Mountain Schools spends more on the consultant than it saves in energy costs, it will be reimbursed.

The energy consultant will not try to sell new equipment to the schools, Miller said.

"If a heating unit went out, they might give advice," she said. "But this is not a business where they need to sell products. This will be what we can do naturally to save energy."

Miller said Kings Mountain

Schools Superintendent Larry Allen got the idea by speaking with the superintendent of Hickory City Schools, which already has adopted the energy conservation program.

Kings Mountain will start the program this year.

"We want to get a head-start on it," she said.