

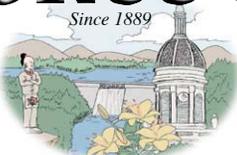
Cherokee Scout

Since 1889



Conference champs

Two Murphy High School wrestlers bring home titles. 12A



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Murphy, North Carolina

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Legislature helping Possum Drop

Legislation would allow permits for live opossums to be used during New Year's Eve Possum Drop

By JOSEPH MARTIN
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Raleigh - State House Rep. Roger West (R-Peachtree) introduced a bill Feb. 4 that would amend the wildlife captivity license law that could grant a license allowing a live opossum to be used in the New Year's Eve Possum Drop.

The bill adds language allowing captivity for "scientific, educational or exhibition purposes."

The bill was discussed in the

Rules Committee on Feb. 6 and was put on the calendar for Feb. 12. Sen. Jim Davis (R-Franklin) submitted a companion bill in the Senate titled, "The Opossum Right-to-Work Act," on Feb. 6.

"It's going to be great if it passes," said Clay Logan, founder and master of ceremonies for the Possum Drop.

"It makes it better if we have a live possum."

"It's just a tradition. It seemed like the wind was taken out of



If you aren't checking out cherokeescout.com, you missed reading about this last week.

everybody's sails here. The crowd wasn't as lively. They were disappointed." Logan's use of a live opossum was challenged by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. On Nov. 13, Senior Administrative Law Judge Fred Morrison sided with the animal rights organization and ruled that Logan didn't qualify for a permit to hold an opossum captive.

If West's amendment passes, the

"In today's world of virtually unlimited entertainment choices, there is no excuse for continuing to exploit groundhogs, opossums or any other animals."

- David Perle

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission will be able to issue Logan a permit to keep opossums captive.

"It's just a very minor change," West said. While Logan will still have to apply for a permit, "He would be able to apply."

Chances of the changes being rati-

fied are good. West hasn't spoken to Gov. Pat McCrory, but "we don't see a problem with him signing it," he said.

Logan's Possum Drop at Clay's Corner on Old U.S. 64 in Brassstown, where a live possum has been lowered at midnight, has been a family-oriented local New Year's Eve tradition since 1994.

While Logan returns the animals to the wild after the event, PETA maintains that opossums are traumatized by being suspended in a clear cage surrounded by cheering crowds and loud fireworks.

see POSSUM, 2A

Creative careers



Students at Mountain Youth School in Martins Creek - Mylo LaTour, 12; Anthony Hill, 12; Nick Flowers, 15; and Matthew Hughes, 13 (from left) - check out their fellow students' clay sculptures made Feb. 6-7 during the school's "Careers in Creativity" event. Local ceramicist Mike LaLone volunteered his time to teach the class, as did other arts professionals involved in the program. For more on "Careers in Creativity," see page 1B.

Families in crisis

Is state's mental health system broken or inadequate for western North Carolina?

By LORRAINE BENNETT
Contributing Writer

The national debate over what to do about mental health care in this country is felt every day in western North Carolina. Caregivers search for answers to questions like: How do I care for my loved one who has been stricken with a mental health disease? What help can I expect, if any, from the state and federal governments? If none is forthcoming, where do I turn?

The tragic elementary school shooting on Dec. 14 in Newtown, Conn., where 26 people were killed by a young man who later turned a gun on himself, has put a new spotlight on mental illness and the challenging problems it poses.

Sufficient mental health services seem to be available in some geographic areas but in short supply in others. That raises the question: Is the mental health system adequate, insufficient or outright broken for needy western North Carolina residents who have a challenging psychotic episode?

One troubling case

Just ask Beverly Dockery of Murphy this question, and there is no doubt where she stands.

When she talked about her daughter, who she described as manic depressive/bipolar, concern etched deep lines in her face. Dockery said she has no love for a system that chained her daughter to a bed at Murphy Medical Center in Peachtree for more than a year.

So Dockery called 911. Her daughter was taken to Murphy Medical. She was admitted through the emergency room, then was moved into the MedSurg unit and later back to the ER.

There, Dockery said, her

First in a four-part series



THE N.C. MENTAL HEALTH SHUFFLE

settled on was at the other end of the state—a nine-hour drive away. From her perspective, it might as well have been on the moon.

Dockery said her daughter, now in her 40s, has suffered mental episodes for most of her life. At age 3, a psychiatrist described the daughter as retarded, predicted she would be unable to learn and suggested that she be placed in an institution. "I didn't accept it, and I brought her home," Dockery said. "She's high-functioning. She completed the 11th grade at Murphy High. But I don't let her drive because of her judgment. She makes poor choices. She would lash out and get into trouble because of her disability."

In a familiar setting with no stress, Dockery said her daughter functions pretty well. However, when anything disrupts that routine, trouble often follows.

That is what happened in September, Dockery said. At first, her daughter grew quiet and withdrawn. Then she began to lash out before becoming uncontrollable.

So Dockery called 911. Her daughter was taken to Murphy Medical. She was admitted through the emergency room, then was moved into the MedSurg unit and later back to the ER.

There, Dockery said, her

see CRISIS, 7A

Community contemplates its future

50 years after King's 'dream,' leaders in Texana say pride still alive in community

By JOSEPH MARTIN
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The Texana community was founded about 1850, a time when most Americans in the South were still considered someone else's property.

The community is named for Texas "Texana" McClelland, a former slave who moved into the community with her family. The community would develop into a self-supporting community that would play an equal role in the county.

On Aug. 28, it will have been 50 years since Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. His dream and legacy are still celebrated in Texana, a



community that remained strong, self-sufficient and family oriented from slavery through the Jim Crow era while the world around them changed for the better.

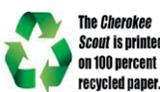
"Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Look-out Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from every mountain side. Let freedom ring," King said in his speech.

While change came to Texana, Murphy and the county without the conflict as other places, black children in the town and

see TEXANA, 2A



Eiural Turner, president of the Texana Community Club, shows off a history quilt outside the Texana Community Center. The quilt, created by various community members, is made from photos of people and places from Texana's past printed on cloth and hand-stitched into the quilt.



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Partly cloudy skies this weekend. 9B

GOOD NEWS Cherokee County Sharing Center able to help more than 1,100 families. 3A

NEXT WEEK Wait times on rise for beds in state psychiatric hospitals.

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