

Across the Region

THE LATEST FROM MECKLENBURG,
THE REGION AND THE STATE



PRO CYCLISTS TAKE OVER UPTOWN



JONATHAN YOUNG - jyoung@charlotteobserver.com

Cyclists round the first turn at Sixth and North Tryon streets during the women's race of the Presbyterian Hospital Invitational Criterium in uptown Charlotte on Saturday. Katharine Carroll of California won the women's race, and Argentinian Alejandro Borrajo was the men's winner.

The Vue condo tower continues climbing uptown

CHARLOTTE — While construction at its competitors for "Tallest Condo Tower in Charlotte" remains stalled, The Vue in Fourth Ward recently began vertical construction.

Scheduled to open in late summer or early fall 2010, the 50-story tower's construction hasn't slowed much.

The 210 Trade tower — planned to have 50-plus stories at the EpiCentre — is mired in lawsuits between the developer and contractor. The development of One Charlotte and 300 South Tryon, two other condo towers, has also been postponed. — DAN TIERNY

Regional briefs

CABARRUS COUNTY ■ HARRISBURG

The North Mecklenburg Animal Rescue is having its best year — more dog rescues, adult dog adoptions and volunteer support. But its best year could also be its last.

The rescue, which moved from Charlotte to Harrisburg in 2004, has lost its major source of funding, which contributed about \$2,000 monthly.

"The property will be going up for sale this fall," said the nonprofit's founder, Beth Phillips. — KAREN SULLIVAN

IREDELL COUNTY ■ MOORESVILLE

After a national search, town

commissioners on Friday voted unanimously to hire a town manager who has run communities in Ohio for 30 years.

Steven Husemann, 57, begins work in Mooresville on Sept. 2.

He is executive director of the Miami Valley (Ohio) Communications Council, an organization of eight cities and 16 affiliates that monitors and regulates common cable TV franchise agreements and government cable channels.

Mooresville has been in the cable TV business since December, when the town and Davidson bought the former local Adelphia system and created MI-Connection. — JOE MARUSAK

UNION COUNTY ■ MONROE

An effort is under way to turn the 122-year-old courthouse on Monroe's town square into a museum that enshrines Union County's history.

The distinctive red-brick courthouse would anchor the proposed Union County Heritage Center and Museum, which would incorporate the Marshville museum in the old Town Hall and the Union County Heritage Room.

The Union County Board of Commissioners on July 21 unanimously approved a \$50,000 contract with a Cleveland-based consultant. — MIKE TORRALBA

Police digest

MECKLENBURG COUNTY ■ CHARLOTTE

An argument over a home-improvement project left one man stabbed in the chest and

the other jailed on assault charges, police say.

It happened on Eastway Drive Friday evening. Police say Sterling Jerome Watson, 45, and Edward Lee Douglas, 40, argued over payment for the home project. Watson was stabbed in the chest several times. He was taken to Carolinas Medical Center, where he was in critical but stable condition.

Police charged Douglas, who lives at 3345 Autumn Ridge Drive, with assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill or inflict serious injury. He remains in the Mecklenburg County jail today on \$75,000 bond. — ANN DOSS HELMS

MECKLENBURG COUNTY ■ CHARLOTTE

An undercover prostitution sting in west Charlotte netted 24 arrests Thursday, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police announced Saturday.

The eight-hour operation took place primarily in the Lockwood, Druid Hills, Enderly Park and Lakewood communities. One man and 23 women were arrested on prostitution and drug charges. — CLEVE WOOTSON AND WCNC-TV

UNION COUNTY ■ WINGATE

The pilot of a small Cessna that crashed near Wingate Saturday morning survived with only minor injuries, Union County dispatchers say.

The plane went down around 9:15 a.m. off Austin Chaney Road, north of U.S. 74, said Susan Myers of the dispatch office. She had few other details, including the pilot's name.

A cow was injured in the crash landing, she said. — ANN DOSS HELMS

Dr. Traffic

Next section of I-485 delayed until October

STEVE HARRISON



A section of Interstate 485 in northwest Mecklenburg will likely open in late October instead of late September, but the Alexanderana Road bridge over Interstate 77 near Northlake Mall is still scheduled to open before the start of school. Virginia Beach-based Skanska said it expects the bridge to open by Aug. 25, giving residents a much-needed east-west route. The bridge will connect Mt. Holly-Huntersville Road with Old Statesville Road, making it easier to reach North Mecklenburg High.

A three-week delay in opening the section of I-485, from N.C. 16 to a massive interchange at I-77 and N.C. 115, is mostly due to rain, said Mark Hubbard, a Skanska spokesman.

"If the ground is muddy, or wet, we can't lay asphalt," Hubbard said. "We're hoping the thunderstorms stay away from our area."

Skanska is still laying the shoulders on the main road.

The 5.5-mile section of I-485 has had a tortured history. The \$94 million project was supposed to be finished in the spring of 2007, and Skanska and the N.C. Department of Transportation are squabbling over who is to blame for the delay. Skanska has said it couldn't begin work on the road because the DOT hadn't acquired all of the rights-of-way and hadn't moved utilities. The DOT has admitted it didn't have the project ready, though it has said Skanska is also at fault.

That will be the last section of I-485 to open for possibly nine or 10 years. Construction on the final leg in northeast Mecklenburg isn't scheduled to begin until 2015.

Hartgen ranks states for congested interstates

David Hartgen is mostly known recently as a critic of Charlotte's ambitious plans to expand public transportation, and he was in favor of repealing the half-cent sales tax for mass transit. But Hartgen, professor emeritus of transportation at UNC Charlotte, has done most of his work on roads — what highways should be built and where.

He recently released his 17th study ranking states and their highways on a variety of measures, such as the condition of their roads and congestion.

The good news for North Carolina is that, by Hartgen's measures, the state's highways are getting better. In a cost-effectiveness ranking, N.C. was the 23rd best state, up from 31st the year before. Hartgen said that's mostly because of a reduction in the percent of its urban interstates in poor condition.

Some of the reasons: The opening of the Interstate 540 loop in Raleigh, and the repaving of much of I-77 through Charlotte.

North Carolina's worst ranking is the percent of its urban interstates that are congested. N.C. is 48th, with just over 70 percent of its urban freeways clogged, according to the study.

Only Minnesota and California had a lower ranking.

It should be noted that Hartgen uses a slightly different definition of congested than the federal government. Hartgen's study classifies a road as congested when it reached 70 percent of capacity, while the federal government's standard is 80 percent.

I haven't run the numbers, but I'm guessing North Carolina's ranking would improve if an 80 percent standard were used. N.C.'s urban interstates are indeed congested — the result of the state's explosive growth and the Department of Transportation's lack of money. But North Carolina lacks the truly hellish traffic of, say, Atlanta, Miami or Houston — cities in states whose interstates are less congested, according to Hartgen's study.

South Carolina had better grades. It ranked 33rd in terms of congested urban interstates, and its overall ranking was sixth.

The study was done in conjunction with the Reason Foundation, a libertarian think tank based in Los Angeles.

Public hearings to address Gaston toll road

The N.C. DOT is holding three public hearings for people who want to weigh in on the Garden Parkway, a 23-mile expressway that's slated to open in Gaston County by 2015.

The Garden Parkway, also known as the Gaston East-West Connector, will begin at Interstate 485 south of Charlotte/Douglas International Airport. It will then cross the Catawba River and go through south Gaston County, paralleling I-85. It will then turn north and connect with I-85 just east of the U.S. 29/74 interchange in west Gaston.

The road has been talked about for 20 years in Gaston, but has recently gained momentum. The General Assembly made it a toll road in 2006, and this year legislators gave it \$35 million annually to help pay for construction.

The meetings will be from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.:

- Wednesday at Olympic High School, 4301 Sandy Porter Road in Charlotte.
- Thursday at South Point High School, 906 South Point Road in Belmont.
- Monday, Aug. 11, at Gastonia Adult Recreation Center, 519 W. Franklin Blvd., in Gastonia.

DOT officials will answer questions and receive comments about the road.

Steve Harrison: sharrison@charlotteobserver.com; 704-358-5160.

'Extreme Makeover' home draws thousands to help

Volunteers working nonstop, and lead builder expects construction to be finished this morning.

BY MARK WASHBURN
TV/Radio Writer

It's like there's pixie dust fallout on Sudbury Road — a feel-good current as thousands of strangers pour energy into Charlotte's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" project.

Volunteers have been working around the clock since Wednesday on a new home for the family of Curtis and Alisha King, home day-care operators selected by the ABC show because of their community service.

"It's nice to feel you're doing something positive for a family that's doing positive things in the community," said volunteer Rebecca Ripple, a preschool teacher from Concord. "We need more positive people."

Ripple came Saturday with about 40 volunteers from Ruckus House Learning Center to do sanding, clean-up and other tasks.

"You just can't help but get caught up in the positive energy," said Connie McNeely of Charlotte. Her 13-year-old son Kent had been coming to the site

all week, nagging lead builder Rick Merlini to let his dad join the build.

Merlini said he liked Kent's persistence and on Saturday, the dad — Grant McNeely, a Charlotte general contractor — was sweating away on the job. "It's like a family atmosphere out here," McNeely said.

Returning the blessings

JoAnn Cameron of Charlotte worked at a station at nearby Eastland Mall, uniting volunteers with hard hats and blue T-shirts.

She understands better than many the miracle of helpful strangers. Eleven years ago this month, she gave birth to quadruplets. But one son, Mac, died 18 months later from lingering health problems.

Strangers showed up at their house to help. Church groups brought things they needed and people helped care for their home and family.

"I felt it on one side and the King family is going to feel it, too — how much people care."

For some volunteers, shifts went longer than planned.

Eddie Stewart with Air Today of Charlotte arrived about midnight Thursday to finish installation of heating and air conditioning, a Hon-



MARK WASHBURN - mwashburn@charlotteobserver.com

The Extreme Makeover home in Windsor Heights is being built for the home day-care operators Curtis and Alisha King and their family. Builders expect to be finished with the house this morning.

eywell system that uses ultraviolet light and microfilters to combat spores and mold. Laila King, 7, suffers from asthma.

But an overnight rain delayed construction. Stewart and his team napped in trucks until about 7 a.m.

Friday when they were able to get into the house to finish the system, worth more than \$45,000, which included 14 SEER heat pumps donated by Ferguson Heating & Cooling and Goodman Manufacturing.

How it's going

Construction of the "Extreme Makeover" house is on schedule and should be finished today. Lead builder Rick Merlini estimates he'll turn over the keys to producers about 8 a.m.

Saturday: Painting, interior details installed.

Today: Deadline for construction, move in furnishings.

Monday: "Move That Bus" reveal, tentatively about 2 p.m.

Information: www.ExtremeMakeoverCharlotte.com

Want to see it?

There is no parking in the immediate vicinity of the "Extreme Makeover" site in Windsor Park. Spectators should take the CATS bus, Route 232, Grier Heights. It takes about six minutes to get to the set and leaves Eastland Mall Community Transit Center, 5411 Central Ave., every 15 to 30 minutes. It costs 60 cents one way, or \$1.20 for a round trip. CATS accepts exact change only. Spectators should bring water bottles and wear comfortable shoes.