

The Daily Southerner

Weather for Tarboro
 Cloudy
 Time: 9:30 am
 Temp: 82 F
 RealFeel Temp:
 Humidity: 80 %
 Winds: SSW at

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Tuesday July 12, 2005 Tarboro, N.C.

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News

Participants talk about need and opportunities in Edgecombe County

By *MATTHEW WHITTLE, STAFF WRITER*

The state of Tarboro and Edgecombe County was the topic of discussion Wednesday afternoon as Charlie Gaddy and the "WRAListens" tour came to town to meet with six county residents and discuss their views of the area's positive attributes, as well as the negative ones.



Pet owners like Eddie Andrews of Tarboro can take their animals to Martin Middle School if evacuated from their homes. The shelter is a collaboration between Edgecombe County Emergency Services, Edgecombe Public Schools and the American Red Cross. Photo/Calvin Adkins

Held in the Hobson Pittman Gallery of

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the Blount-Bridgers House in Tarboro, the six-member panel touched on issues ranging from Tarboro's downtown revitalization, to the need to draw more business and industry, to the thriving arts community, to the growing Hispanic population and to the continuing effects of Hurricane Floyd.

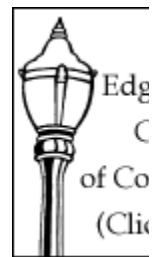
The county representatives were Joe Pitt, owner of ACE Hardware on Main Street and chairman of the Tarboro Area Development Council; Dr. Deborah Lamm, president of Edgemcombe Community College; Doris Stith, director of the Community Enrichment Organization; Bill Negron, English-as-a-second language teacher for ECC; W. Terry Smith, editor of The Daily Southerner and Tom Porter, local farmer and president of the Edgemcombe County Farm Bureau.

Carol Quigless also was invited to participate but was unable due to family illness.

"This one went very well. They were a phenomenal panel," Gaddy said afterwards. "This is an opportunity for us to get out and get into the communities and find out what people are thinking about.

"Every county is different, even if some of the issues are the same, they're still colored differently."

Jobs and economic development drove much of the conversation Wednesday. Mentioned was the recent loss of a Gatorade



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"WRAListens" host Charles Gaddy, center, shares a laugh with, from left, Tom Porter, Doris Stith, Joe Pitt and Dr. Debroah Lamm at the end of taping.

distribution center to Virginia, but panel members chose to not dwell on that disappointment, hoping instead that the exposure and lessons learned from that experience would keep Edgecombe County on other industry short lists.

The panel also discussed

several positive recent developments, such as the opening of Java Time Cafe next to the county Veterans Museum in downtown Tarboro, the progress being made on turning the Royster-Clark Building into arts center and the work being done to create a paddling trail on the Tar River.

"We cannot ever, ever stop recruiting industries, but it's not all smokestacks and large industry that we're chasing. We need to cash in on the good stuff we have here," Pitt said.

Among those resources are the Tar River and opportunities it brings for eco-tourism, a thriving arts community with over 50 active artists and a new performance venue at ECC's Keihin Auditorium in the Arts, Civic and Technology Center, as well as the historic district, which Pitt described as the second-largest in the state.

Another resource is the community college as Lamm discussed the efforts ECC makes to help provide not only basic and generalized workforce training, but also specialized training for particular businesses and industries.

"Our mission is to provide quality workforce training and to continue to build partnerships in the community," Lamm said.

By providing such training and by luring businesses and industries to the area, one effect that many on the panel are hopeful will occur, is the ability to keep the county's young adults from leaving to find better opportunities.

"That has historically been a challenge for us," Stith said.

But she said, more and more of "our children are looking for opportunities in their hometown area."

Such discussions seemed to underscore what Smith said about what is necessary for the county to grow.

"Jobs are the silver bullet," he said.

The panel also discussed how the needs of the growing Hispanic population are being met by the county and the school system and the community college, but also how much is still left to be done, as well as how the agricultural community, which just opened a new livestock arena in the Kingsboro community, is still very much alive despite recent struggles.

Overall the panel was optimistic that though there is still much Tarboro and Edgecombe County can improve on, things are headed in the right direction.

"We've got so much to be thankful for in Tarboro and Edgecombe County," Smith said.

Lamm agreed, saying "I think we've got a wonderful future ahead of us."

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