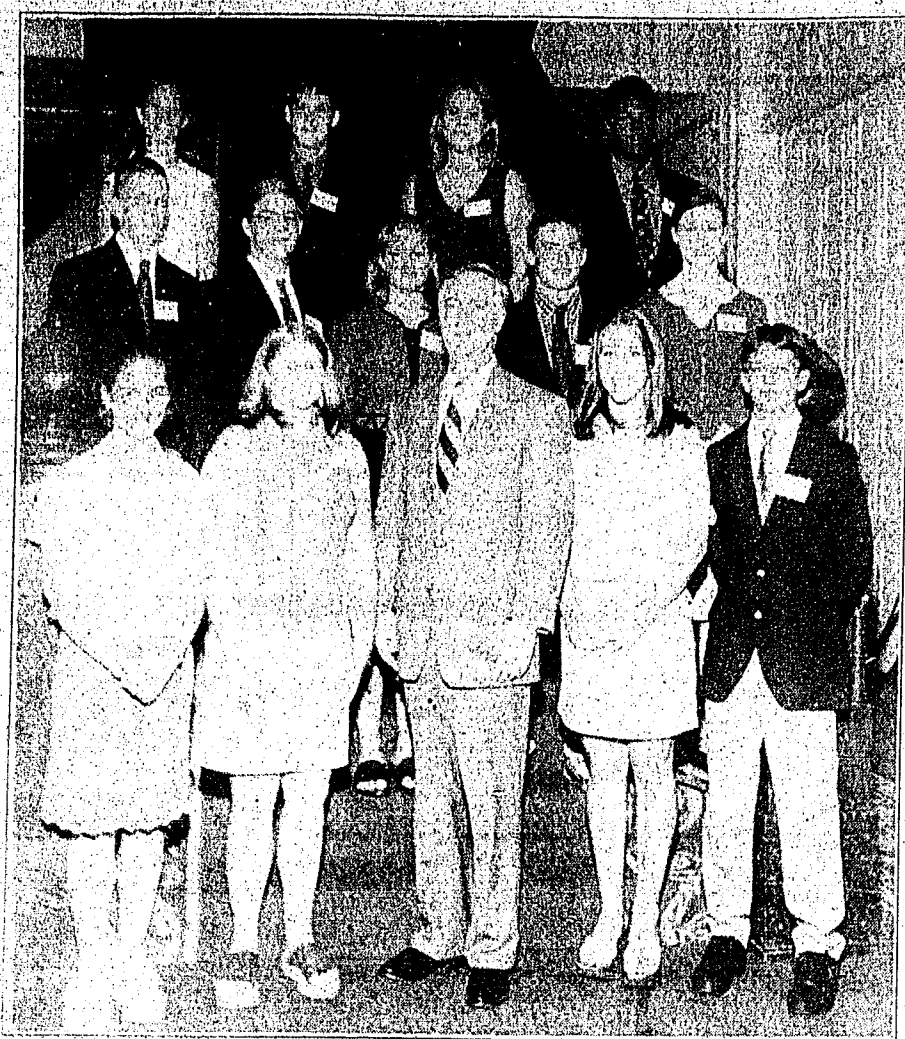


They're Governor's pages

A pair of Mooresville High School students — Helen Elizabeth Kearns (middle row, far right) and Megan Irene Kenyon (front row, second from left) — recent participants in the Governor's Page Program in Raleigh, pose with Gov. Mike Easley and other pages from around the state. The pages spent the week of July 9-13 learning about state government and providing administrative support in the Department of Administration and Lieutenant Governor's office. Kearns is a rising junior at Mooresville High. Kenyon is a rising senior.



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Hate crime investigation takes a strange turn

By MITZE BENDER

On May 10, 2000, at approximately 11:30 p.m., Jaelyn Sealey was at her home on 14888 Middlethorpe Lane in Huntersville with her 10-year-old daughter and five-month-old son when, according to family friend Angela Thomas, her dogs started barking, and Jaelyn discovered their Chevrolet Cavalier was on fire. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that someone had painted "Go Home Nigger" on their garage and doused the back deck with gasoline.

The Sealeys appeared to be victims of a vicious hate crime. Residents of the neighborhood, horrified by the event, donated money to the family to help with repairs and their insurance deductible. Gifts were given to the Sealey's adopted children, and the mayor of Huntersville, Randy Quillen, organized a Relationship Council in hopes of preventing further discrimination and crime. The two investigating officers, Huntersville Police Detective Gerald Childers and Lt. Michael Kee, along with the FBI and Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), worked diligently to solve the heinous crime.

"It was really scary. Nothing like this has ever happened anywhere I've lived," said Marcia Haddock, who lives just up the street from the Sealeys. "There was an explosion just after 11 p.m. It was very frightening. I couldn't believe it; it was the worst thing."

Now, more than a year later, it seems the case has taken a tragic turn. On July 10, 2001, Jaelyn Sealey was indicted on two charges of lying to a federal agent, seven counts of mail and wire fraud and one count of using a fire to commit a federal felony.

While Sealey is unable to comment on the case, Angela Thomas, who has been friends with Jaelyn since '98, said Sealey had no idea she was even a suspect.

"We weren't even aware of the indictment or anything until Channel 9 News came to get her comments on the whole thing," said Thomas, "but she was at work."

Thomas said she immediately phoned Jaelyn at the law firm where she works as a paralegal and told her what had happened. She said Jaelyn was "shocked, upset and heart-

broken."

However, neighbors claim rumors of her indictment had been circulating for some time. "The FBI was at their house frequently, and I had heard rumors they were investigating her," said Haddock. "I can't imagine why she would have been surprised."

Thomas believes her friend is innocent of the charges against her. "Jaelyn is not capable of anything like this," she said, confidently.

But it seems a few Wynfield residents have reached different conclusions. Haddock was skeptical from the beginning.

"It was hard to believe all along, we hadn't had any problems like this before," said Haddock. "And I could never understand why the dogs didn't bark."

Contrary to Thomas' claims that the dogs alerted Sealey, Haddock said, "Those dogs did not bark at all, but her dogs usually barked at everything."

"I was a little bit suspicious of the whole thing from the beginning," said Liles Suddreth, another neighbor of the Sealeys. "There are other black couples, mixed couples, throughout the neighborhood, so I couldn't understand why anyone would target them."

Suddreth said an interracial couple lives just to the right of the Sealeys and have been living there even longer than the Sealeys, but have never had any problems to his knowledge.

Though Haddock said there is no doubt in her mind Jaelyn Sealey committed the crime, she is still waiting for the verdict.

"There is always the possibility," admits Haddock. "If she is found guilty, however, she really put a lot of neighbors at risk. The explosion from the car could have injured those who were out there trying to help put out the fire; her children were also in danger."

According to Thomas, the lack of continued support from the community disappoints Sealey.

"It's like she's guilty until proven innocent," said Thomas. "People she thought she could depend on she found she really couldn't."

"The only evidence the police are going on is that black paint," Thomas continued.

According to investigating officers the black paint used to write the racial slur on the Sealey's garage was the same

paint that had been used on the Sealey's basketball goal prior to the incident.

"To my knowledge that paint was sold at a garage sale Jaelyn had not long after using it," explained Thomas.

However, while Lt. Kee is not allowed to discuss further evidence, he did say, "There was a ton of evidence against her."

One thing Thomas, the investigators and neighbors

agree on was that Steven Sealey, Jaelyn's husband, was not at home the night of the incident.

The Sealey's house went on the market a couple of days prior to her indictment.

According to neighbors, Steven Sealey has already moved to California with their 11-year-old daughter, where he now works for U.S. Air. Jaelyn is still living in the house with their 18-month-old son and

their newest adopted son of eight months. Her father has been by her side since the indictment.

While the police could not say whether the Sealeys had received any money from the insurance company, Haddock believes no insurance money has been awarded to the family because the claim is still under investigation.

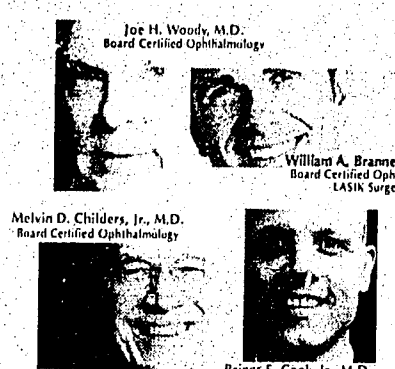
Suddreth said he did not believe the situation would

raise racial tensions in the neighborhood.

"I don't think things will change. There are good people and bad people in every race, and I think the people in this neighborhood realize that," Suddreth assured. "It's just sad this happened."

Mitze Bender is editor of the Davidson Gazette, a Tribune sister paper covering North Mecklenburg.

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Road extension is topic of public forum

By JOE MELTON

The town of Huntersville and local transportation planners are in the process of designing a six-mile extension of Vance Road to create a new North-South corridor in North Mecklenburg County.

As part of that plan, Huntersville town staff, a contracted engineering firm and representatives from the Charlotte Department of Transportation met last Tuesday in a public hearing to obtain input from the community on the path Vance Road will take when construction begins. Officials at the meeting said the extension would have a 100-foot right-of-way and be no more than four lanes under current projections.

The meeting also served as a forum to enlist opinions as to what steps should be taken to preserve the historical nature of Beatties Ford Road, particularly north of Lakeview Road.

Bill Cox, transportation planner for the town of Huntersville, explained why this extension is being planned. "We believe that as the community develops, we'll need another north-south corridor between Beatties Ford Road and Interstate 77."

Roughly 64 citizens attended the meeting, dubbed a "Community Visioning Workshop" by the town. This meeting was the fourth step in a planned 10-step process to determine the final path of the Vance Road Extension (VRE). The first three included preparation of the public hearing, data collection and analysis by engineers

and preparation of the Beatties Ford Road protection plan.

HDR Engineering is the engineering, architectural and urban planning consultant working with Huntersville on this project. Future steps in the project include evaluating alternative road alignments, holding another workshop on the identified alternatives, presenting a report and recommendations to the public, and adoption of the final plan by the Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization (MUMPO).

MUMPO is a federally-mandated organization for urban areas with a population of more than 50,000. Its purpose is to coordinate transportation planning among local governments. Members of MUMPO include representatives from Mecklenburg and Union counties, as well as Charlotte, Huntersville, Cornelius, Davidson, Matthews, Mint Hill, Pineville, Weddington, Stallings and Indian Trail.

Although roadwork on the VRE probably would not begin for another 15 years or more, Bill Cox said, "The Charlotte Department of Transportation said it is best to be prepared."

This time frame could change depending on development patterns and availability of money to finance construction. He also pointed out that if the North Mecklenburg county area stays rural, then the road might not ever need to be built.

Additionally, Finger stated citizens of this area have made it clear they do not want to see Beatties Ford Road widened due to the probability of destroying its historical character and that of the surrounding areas.

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