

Demand funds for early education

What will we lose if Smart Start goes away? What does More at Four do for us anyway?

By Genevieve Megginson

Most of a child's early life is spent "behind the scenes", until they enter public schooling. Smart Start and More at Four are much the same; most people do not see or know what they do for children. Programs like these get results! The latest study from the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy shows that the results are not just for the children directly participating in the programs, ALL the children in the community get better outcomes. Visit www.smartstart.org to read more about this research and other news on early childhood education.

NC's early childhood programs are working and getting the results they were designed to achieve. So why are public policy makers targeting Smart Start and More at Four for elimination or severe reduction. Here are a few of the numbers that show some of what Chatham will lose if these programs are cut: 269 eligible 4-year-old children would not get a year of high quality early education from More

at Four. This program serves children who have risk factors such as family financial hardship, developmental delays, language learning delays, and other factors that make them less likely to succeed in school. More at Four funds 22 classrooms and 47 teachers in Chatham County who would lose their jobs if this program is eliminated.

Smart Start provides direct services to over 500 children in Chatham each year through child care resources and subsidies, parent education, and family support to specific at risk families with children ages 0 to 5 years old. Ninety-two cents of every Smart Start dollar goes to direct services.

Each year Smart Start helps over 450 working families afford the cost of quality child care so they can work without worrying about their children. Smart Start also supports programs to help parents find child care. Other services help child care centers prepare for their licensing inspections and improve the quality of their classrooms.

Child care teachers work for substandard wages. A living wage for Chatham County is over \$14 per hour according to the NC Center for Law and Policy. They calculate the cost of only what it takes for the basics; like food, shelter, transportation, and clothing. The average wage for child care workers is estimated to be around \$10 per hour. We don't know for

sure because funds for the child care workforce study were cut from the state budget several years ago. Smart Start provides salary supplements to early childhood teachers who pursue higher education. We do this because research tells us that better educated teachers teach better. Smart Start rewards teachers who take college level classes and earn college degrees. Even with the salary supplements, income for our program participants does not exceed the basic living wage level. Smart Start has provided over \$50,000 a year for salary supplements for child care teachers living and working in Chatham County.

Without this salary subsidy, many of these teachers would have to find a second job instead of going to school or they might need to leave the field in order to live.

Ninety percent of brain development occurs between birth and 5 years old. Neuroscience demonstrates that early experiences shape the child's brain, providing either a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, health, and behavior. A strong foundation helps ensure that children develop the academic and social skills, such as cooperation, patience, hard work, and persistence, that lead to responsible citizenship, economic productivity, strong communities, and a sustainable society. Healthy brain development depends on stable, responsive relationships with

caring adults at home and in quality child care settings.

The US Chamber of Commerce and the Institute for a Competitive Workforce recently published a report: Starting Smart. In this paper they state that "investments in young children yield the greatest economic return to the state." Quality early care and educational experiences result in positive cognitive, social and emotional outcomes for young children. These outcomes define North Carolina's future workforce and economy.

This is only some of what Smart Start does for Chatham County.

I am asking for help in letting our legislative leaders know that Smart Start and More at Four are essential and should not be eliminated. There are serious budget issues facing our leaders, but they need not look to the children to make these cuts. Please follow our blog {<http://chathamkids.org/whatsnew/>} to see how you can help or just give me a call to volunteer. Our children need us; it really does take a village to raise our children.

Genevieve Megginson, M. Ed, has served as the Executive Director of Chatham County Partnership for Children since its inception in 1994. The Partnership website can be found at: www.chathamkids.org. You can email her at jenny@chathamkids.org or call her at 919.547.7449, extension 24

Save the Townsend Poultry Plant and the Rocky River

By Pat Shipman

Omtron's purchase of the bankrupt Townsend Poultry Plant in Siler City promises far-reaching effects. Keeping the plant open will retain honest jobs for our friends and neighbors. However, unless major upgrades are made in wastewater treatment, the plant will continue to pollute and destroy the Rocky River.

Will Omtron be a good employer? Omtron is a U.S. shell company and subsidiary of Agroholding Avangard, which controls the egg market in Ukraine. Omtron's owner is Oleg Bakhmatyuk, the major shareholder in Avangard. Bakhmatyuk was the former "deputy head of Naftogaz, the country's notoriously murky gas transportation and extraction monopoly, during the corruption-plagued presidency of Leonid Kuchma," according to the Kyiv Post. In 2010, Business News Week reported complaints by a Ukrainian subsidiary of Russia's VTB Bank that Avangard and Bakhmatyuk were trying to evade debts of \$27 million by declaring phony bankruptcies of their subsidiaries.

Avangard recently announced plans to ship grain from Ukraine to North Carolina for chicken feed and processed chickens back. World Poultry.net and the News and Observer observed the cost of shipping would be "prohibitive" unless the grain was "purchased below the price being paid on the world market." However, a lot of the grain produced in Ukraine since the Chernobyl accident in 1986 has been sold at rock-bottom prices because it is radioactive, according to the Sunday Herald in 2002. Importing Ukrainian grain has been banned by several countries. The 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl accident is fast approaching in April.

A great many scientific studies have investigated the long-term effects of radioactivity on people, plants, and animals in the Ukraine. The Chernobyl disaster released substantial quantities of radioactive 137Cesium that blanketed the Ukraine, parts of Belarus, Germany, and France. The half-life of this form of cesium

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is 30.17 years – meaning that half of the radioactivity originally released will still persist in 2016. There has been a devastating toll in human deaths, suffering, genetic malformations among newborns, and cancers among the middle aged. The radioactivity still in the soils of Ukraine are also causing high rates of DNA mutation and radioactivity in plants and animals. Birds have been found to be especially vulnerable to radiation.

With these data in hand, the prospect of having grains from the Ukraine imported into the US to feed chickens is alarming. Is Omtron going to ship radioactive chicken feed to poultry farmers in our state? Will our poultry industry be ruined because of high rates of mutation, disease, and deformity among the chickens? Is this grain-shipping plan an excuse to declare bankruptcy in a year or two?

Will Omtron upgrade its wastewater pretreatment facility to meet legal standards? The Industrial User Pretreatment Permit for the Townsend plant must be renewed in 2011, but the application submitted on January 5 was returned for failing to contain nutrient limits and for failing to identify either the site where offal trailers are drained or the connection between the drainage site and the pretreatment facility.

At present, uncovered trucks drain chicken offal, blood and other waste onto an open asphalt parking lot next to a tributary of Love's Creek. This situation, in and of itself, poses a serious health hazard. An open channel in the parking lot directs waste and rainwater into the pretreatment facility, but this drainage is

not structurally isolated from the waterway as the law requires. During heavy rain, untreated wastes and rainwater overflow directly into the tributary, then into Loves Creek and the Rocky River.

Would you want to live next door to the drainage site? Does it matter if wastes and excess nutrients flow into the Rocky River? The beautiful Rocky River includes two nationally significant "Critical Aquatic Habitats" and harbors six endangered or threatened species.

Below Siler City, the N.C. Division of Water Quality has listed the Rocky River as being "Not Rated" because it appears not to meet Class C standards and not to be suitable for wildlife habitat, boating, wading, swimming or fishing. Excessive nutrients, largely from the Townsend plant, cause the river to become clogged with algae, contributing to biological decline. To save the river and its recreational potential, we must dramatically reduce nutrients – especially nitrogen – coming into it.

The record for the protection of the environment by industries in Ukraine has not been good. Will Omtron willingly comply with N.C. Division of Water Quality efforts to reduce nitrogen discharges from Townsend? Or will they regard compliance as unnecessary government interference?

Will Omtron contribute to upgrades in the Siler City Wastewater Treatment Plant? The Townsend plant has been the major user of the facility and the contributor of 80 percent of total nitrogen and 88 percent of total phosphorus entering the treatment plant. Downstream of Siler

City, nitrogen levels in the river soar by 2,500 percent and phosphorus levels increase by 55 percent. When the plant's NPDES wastewater discharge permit is renewed in 2012, the NC Division of Water Quality has stated it will require the Siler City Wastewater Treatment Plant to utilize the "best available technologies for nitrogen removal." Who's going to pay? Do we think Omtron will contribute, when they are already negotiating for cheap water and other "breaks" so they can be profitable?

What is business-friendly? CNBC uses ten measures to rank the 50 states as places to do business. North Carolina was the fourth best in 2010. What kept North Carolina from first place? The only two categories in which our state fell well below the average for the top ten were quality of life and economy. Quality of life includes recreational activities and facilities, cultural offerings, and clean, healthy places for workers and management to live. Quality of life is especially valued by businesses that pay high wages. Making North Carolina more business-friendly means both attracting new businesses and making environmental protection a key part of all economic development. Companies that pollute sabotage our long-term economic well-being and destroy natural assets that make this a good place to live and work.

We will work with any party interested in providing good jobs while actively protecting our natural and environmental resources. We need cost-effective, state-of-the-art wastewater pretreatment and treatment facilities to reduce the nutrient load in the Rocky River. For example, adding a designed ecosystem to the Siler City wastewater plant would effectively remove pollutants from the river while enhancing wildlife and recreational values.

Why not make the Siler City plant a showplace for modern wastewater treatment, and save the Rocky River too?

Pat Shipman wrote this article on behalf of the Friends of the Rocky River and the Rocky River Heritage Foundation.