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## Some Good Economic News for Chatham

By Julian Sereno

Chatham's winter of economic discontent is showing signs of a spring rebirth. More than 670 new jobs are coming to Chatham County, the Chatham County Economic Development Corporation has announced. Five new companies said that they will add more than 450 jobs and nine existing companies will expand and add another 220 jobs.

Dianne Reid, president of the EDC, said, "With this growth, we will see new capital investment of more than \$150 million."

She offered Acme-McCrary, a textile producer based in Asheboro, as an example of recent job growth in Chatham County. The company expanded its distribution and warehouse operations to the former Joan Fabrics building in Siler City. The move yields a \$500,000 company investment, retains 42 existing Siler City jobs and creates 100 new jobs in Chatham County.

Value Outsourcing Solutions (VOS), is a new business to the area which moved into a vacant 280,000-square-foot building in Siler City earlier this month. VOS offers services for a wide range of companies, such as order processing and fulfillment, packaging and product assembly.

EDC mission is a more prosperous Chatham County, and

it uses the skills of more than 180 volunteers to help bring it all about. It also works to help entrepreneurs and start-ups.

In more good news, Carolina Brewery has announced that it signed a deal with Pearlstone Distributors and will start distributing its beer in Charleston and Hilton Head, South Carolina, and surrounding communities. They are already available across North Carolina. Their beers and ales, the recipients of many awards, are brewed in Pittsboro and Chapel Hill.

And the light at the end of the tunnel – The Chatham County Courthouse should be rebuilt and reopened by December. Expect it to be beautiful – although not exactly as it appeared before the fire. It will be painted with a teal trim, as it was about 100 years ago. And its copper roof will be restored so that it glistens in the sun.

The inside will celebrate Chatham County, with a Chatham County Historical Society Museum and exhibits about Chatham on many walls.

And of course, as the 550 boat owners have learned to their relief, the present operators of Crosswinds Marina reached a deal with the future operators, and the boats didn't have to move after all.

*Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.*

## Vote Against Amendment One

By Ed Crabtree

On May 8th North Carolinians must decide whether to write discrimination into our constitution. For the first time in decades, our legislature passed an amendment that would limit, rather than expand or protect, the rights of

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North Carolina's citizens. As voters, we have the obligation to vote against ratifying this amendment. It is crucial that the fair-minded people of our State make the extra effort to vote in this primary election and soundly defeat Amendment One.

Although numerous reasons for voting against this hateful amendment exist, one, above all others, is reason enough: it is simply poorly written. Amendment One's wording is legally vague and poses numerous problems in its legal interpretation. The judicially untested verbiage exposes citizens of North Carolina to the possibility of legal limbo, litigation, and possibly even tragic consequences.

The biggest threat is to children and families. North Carolina law already defines legal marriage as being between a man and a woman. Amendment One isn't simply redundant, its impact would go much further and affect not only gays and lesbians and their children, but also ANY unmarried couples and their children.

Amendment One endangers children. Children of unmarried couples often depend on domestic partnership agreements to obtain insurance coverage. Under the proposed amendment, these children, regardless of their parents' gender or orientation, could lose crucial insurance and prescription drug coverage.

Almost certainly any public employees currently fortunate enough to work for municipalities with domestic partnership coverage would lose their ability to obtain insurance for their partners and their partner's children; however, the broad wording of the amendment also puts unmarried couples who work for private companies in jeopardy. In other states with similarly worded amendments, even private companies have been forced to end domestic partnership coverage.

Beyond insurance coverage, children could suffer by being removed from their homes and loving parent if something were to happen to one parent. Amendment One threatens to nullify existing custody and visitation rights. It threatens to make unmarried partners legal strangers to their partner's biological children; these partners would have no legal protection to keep biological family members from further traumatizing children by removing them from the only homes they have known.

Amendment One supporters claim the amendment would not place children in harm's way, but in other states where similar amendments have passed, unintentional consequences brought years of legal ambiguity and periods where citizens remained unprotected. It is morally wrong for even one child to be placed in harm's way simply for a political ploy. We must defeat Amendment One for the sake of our children.

Unmarried women also stand to suffer under Amendment One. Some legal experts believe that all current domestic violence protections for unmarried women would be scrapped entirely if this amendment passes. Amendment One would render unmarried couples as nothing more than roommates, regardless of their orientation. In fact, in Ohio, a similarly worded amendment resulted in domestic violence convictions for unmarried couples to be overturned. Women (and their children) were forced to live in fear that someone who hurt them in the past could hurt them again because restraining orders were unintentionally voided by vague wording.

## Our Neighborhood Charter filing application

By Donna Bianco

Chatham children deserve the best educational opportunities – and charter schools are the best way to make that happen.

I'm saddened by the number of children dropping out of high school. If a child is not that perfect round peg that fits smoothly into that round hole they are doomed to failure. Many of these children are extremely bright but are unmotivated by the tedious schedules, lack of stimulating lessons and unmonitored social deficiencies going on in the schools. Teachers do not have enough time to deal with every problem of every child in their classroom. Big Brother is staring over the shoulder of every teacher expecting great things with limited resources and limited time — mostly due to oversight paperwork. Big Brother should be ashamed of himself for the failure that has occurred in our county, in our schools. It is our responsibility as adults to make sure that every child, bar none, receives a high school diploma and not a watered down version. These children will be having children, raising children, and will be involved in our schools, towns, the county, state and country either as contributing members or as a burden on our welfare system. It is our responsibility to give these children the absolute best education possible.

The most recent statistics from the Chamber of Commerce indicate that the graduation rate for 2009-2010 was 74.2 percent and the dropout rate was 4.02 percent. Perhaps the missing 22 percent is related to special needs students whose "Certificate of Graduation" is not counted by the state, as well as students graduating in their 5th year. But beyond that, just looking at the dropout rate of 4.02 percent do you realize that out of 7,900 students in Chatham County 318 kids dropped out of school! There are three high schools in Chatham which means an average of over 100 kids from each of their graduating classes did not graduate. Staggering! Unbelievable, actually, and it seems to have increased since 2007 when it was 3.72 percent and we only lost 294 kids. So let's take an average of 300 dropouts per year. Do the math. Since 2007, 1,500 children dropped out of school in Chatham County; almost 4,000 since the year 2000. Is anyone else outraged?

I would also dare say that a number of the Chatham County dropouts are making up a significant number of our prison population. Some statistics indicate 75 percent of inmates are dropouts. How much does it cost to house an inmate for one year? Google that one and you will get in the vicinity of about \$20,000 per inmate per year. How much do charters, and public schools for that matter, get per child, per year to educate them? Only \$7,000 and sometimes less. Can anyone else do the math? I bet Mia Munn has done the math. She's running for a position on the Chatham County School Board and is an amazing advocate for the children and citizens of Chatham. We have to start somewhere and dig in and save our children from the clutches of welfare, food stamps, prison, and unemployment.

On February 22, the Chatham County Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution supporting the creation of charter schools in Chatham County but not surprisingly, the Chatham County Board of Education has come out against it, saying that they should get the funds instead of the charters. We are excited that the County Commissioners are in full support of new charters in Chatham.

Some people just complain, and some people complain and offer solutions. My solution is to apply for a charter to be housed in downtown Pittsboro. The application is due April 13. The application process is tedious. A veteran charter school applied this year and was turned down due to a technicality, so there is definitely a risk of not being approved. With that said, it will not be due to lack of effort.

So, here we are, ready to submit an application to the state board of education saying that we, as a charter, can do a better job with the same amount of money. I know we have the passion which is one of the major elements being depleted in public schools because of the lack of resources and bureaucracy. I know we have the knowledge — our team is comprised of some of the most knowledgeable teachers and professionals I know: a chef with a Masters in Holistic Health Education, the Dean of Business and Media Technologies & Public Services at CCCC with an MA in Education, two retired Chatham County School administrators and many other key supporters. I know we have the support of much of the community. The only thing left is to cross all of our t's and dot all of our i's with the ultimate goal to give parents a choice in educating their children. We are going to make Our Neighborhood Charter fun, exciting, challenging, and most of all we are going to listen to children. Bella Donna Italian Restaurant will also commit to being a financial and academic supporter of Our Neighborhood Charter.

### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- Send an e-mail to donna@ourneighborhoodschool.com showing your support of a charter school in Pittsboro/Chatham County. These e-mails will be included in the charter application and will need to be in hand by April 9th.

If approved, we will be having numerous fundraisers to get the project funded. In the past, NC funded the start-ups for new charters. Some schools received as much as \$200,000! This is no longer the case. Any school starting up will have to raise the money themselves. If the application is approved please get involved with any fundraising efforts.

- Volunteers will be needed in many areas: reading mentors, after school tutors, science buddies. The list is only as long as your imagination as to how you can offer your skills or time to the children of Chatham County.