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MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Peachland-Polkton Elementary School Students Enjoy Social



Peachland-Polkton sixth graders recently celebrated their annual Christmas Social. The students were honored during a performance given by the Anson County Show Choir for the school. Students were dressed in party attire and were provided a special lunch followed by a dance.

A Traditional Christmas Eve of Yesteryear

Reflecting back on my traditional Christmas Eve of yesteryear the one memory that most prominently stands out in my mind is our church Christmas Pageant. Each Christmas Eve night the First United Methodist Church in Polkton held a Christmas program.

In the program were all the youth and any visitors who came on a regular basis. There was always the memorizing of a few verses for each child to recite before the church audience. Back then it was nothing for me to stand before a crowded sanctuary and recite my lines after rehearsing over and over. My brothers, sisters and I would sing like birds without hesitation. Ah, the ignorance, I mean innocence of children! How refreshing the memories.

Afterwards we were given a brown paper sack filled with nuts, candies and fruit. And we harbored those bags as if made of gold. As soon as we arrived back at home, we'd all yell, "It's time to go to sleep so Santa can come," and mom would remind us, "It's only 7:30 kids. It's too early to go to bed now." So we'd ride it out until at least 8:30. You see, we needed our rest in order that we could arise without missing a beat by 3:00 a.m. or whenever my older brother would wake us with a whispered, "Get up, come on Santa Claus has already been!" And we'd shuffle into the living room where each kid had their own little space for their own little goodie pile.



Mine was usually the same. I had a baby doll and a baton. And I was the happiest little girl on Earth. There weren't many toys but what we had were special, wonderful, delightfully entertaining and I wouldn't trade any of them for anything. Mom would always be there, bleary eyed from a lack of any sleep whatsoever. But she was happy and excited to watch us as we played and laughed while the wee hours of the morning turned into afternoon.

Friends of mine had some pretty fond memories of Christmas Eve as well. Several followed suit with their own church programs, some were given special permission to open one gift on Christmas Eve night, everyone went to bed early to await Santa's arrival, many went to their grand parents for dinner, families played board games and drank hot cocoa and many remembered the resonating sounds of Christmas music playing in their homes while preparing cookies to leave for Santa and his reindeer.

We all reminisced about watching the Channel 9 news as they showed Santa's sleigh shooting across the screen via radar and thinking how wonderful to actually see him and know he's near by. It was a glorious time to be a kid and the memories of Christmas and Christmas Eve still stand as some of the truest and most cherished of my lifetime.

Remember your traditions of Christmases past and create new traditions with your family, friends and loved ones to share for years to come. Have a wonderful holiday season Anson County and may your Christmas be as bright as the Star over Bethlehem. Peace on earth and Merry, Merry Christmas.
By Melanie Morse

Sandhills Community Action Program Has New Location

Sandhills Community Action Program (SCAP) has a new location in Wadesboro. Their office is located in The Express Newspaper building at 205 West Morgan Street. The new office hours are Monday and Tuesday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Wednesday, 8:30 a.m. to noon. The telephone number is 704-694-3128.

- SCAP accepts applications for:
- Weatherization
- Heating Appliance Repair and Replacement Program
- Community Services Block Grant's Self-sufficiency and Housing Programs
- NC Home Protection Program

SCAP offers these and other resources for the low income families and individuals in Anson County.

Teen Pregnancy in Anson County - Part 2

Anson County has the dubious distinction of leading the state in minority teen pregnancies. Anson County is also number seven in total pregnancies for girls aged 15-19 in 2007, with two girls giving birth at age 13 that were not included in these statistics. The number jumped 21% from 2006 to 2007, and repeat pregnancies to teen moms increased by 41%.

Members of Holla (Helping Our Loved Ones Learn and Achieve) were concerned enough about the statistics released by the 2008 Community Health Assessment plan to hold an emergency meeting December 9. Sally Swanson of the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina attended the meeting as well.

Comprehensive sex education programs designed to work with the health curriculum in schools are available, Swanson said, and the community can choose a program for their schools. These programs are correlated to the Standard Course of Study of the N.C. Department of Public Education, but must be approved by the local school board. "It takes a 30-day public hearing before the vote and a 30-day viewing of the curriculum after the vote," she said. Swanson said Thomasville City Schools chose a multi-approach to pregnancy prevention, including Making Proud Choices in middle school and Wise Guys and Student Training Empowerment Program (STEP) in high school. The programs have the full support of the superintendent, principals, teachers and parents in Thomasville.

Teaching comprehensive sex education does not mean the schools will lose state and federal funding, Swanson said, alluding to Anson County's Abstinence until Marriage curricula. "All of these have an abstinence component and you just use the funds for that part of the program."

In other communities the comprehensive programs are taught by certified health educators or by instructors from Communities in Schools (CIS). Subrina Hough, Holla co-chairman, said, "We have been looking at CIS for some time and it is on the table for Anson County. CIS takes teen pregnancy seriously as a part of dropout prevention efforts."

The Teen Outreach Program (TOP) could be taught to 7th, 8th and 9th graders in the school setting, but funding from Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives (TPPI) would be withheld unless it includes the sex education component, specifically providing complete and medically accurate information about contraceptive methods (including abstinence).

Donna McNair, a retired educator, explained, "If it is a research-based program and you do your own version, you won't get the same results." It is important to have model fidelity to the chosen curriculum in order to see a decrease in teen pregnancy in Anson County. Getting the schools to include a comprehensive sex education program needs to be a joint effort of the white and black communities, Holla members agreed. "Get the county commissioners on board," McNair said. "They hold the purse strings."

"What do we do in the meantime?" asked Winnie Bennett, parenting educator with Parents as Teachers at the Anson County Partnership for Children. Hough said that a recently held Parent Summit is going to be repeated in the spring. The summit addresses dropout prevention and related issues, including sex education. "We held a session on how to talk to your child about sex that was well attended," she said.

The Holla team agreed to meet in a week's time, with Swanson to bring examples of programs for members to study.

While pregnancy prevention is a top priority, consideration must be given to girls who are already teen moms or about to be. Jorris Edge, a guidance counselor at Anson High School, affirmed that eight students are currently pregnant at the high school. There are also pregnant and parenting girls at Anson Middle School. Prior to the December 9 meeting, providers were asked what programs were in place for these girls. Dr. Francis Kateh, director of the Anson County Health Department, said the health department works with the school system to target teens at risk. "In our favor, we have nurses and social workers in the schools who see these teens and refer them to the health department. It is a team approach, the doctor, the nurse and the educator."

Kateh said the health department bills the department of social services for prenatal care, which in turn bills Medicaid. DSS also pays delivery expenses through Medicaid; and eventually funds other expenses, including food, clothing and child care incurred by mother and child. Mary Kendall, Child Protective Services with the Anson County Department of Social Services, said that DSS tries to provide parenting information and adequate resources to prevent a repeat pregnancy.

Hough, a senior case manager for Sandhills Community Action's Transitional Housing, said that the two-year program allows young mothers to live together in a four-family home and learn self-esteem, parenting, budgeting and other skills. "The figures are not good," said Hough, who was a teen parent herself. "But we tell the teenage parents here that if they take the situation and make that their stepping stone, they can do so much more with their lives. It gives them an opportunity to see life in a new light, a new way of thinking, new desires and goals"

"Teen Information and Parenting Services (TIPS) is a huge cost savings to the county with every pregnancy we delay or avoid," said Bonnie Morgan, TIPS director at the Anson County Partnership for Children (ACPC). "What works is one-on-one attention and caring. We need more mentors, but we do not have enough volunteers."

That said, of the 79 girls who got pregnant last year, only 20 could be accepted into the TIPS program, which has a waiting list and can only enroll girls under 18. And while Hough said that Transitional Housing participants have the opportunity of a lifetime, with a new lease on life for themselves and their children, that program is also limited in the number of participants it can serve.

Holla is working to bring the need for a comprehensive sex education program to the schools, but members recognize that they cannot do it alone. "It will take the citizens to get this issue to the top of the priority list," said one of the attendees at the December 9 meeting. "The demand for a comprehensive health curriculum needs to come directly from the community."

Alzheimer's Support Group Meets on Sunday, December 28

The Alzheimer's Support Group will be meeting again this month. The meeting will take place on Sunday, December 28 at 3 p.m. at Meadowview Terrace. Guest speaker will be Rita Short from Grace Senior Center. She will be discussing how to get financial help for Alzheimer patients.

The public is invited to attend. For more information, please call Teresa Pope at 704-994-9050.

Applications Invited for Local Poverty Grants

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development in the Diocese of Charlotte is accepting grant applications for the 2009 funding year. CCHD makes small grants from \$500 to \$5,000 to organizations and organized groups in the 46 counties of western North Carolina, without regard to religious affiliation. Applications must be postmarked by February 15, 2009.

Established in 1970 as the U.S. Catholic Bishops' domestic anti-poverty program, CCHD is a response to the Biblical call for justice for those who are poor. The Diocese of Charlotte CCHD Committee solicits programs and projects that:

- 1) seek to affect the root causes of poverty in the target community;
- 2) involve genuine participation of the people served in the planning and decision-making of the sponsoring organization;
- 3) indicate potential for institutional change, empowerment of the people and community involvement, and the development of local leadership;
- 4) conform to Catholic Social Teaching.

For an application, contact Mary Jane Bruton, CCHD Diocesan Director, Office of Justice and Peace, Catholic Social Services, 1123 South Church Street, Charlotte, NC 28203-4003; (704) 370-3234; FAX (704) 370-3377. The application and a sample grant are available on the CSS website at www.cssnc.org/justicepeace (scroll down in text to Catholic Campaign for Human Development). To obtain the application as an email attachment in an MS Word document, send an email request to mjbruton@charlottediocese.org.

Wadesboro Garbage Pickup Schedule for Holidays

There will be no garbage pickup in Wadesboro on Thursday, December 25 and Friday, December 26 due to the Christmas holidays. All areas will be serviced on Monday, December 29.

There will be no garbage pickup on Thursday, January 1, 2009, due to the New Year's holiday. All areas will be serviced on Friday, January 2.