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SPORTS



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Beck, Gingrich rally NRA crowd



DIEDRA LAIRD - dlaird@charlotteobserver.com

Backed by his familiar chalkboard, Glenn Beck depicted a nation that has lost its faith in God, honor and American institutions. One pyramid illustration showed the relative importance of government, charity and God.

Commentator and former House Speaker advocate organizing, going to polls.

ARMS SHUTTLE
Hyatt Gun Shop does big business as it offers free rides during the NRA convention. **Story, 1B.**

View more photos from the convention, **5B.**

About 20 people protested gun violence and "gun show loophole." **Story, 11A.**

BY BRUCE HENDERSON
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Conservative commentator Glenn Beck and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich rallied a National Rifle Association audience Saturday night to get back to God, guns and the polls. "We're the people who always rise at the last moment to pull somebody's butt out of the fire," Beck said as he concluded at Charlotte's Time Warner Cable Arena. "We have to do it again. You are all here for a reason." A crowd of more than 10,000 at the NRA's Celebration of American Values Freedom Experience stood and roared.

While the night was aimed at a gun-loving crowd, the headliners derided the "Marxist revolutionaries" in the Obama administration as they celebrated veterans and the Second Amendment. With midterm elections less than six months away, they spoke of an urgency to renew America at the polls. "Your mission," Gingrich said, "is to organize at every level ... and to simply, decisively beat all (liberal-leaning candidates) and get this country back on track." Beck said the nation's debt poses a danger: "Our debt is over twice the



Beck

ONLINE EXTRAS
See more photos at charlotteobserver.com

Which CMS schools will close?

Officials say many other questions must be answered first.

Underfilled schools

These are schools that are less than 70 percent full this year. Long Creek Elementary includes prekindergarten classes.

BY ANN DOSS HELMS
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Teacher layoffs and busing changes are creating angst about the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools budget, but upcoming - and unprecedented - talks about closing schools in 2011 will bring even bigger changes for students, neighborhoods and families. Once the school board wraps up the 2010-11 budget, members plan to delve into a long study of student assignment, busing and magnets, as they prepare for a budget year expected to be worse than this one. Superintendent Peter Gorman has said he expects to close 10 or more schools before the 2011-12 school year begins.

In a county where just three years ago voters approved a record \$516 million to build schools, the prospect of budget-driven closings is a shock. People are already edgy. SEE SCHOOLS, 4A

School	Students	% full
Elementary		
Westerly Hills	276	47
Lincoln Heights	277	53
Ashley Park	245	54
Berryhill	328	63
Pawtucket	223	65
Whitewater	459	69
Long Creek	523	69
Middle		
Sedgefield	378	46
Whitewater	548	51
Alexander	570	52
Spaugh	521	64
Cochrane	598	65
Kennedy	612	66
Ridge Road	959	66
Quail Hollow	882	69
High		
Harding	1,040	65

FIND YOUR SCHOOL
Student/teacher ratios and building-use data at CharlotteObserver.com/schoolhouse

COUNTY SALARIES

Part 2 of our What Public Servants Earn series looks at Mecklenburg County employees' salaries. As the county prepares for more budget cuts, new data show about 1,200 workers got raises this year. Pay for top officials mostly stood pat.

Top five earners

- County Manager Harry Jones, \$254,055 (includes \$38,400 performance bonus), no change.
- General Manager Bobbie Shields, \$191,609, no change.
- Chief Medical Examiner James Sullivan, \$185,833, no change.
- General Manager John McGillicuddy, \$180,873, no change.
- General Manager Michelle Lancaster-Sandlin, \$172,314, up 4.76 percent.

More on county salaries, **1B**

CHECK SALARIES ONLINE

Under N.C. law, the salaries of employees of tax-funded institutions are public information. Go to CharlotteObserver.com to search a database that lists salaries of nearly 4,700 Mecklenburg County employees.

CHUCK NORRIS DOESN'T DISAPPOINT 'RANGER RYAN'

This is the legend of Ranger Ryan. All heroes have a secret identity. Ranger Ryan was born Ryan Cloninger 35 years ago. He has Down syndrome, but that did not keep him from going to school and getting a job and living on his own. That is a heroic life, in and of itself. But four years ago, Ryan came to a turning point. He started to understand that, because of Down syn-

IN MY OPINION



TOMMY TOMLINSON

drome, he might not get to do everything other people do. He became depressed. He got mad at his parents and God and himself. His family didn't know how to help. One day, watching TV, Ryan came across a show. It was called "Walker, Texas Ranger." The hero is Chuck Norris. He is a mild-mannered lawman who shuts down motorcycle gangs and runs



LAURA-CHASE MCGEHEE - lmcgheee@charlotteobserver.com

Chuck Norris not only autographed a book for Ryan Cloninger but he also took time to meet his family and to pose for pictures Saturday.

TODAY'S MUST-READS

Away we go: One man's quest to visit 100 countries. **TRAVEL**

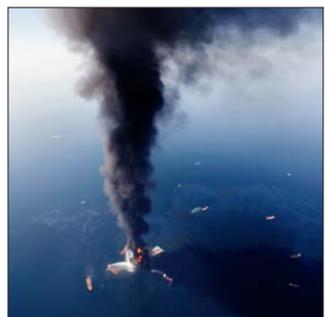
Job tips for grads: Navigating a tough market. **MONEYWISE**

82° 62°

Forecast: Showers and thunderstorms. **8B**

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STORY OF A SPILL: A FLASH, THEN 'MAYDAY!'

For nine years, the Deepwater Horizon had been a lucky ship, finding massive stores of oil in the Gulf. Its luck ran out on April 20. Mark Washburn reconstructs the rig's final day, one of frustration and, ultimately, calamity. **THE BIG PICTURE**
BP optimistic about latest move to capture oil, **5A**

Statue salutes 'Meck Dec,' its mystery

Tale of Capt. Jack inspires lingering debate over whether Mecklenburg was 1st to declare independence.

BY DAVID PERLMUTT
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Tightly wrapped in parachute nylon, a 3-ton statue set to be unveiled Thursday honors the spirit of a Charlotte man who helped fan the flames of rebellion as war clouds gathered in the summer of 1775. His name was James Jack. He was a Trade Street tavern-keeper, a captain in the local militia. And to many in these parts, he achieved Paul Revere status, racing through the N.C. Piedmont on a galloping steed, into Virginia and finally Pennsylvania to deliver seditious papers from Mecklenburg County to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Exactly what documents he carried in his saddlebag is a longstand-



COURTESY OF MAY 20TH SOCIETY

A statue of Capt. James Jack will be unveiled Thursday. The Charlotte tavern-keeper carried seditious papers to Philadelphia in 1775.

ing mystery that still inspires debate today. Were they papers signed by 27 Mecklenburg leaders on May 20 that proclaimed the county "free and independent" from England's King George III - 14 months before the

SEE STATUE, 6A

WICKED

THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE WITCHES OF OZ

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STATUE

■ from 1A

country's declaration? Or were they simply a set of resolves for self-governance approved 11 days later?

One thing's for sure: The county's rebellious spirit was real and papers expressing it were given to Jack to deliver to the N.C. delegation in Philadelphia.

That is why the May 20th Society, a group created in 2004 to revive interest in May 20, 1775, and the county's "long and prodigious" revolutionary past, commissioned the statue and is calling it "The Spirit of Mecklenburg," said Charles Jonas, the society's chairman and one of its founders.

The society, fiercely affirming that a Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence existed, raised \$525,000 from 100 donors for the larger-than-life-size statue encased in quarter-inch bronze, as well as a reflecting pool.

It's the first of what are expected to be several sculptures of Mecklenburg figures dotting a 1 1/2-mile "Trail of History" along a section of the Little Sugar Creek Greenway from Elizabeth Avenue to Morehead Street. The history trail - which could take 15 to 20 years to complete - is being spearheaded by Tony Zeiss, president of Central Piedmont Community College, and former Superior Court Judge Chase Saunders, along with the May 20th Society's Jonas, George Dewey and Scott Syfert.

In a city that took to bulldozing most things old to make way for its New South image, they were concerned that Mecklenburg was suffocating its soul by demonstrating little regard for the past.

Newcomers are always asking Charlotte native Jonas to define the city's soul. He tells them the story of May 20, 1775, and the "can-do spirit" of 27 patriots and a man who galloped through storms and stifling humidity - not to mention roadblocks guarded by British troops - to deliver their message.

The revolutionaries represent the past, he tells them, but also the gumption of a small Southern city that over the years has built itself into a major financial and energy center.

"They can't get enough of the story because you just don't see any evidence of that history," Jonas said. "But Charlotte's roots go back to the founding of this nation. And James Jack is a symbol of Charlotte's role in the revolution, but also the future."

Not a typical sculpture

The statue by Chas Fagan, to be unveiled on the 235th anniversary of May 20, 1775, is of a 44-year-old Jack on his steed crossing a stream as he turns the horse north.

"I wanted to give it energy," said Fagan, a Charlotte artist with a national reputation for his historic sculptures and presidential portraits. "I didn't want the typical sculpture of a man sitting on a horse that is standing straight up."

The northward listing required help from an engineer so it would stand up to the elements and climbing children. A reflecting pool will be piped with three blasts of water timed to mimic the rhythm of gallops.

Jack was not among the 27



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Artist Chas Fagan (left) and Dennis Carnevale of Carolina Bronze examine the base of the statue of Capt. James Jack. On Thursday, the statue will be unveiled at Kings Drive and Fourth Street. The 3-ton statue was designed in Fagan's Myers Park studio and sculpted in Seagrove. Fagan hopes it captures "the individualism, the resolve, the daring" of Jack.

members of Mecklenburg's "public safety committee" who met on May 20 in the county courthouse, unified in support of a brewing revolution. Their passions for independence had been inflamed the day before, after word arrived that British soldiers had attacked in Lexington, Mass., a month earlier, killing eight American minutemen, said Syfert, a Charlotte lawyer who has dug into Jack's history for the May 20th Society.

As a tavern owner, Jack would have been a common sight on the main roads to get supplies, Syfert said. Still, his ride was perilous under the mounting tensions of a revolution.

Restaging the ride

No one knows what Jack faced on his 600-mile ride better than Jerry Linker.

In 1975, 200 years after Jack's ride, Linker restaged the journey to Philadelphia atop an Arabian stallion named Sharek as part of Mecklenburg's bicentennial.

Linker was 22, bore little resemblance to Jack and had to bone up on Mecklenburg's rebellious history, but he was chosen from among hundreds for his knowledge and ease around horses.

After months of training to ready rider and horse, Linker and Sharek set off for Philadelphia on

May 31 (on the anniversary of the Mecklenburg Resolves) along the route Jack must have taken - a wagon road that ran roughly where U.S. 29 is now through North Carolina's Piedmont into Virginia.

Along the way, rider and horse rode in parades, stayed at houses built in the 1700s, visited graves of Jack's ancestors

and rode into Philadelphia with a crowd of 1,500, including Charlotte Mayor John Belk and Philadelphia Mayor Frank Rizzo, waiting for them to trot up to Independence Hall.

"I had different stumbling blocks than Capt. Jack had," said Linker, who lives near Locust in Stanly County. "I had interstate, cars and trucks spooking Sharek. He had the king's soldiers; people were actually against what he was doing. But he made it. I enjoyed my ride - he probably didn't enjoy his."

"He did it alone and could have lost his life at any minute."

Public celebrations

There was a time when a statue wasn't needed to tell the story of May 20 - when "Meck Dec Day" was a big deal.

Four presidents have spoken on that day, once a county holiday that drew parades and thousands of spectators. N.C. leaders chose the date in 1861 to secede from the union. They put May 20, 1775, on their flag. It continues to fly on the state flag and is etched into the state seal.

The centennial celebration, May 20, 1875, drew coverage from Harper's Weekly and attracted 40,000 people to a city of 6,000. Edward Dilworth Latton chose May 20, 1891, to launch his new suburb of Dilworth.

It was dropped as a holiday in the 1980s when a day honoring Martin Luther King Jr. was added.

Yet the controversy over Meck Dec had been festering for years.

Jack was believed to be carrying at least three copies of Meck Dec. None have been found. The N.C. delegation in Philadelphia - William Hooper, Richard Caswell and Joseph Hewes - considered the country unready for the sentiment Jack delivered in June 1775 and

The Spirit of Mecklenburg

What: A statue of Capt. James Jack, crossing a stream and turning his horse north toward Philadelphia.

Mission: In June 1775, Jack delivered documents to the Continental Congress, expressing Mecklenburg's desire to separate itself from England.

Artist: Chas Fagan. Designed in Fagan's Myers Park studio; sculpted in Seagrove.

Cost: \$525,000 for the statue and reflecting pool.

Height: 14 feet.

Weight: 3 tons.

Materials: 1 ton of clay; quarter-inch of bronze.

Method: Done in the ancient wax method that Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo used.

Quote: "It was very fun to do this piece in my hometown. I knew and loved the story. I enjoyed the history. I got to translate it in bronze and hopefully tell the story all over again. There's the spirit, the individualism, the resolve, the daring - all characteristics of Capt. James Jack." - Chas Fagan

likely trashed the copies. And minutes of the May 20 meeting were destroyed when the house of the safety committee's secretary, John McKnitt Alexander, burned in April 1800.

Nineteen years later, Alexander's son, Joseph McKnitt Alexander, published the convention record and Meck Dec's text based on surviving records and recollection.

John Adams started the dispute in 1819, when he sent a copy of that record to Thomas Jefferson, noting "the genuine sense of America at that moment was never expressed so well before, nor since." Jefferson called it "spurious."

The first public commemoration came on May 20, 1822, when U.S. Rep. William Davidson declared the state "first in liberty" and waved a pamphlet that contained testimony from signers' survivors attesting that the declaration existed.

Some argue there would have been no need for self-governance resolves without a document proclaiming independence.

Still, with no copy or contemporaneous writings, histo-

rians have long been unwilling to claim authenticity.

They say the declaration could have been confused for the resolves.

"Professional historians have a standard of proof, and this doesn't meet the standard of proof," said UNC Charlotte historian Dan Morrill. "The evidence is as good that it did happen, as it didn't happen."

'Display of defiance'

What Morrill and other disbelievers don't dispute is Mecklenburg's revolutionary fervor.

By the late 1700s, Mecklenburg was fed up with the British. Many of its leaders were Scots-Irish settlers who migrated here for opportunity and to escape oppression. Yet they remained under the king's thumb. Most were Presbyterians, but they were taxed to support the Anglican church.

Whatever documents James Jack rode to Philadelphia clearly expressed Mecklenburg's fervent willingness to fight for those freedoms.

"There's no question that Capt. Jack went to Philadelphia," Morrill said. "The ques-

The Meck Dec controversy

Supporters lay out significant evidence that Meck Dec existed:

■ In 1831, a state commission reviewed existing records, interviewed eyewitnesses and survivors of signers. It published a report containing 14 affidavits (including one from James Jack) and certificates, vouching for Meck Dec's existence.

■ Prior to May 20, 1775, property deeds generally were dated: "In the reign of King George III." After the May 20 convention, many deeds were dated with references to that date. For instance, one deed said: "Made this 13th day of February 1779, and in the fourth year of our independence." Or: "Made this 28th day of January in the fifth year of our independence." All the deeds place "independence" in Mecklenburg in 1775 - not 1776.

■ May 20, 1775, appears on the N.C. flag and state seal.

■ Among the surviving records of John McKnitt Alexander, the secretary of the May 20 convention, are his written records describing the meeting and text of the declaration. They are archived in Wilson Library at UNC Chapel Hill.

■ Skeptics have long pointed to a lack of contemporaneous written evidence of Meck Dec. Yet in 1903, researchers discovered journals of Moravians in Salem, N.C., that include writings from merchant Traugott Bagge in late 1775: "In the summer of that year, that is May, June or July, the County of Mecklenburg in North Carolina declared itself free and independent of England, and made such arrangements for the administration of the laws among themselves, as later the Continental Congress made for all. This Congress, however, considered the proceedings premature."

■ In 1775, Charlottean Adam Brevard wrote a poem titled "The Mecklenburg Censor." It included the lines: "When Mecklenburg's fantastic rabble/Renowned for censure, scold and gabble/ In Charlotte met in giddy counsel/ To lay the constitution's ground-sill ... Their Independence did declare."

Yet historians discount its existence because:

■ No copies, and few contemporaneous writings, have been found.

■ The three N.C. representatives in the Continental Congress never wrote about reading Meck Dec to friends or constituents.

■ The date on the flag and seal was put there by politicians, not historians.

■ James Jack's ride didn't start until early June, after the resolves were approved.

tion is: What did he have in his saddlebag?

"We know he had the Mecklenburg Resolves, which were a remarkable display of defiance. Could he have had the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence?"

"Maybe."



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