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Task force formed

Ambulance crisis sparks meeting

The Nicholas County Fiscal Court and the Carlisle City Council met in a joint session at the courthouse last Thursday night to discuss the county's impending tenure without ambulance service. The result of that meeting was that both bodies set up task forces to travel to surrounding counties and observe their ambulance operations.

In particular, the Court and the Council will be looking toward Mt. Sterling because of that city's recent ability to provide ambulance service for the local funeral homes owned by the service.

The decision to study surrounding counties came after the Court and Council listened for over an hour and a half to possible alternatives suggested by Chris Smith of the Department of Human Resources.

Smith said that the county has numerous options in front of them, but that the situation "is far more complex than you can begin to believe." In addition to the complexity, Smith said that it would cost the county approximately \$75,000 to \$80,000 to set up the service with one ambulance operating 24 hour service. The cost of adding a second ambulance would run \$45,000 to \$50,000.

Those figures were quoted for a full time, paid staff. Smith said that the bill could be cut back to around \$2,000 with a volunteer service. However, in order to meet all requirements, there must be one EMT with a minimum of eight hours training for every scheduled run, plus one other person to act as a driver.

Smith said that many rural areas are finding it better to get together with neighboring counties and share the costs involved. He said that some counties are currently spending 60 percent of their general revenues on ambulance service.

As far as government assistance in financing ambulance service, Smith said that Senate Bill 86 does create \$1 million annually for such purposes in the form of matching grants. But he quickly pointed-out that with the high costs involved, \$1 million doesn't spread very thickly over 120 counties.

There are also currently seven federal programs that support emergency medical services in the state, but Smith warns that none of these were certain to continue. One of those programs is CEPA, and Smith said that frankly the county would have "zero chances" of getting federal funds.

Smith did tell the gathering that the county could choose not to follow the state's regulated guidelines. He said that a resolution of the fiscal court would allow the county "to run a last service if you want." But, he warned, the courts could hold that if the county publicly commits itself to offering ambulance service, it should meet some minimum regulations.

He also said that the area of liability was very ambiguous in a service that does not conform to regulations. In addition, without the state's certification there would be no eligibility for government assistance, and the ability to collect from insuring agencies would be affected.

Smith said that Medicaid currently pays \$20, plus a \$6-per-mile for all miles over 10.

Smith suggested that one way to cut down the number of runs made by the service and thus the cost, could be a carefully worked-out set of guidelines that would allow the dispatcher the discretion of deciding what was and was not an emergency worthy of ambulance service.

Smith told the governing bodies and concerned citizens present that less than 25 percent of the state's ambulance service is provided by funeral homes. "The majority of cases have the local units of government footing the bill," he said. And unfortunately, he said that at a time when less able to pay, local governments will be getting more of the bill.

As far as a location for the service, Smith suggested that the hospital would be the best location. Besides the obvious reasons, he said that they are already set up to handle the billing part of the service. Hospital Administrator Robert Hester quickly interjected that billing and collections were two different creatures, and stated that the hospital could in no way bear the financial strain of supporting an ambulance service.

Hester said later that if the service were located at the hospital, the entire project would have to be subsidized from outside government agencies, and that a whole separate entity within the hospital would be created.

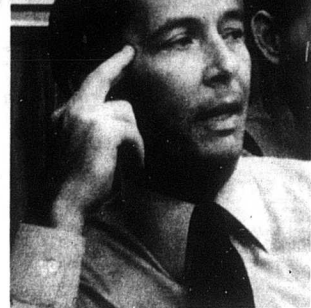
Smith said that location of the service at the hospital could add goodwill and good publicity to the hospital's current assets, as well as allowing them to pick the patients they want. Hester responded to that statement by saying that while those rewards are all well and good, "you can't take goodwill to the bank."

As far as the length of time it would take to get the service going locally, Smith said that four to six months is minimal. The process for getting a "certificate of need" through the state channels could take over a year. Calling the process "Bureaucracy at its best," Smith suggested that the county consider purchasing the current license of one of the local funeral homes. He said that process could be complete in about one month.

As far as financing the service locally, Smith suggested several alternatives, but the one which kept coming to the fore was the possibility of a new ambulance tax. Other alternatives he mentioned were selling subscriptions, collecting donations, holding bake sales, and other charitable means.

He said the fiscal court had the power to raise the tax.

* See Crisis, page 12



Department of Human Resources spokesman Chris Smith appeared before a joint session of the Nicholas County Fiscal Court and the Carlisle City Council last Thursday to discuss some alternatives to solving the impending dilemma facing the county's ambulance service. — Mercury photo.

Is Nicholas next?

Blue mold spreading

Blue mold is spreading through the tobacco fields of Kentucky at a most alarming rate, and County Extension Agent Mike Phillips said Monday that certain conditions could easily bring the burley-destroying fungus into the county within a matter of days.

While no blue mold has been discovered in Nicholas County to date, Phillips said that a line of fungus has now developed from Indiana to Tennessee and that local farmers are helpless to prevent south or southwest winds from carrying the fungus' spores into their tobacco patches.

Phillips said that an increase in moisture in the area, combined with a couple of days of low light intensity would produce conditions overwhelmingly favorable to the growth of blue mold.

"It's really a double edged sword," he said, "the smaller tobacco in the county needs the moisture to grow, but that moisture would create favorable conditions for blue mold."

The blue mold fungus has been spreading through the state like wildfire through the last couple of weeks, and just Friday agriculture officials announced that heavy infestations of the disease were found in eight more counties. In fact, the fungus is spreading so fast that an alert has been issued for all burley-producing areas in eastern and northeastern Kentucky, and for the area between 146 and 171.

The fungus spread into central Kentucky last week as Jessamine and Fayette counties reported blue mold damage. It has also spread east and northeast into Rowan and Lewis Counties.

Phillips urged local farmers to carefully check their crops. He said particularly likely spots for the blue mold to begin would be found in shaded areas of a field or in areas of taller tobacco that is getting ready to top. Anything that blocks the sun and allows moisture to remain for an extended period is an ideal location for blue mold.

Early detection is the "key" to controlling blue mold, Phillips said. He said that if the fungus is discovered early enough, it "can be controlled fairly well." He said that a fungicide can be applied about twice a week, depending on conditions, and that could keep the disease from spreading.

Phillips said that statewide it appeared that the tobacco treated with ridomil was faring much better than that which had not been treated.

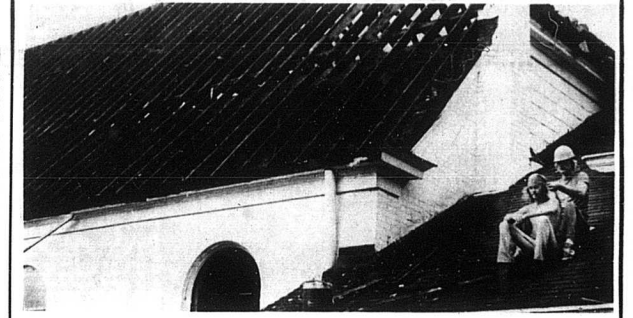
Overall picture dim

As far as the overall picture of the tobacco crop in Nicholas County this year, Phillips painted a pretty bleak picture. He said it "could be the worst crop in the last four years." When those years are looked at closely, the prediction is even more grim. In 1978 the tobacco was subjected to extensive flooding; in 1979 blue mold hit with tremendous power; and last year black shank was widespread in the county's burley fields.

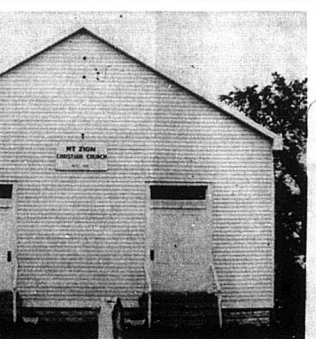
This year Phillips mentioned the seemingly never-ending rains that came around setting time, and the lack of moisture once the plants were out. He added that the early rains particularly hurt those fields which had been fertilized heavily prior to their export. He said that the rains broke down the nitrogen too fast and that the soil of the soil was altered too radically. In fact, some soil samples in the county have shown a pH of 4.3. Phillips said that any pH below 5.4 is toxic to tobacco, and that is the level of the county's burley is lucky just to be surviving.

Phillips said that at this point the farmer has done just about all he can do. The rest is "up to mother nature." And he hopes that his predictions about this year's crop are not realized. He said that with the last three bad years still haunting many area farmers, a poor weight this year could push them over the brink financially. "We so desperately need a good crop this year," he said.

* See Blue Mold, page 12



Workers for Clem Wrecking Company, Lexington, began raising the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, prepared early Monday morning for a hard day's work as they began raising the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. — Mercury photo.



The Mt. Zion Christian Church will be celebrating its 150th anniversary throughout next week. A revival will begin August 3 and run until the big anniversary celebration next Sunday. See story, page 4. — Mercury photo.

Local trooper investigated

Officials from the Kentucky State Police's Office of Professional Standards were in Carlisle last week investigating complaints against local trooper John Hall.

While extensive details are not available at this time, Executive Officer Gene Peter, who is in charge of the KSP's Professional Services Division (of which Professional Standards is a branch), confirmed reports of the investigation.

Peter would not comment on the specifics of the investigation at this time, but he said that two separate written complaints were received by Commissioner Marvin Campbell during the week before last. He said the complaints were "in relation to performance of duty."

Peter also declined to release the names of the persons filing the complaints at the present time. Peter said that the investigation is standard procedure in following up on a written complaint on a KSP officer. His department is outside the regular chain of command, and he said that the complaints came straight to him from the Commissioner.

The office of Professional Standards is what was commonly called Internal Affairs. Peter said that if any information is needed, it should be directed to the Commissioner.

* See Trooper, page 12

American Legion raided

A search warrant was executed on the American Legion Post #17, 117 W. Main Street, on July 18 as result of an undercover investigation by the Kentucky State Police.

During the raid, 165 containers of beer and a quantity of other alcoholic beverages were confiscated. The ramifications of the incident became evident last Tuesday in Nicholas County District Court as Ruby M. King, 105 Race Street, pled guilty to the charge of trafficking in alcoholic beverages in a dry territory. Mr. King was sentenced to a fine of \$50, court costs of \$25.50 and to post a \$500 good behavior bond effective for one year. The charge of possession of alcohol for the purpose of sale in a dry territory against Mr. King was dismissed.

Also charged in the incident were Billy Dixon, Route 2, and the American Legion Post itself. Dixon was issued a subpoena to appear in District Court next Tuesday on charges of trafficking in alcoholic beverages in a dry territory. The local Legion Post itself, with possession of alcohol for the purpose of sale in a dry territory.