

Residents urge city to buy Eastland

More than two dozen sport signs extolling \$13.2 million deal

By ELISABETH ARRIERO
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More than two dozen residents rallied at the intersection of North Sharon Amity Road and Central Avenue on Sunday to show their support for the city of Charlotte purchasing Eastland Mall.

Under a proposal that city council members will hear on Monday, the city would pay \$13.2 million to the mall's seven owners — including Belk, Sears Roebuck and Co. and Houston-based Boxer Properties — and potentially partner with a developer to convert the site into movie and television studios, or other possible development ventures.

For the first time, the mall would be under one owner, allowing the city to present a single, large parcel of land to develop.

"Developing the eastside is important to our neighborhood as well as the city as a whole," said resident Therese Bohn of Coventry Woods. "It's time to bring life back to it."

Ed Garber, chair of Eastside PAC, said he was very pleased with the turnout at Sunday's



Carol Webber, left, and Robert Dawkins show their support at the Eastside PAC's rally at the intersection of North Sharon Amity Road and Central Avenue on Sunday.

rally, in which participants held signs such as "Hollywood or bust" and "Believe in East Charlotte."

A possible movie studio coming to town, Garber said, "exceeds what people really thought would be the end result of Eastland Mall. A vote against that would be a vote against Charlotte's viability."

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Grace Garber, left, and her mother, Lori Garber, participate in the rally backing a city plan to buy Eastland Mall.

Pedestrian struck by car Friday dies

By CLEVER R. WOOTSON JR.
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A man struck by a car that veered off North Sharon Amity Road late Friday died of his injuries Saturday evening.

Jesse Ryan Brackett, 21, was pronounced dead at Carolinas Medical Center around 3:30 p.m. Saturday.

Another person — a juvenile — was also struck by the silver Hyundai Elantra. Charlotte-Mecklenburg police have not released that person's name but said the injuries were not life-threatening.

The driver of the Elantra, 25-year-old Erica Sharmaine Ashley, was also injured and taken to the hospital. Her car struck several trees after hitting the two people, police said, but her injuries were not life-threatening.

Police say Brackett and the juvenile were standing on the sidewalk on North Sharon Amity Road between Central

Avenue and Albemarle Road when they were struck by the Elantra, which had been headed south in the right lane.

The crash remains under investigation, and it was unclear on Sunday what, if any, charges Ashley would face.

Fourteen pedestrians or bicyclists have died on Charlotte streets in 2012, putting the city on pace for one of its deadliest years in recent memory.

On Sunday, police announced they had obtained an arrest warrant charging Raquel Belinda Mallory with involuntary manslaughter in connection with a fatal crash Saturday morning.

Ricky Neal, 46, was walking across Beatties Ford Road in west Charlotte when he was struck and killed by a car. Mallory, 38, was charged Saturday with driving while impaired.

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Killer of two N.C. lawmen dies in prison

By ANNE BLYTHE
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LEIGH — Frank Wetzel, dubbed one of the state's most notorious criminals after being convicted of killing two state highway patrolmen, fought for more than half a century for his release from prison.

On Saturday, his struggle ended.

Wetzel, 90, died in Central Prison as the state's oldest prisoner and one of the longest-serving.

Wetzel, a silver-haired, blue-eyed inmate who lived out his last years in a cloud of dementia, maintained through the years that he was the victim in his case, not a cold-blooded cop-killer, but the target of a law enforcement conspiracy.

His case, with its sensational manhunt and trial, offers a trip back in time and across the country of a half-century ago when cars had tail fins, Luther Hodges was governor of North Carolina and Dwight D. Eisenhower was president.

At 8 p.m. on Nov. 5, 1957, police radios in Richmond County crackled with urgent news: Trooper W. L. Reece had been fatally shot and was lying on U.S. 220 near Ellerbe, a Richmond County town.

Some 20 minutes later, radios delivered another punch: Another law enforcement officer, James T. Brown, had been shot on U.S. 1 near Sanford.

A man who claimed to be a hitchhiker in the assailant's car told police the killer had drawn a large pistol from the glove compartment when the trooper in Richmond County pulled the car over for speeding.

The hitchhiker described the assailant as a dark-complexioned man who spoke with a foreign-sounding accent.

Wetzel, fair-skinned with distinctive blue eyes, became a suspect after a black 1957 Oldsmobile was discovered in Chattanooga, Tenn. Inside, the FBI found Wetzel's fingerprint on a North Carolina license plate.

A nationwide manhunt ensued, and two weeks after the killings Wetzel was arrested as a vagrant in Bakersfield, Calif.

Less than two months later, he went on trial for the first killing.

Wetzel received two life sentences in 1958 after he was found guilty of killing the two troopers. Wetzel claimed he was on his way south to try to break his brother out of a Mississippi prison.

Over the years, Wetzel has collected a group of followers, family, lawyers and others who insist that he could not have committed two killings on the winding North Carolina roads — that no one, not even the fastest NASCAR driver, could get from Ellerbe to the Sanford killing site in 20 minutes.

"I've offered anyone who can do that a million dollars," said Richard Wetzel, the convict's 57-year-old half-brother. "I don't have a million dollars, but I'm not worried that anybody can do that, not anyone in NASCAR or speed racing."

Wetzel grew up in New York after his father, a farmer forced out of North Dakota by the Dust Bowl, struggled as an on and off foundry worker to put food on the table for seven children. Wetzel got into trouble as a young boy, stealing from grocery stores and landing in reform school and eventually New York jails.

Frank Wetzel married in prison nearly 30 years ago. His wife, Bianca, who now lives in Florida, advocated for his release for many years.

Richard Wetzel said he doesn't plan to let his half-brother's appeal die with him. — NEWS RESEARCHER TERESA LEONARD CONTRIBUTED TO THIS REPORT.

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'It's like swimming, with a kayak under your belly'

KAREN CHAVEZ
Asheville Citizen-Times

ASHEVILLE — Adam Masters' mind is like a runaway white-water rapid.

Chugging and churning, foaming and frothing. It won't settle down, and it's always racing to find the perfect line through the rocks and the rolling water that surround him.

So it's no surprise that at age 32, the Asheville entrepreneur who has spent a lifetime exploring, crafting and designing new adventures for himself, has created not only a new invention, but a new sport and a new word for the English language: bellyak.

Bellyak is a noun — a type of boat and a sport. Set to hit the Asheville and worldwide market, the Bellyak is a kayak that you ride on your belly.

"It's like swimming, with a

kayak under your belly," said Masters, who lives on a farm in Marshall with his wife of a year, Anna Woodruff-Masters, 31. The two founded Bellyak, which is headquartered on Riverside Drive just north of Asheville.

"Nobody has done anything like this. What I love about this, when you kayak a lot, you get to a point when (you) get to Class 5 whitewater," Masters said. "You have to maintain a certain edge, and the risk-to-reward ratio gets a little different. To increase the excitement, you have to increase your risk."

"You can take a Bellyak, a super-intimate way of riding the river, and (calmer waters) like the French Broad River, the Tuckasee, all of sudden they become more fun. The experience is so dynamic. You can ride on your knees, on your butt, you can lay down and take a nap."

He already has die-hard devotees of the Bellyak, and a new business, Asheville Adventure Rentals, that will be the exclusive carrier in Asheville of the new boats, which Masters believes are destined to be the next big wave in whitewater sports, which include kayaking and canoeing.

According to the 2012 Outdoor Foundation Outdoor Recreation Topline Report, participation in recreational kayaking is up nearly 32 percent in the past three years, and whitewater kayaking is up more than 24 percent. As a brand-new sport, bellykayaking fits somewhere in between these two sports.

One day in 2004, Masters was kayaking down a backyard creek after a flood in Sunset, S.C., in North Pickens County. He was trying to maneuver through a Class II curl, but the space was

too narrow to use a paddle.

So he covered the boat's cockpit with a spray skirt and duct tape, hugged the boat tight to his belly and launched forward, using his hands as a paddle.

"I laid on top of my kayak to get my center of gravity lower. That's where bellyak was born."

To ride a Bellyak, you only need to be "moderately" athletic: know how to read lines — or safe passages — down a river; and wear a helmet, life jacket and special webbed paddle gloves. Proficient bodyboaters can ride the Bellyak on their knees or in a sitting position, Adam Masters said.

The Masterses have been offering free Bellyak clinics on Wednesdays at Ledges Whitewater Park and on Thursdays at the U.S. National Whitewater Center in Charlotte.

AUCTION

■ from 1B

field vinyl wall cover (6 feet by 17 feet), and a section of wall mural (60 inches by 72 inches) from the team's weight room, featuring autographs of all the players in 2011.

The collection (excluding the autographed wall) is made up of items that outlived their usefulness after the team refined its logos earlier this year.

All the old stuff came down, the new stuff went up, and the team decided to get creative with its leftovers. Proceeds from the auction will benefit the team's Keep Pounding Fund at Carolinas HealthCare Foundation, which supports cancer research at the Levine Cancer Institute and the Levine Children's Hospital.

Team spokesman Riley Fields said the auction offers a rare chance for fans to own an "iconic" piece of the team's history. This is particularly true of the cat heads, which he describes as a "calling card for Bank of America Stadium."

Bidding is being handled through the NFL's auction site and will end Aug. 20.

The catch, of course, is that high bidders will need an equally grand scale idea for how to display their prizes.

Fields can't help but be optimistic: This isn't the first time the team has done something unusual on behalf of charity. Back in 2004, team officials auctioned off 16 sections of stadium turf, linked to big moments in the Panthers' 2003 rise to the Super Bowl. Fans went for it, too, paying as much as \$500 for the 4-inch by 4-inch sections of dirt and raising \$4,000 for charity.

Word has already begun to spread about the Panthers head auction, and it's clear avid souvenir collectors are now asking themselves: How big is too big?

Dan Ortel is probably Charlotte's best known Panthers' fan, having been inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame's "Pro Football Ultimate Fan Association." He'd like to own one of the heads.

"But I'm guessing the homeowners association would have a problem with me putting them



Riley Fields, director of community relations, and intern Drew Daniller-Varghese unfold one of the 19-foot-by-34-foot scoreboard logos Friday. The original cat heads have been replaced for the 2012 season with the team's refined logo mark. Since 2004, the Keep Pounding Auction has raised funds for the team's Carolinas HealthCare Foundation, which supports cancer research.



This panel features the autographs of the team's 2011 roster. It's one of the items in the auction.

The Panthers' Keep Pounding Wall in its weight room commemorates Sam Mills' speech prior to the team's playoff victory over the Dallas Cowboys on the team's journey to Super Bowl XXXVIII.

How to bid

Today through Aug. 20, visit: <http://www.auction.nfl.com/cgi-bin/ncommerce/3/User?id=panNFL&w=6566491&type=A>

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