

from the editor | *Doggone it, it's fun to share good news*



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Every week I see their faces. Last week, it was Scout and BeeBee who needed homes. This week they have them. The Pets of the Week is one of those features that works because it connects nice people – or dogs and cats – who need help with nice people who can give it. Kay

Hurley, of the Suffolk Humane Society, said people often tell her that they saw the pictures in The Sun, or they show up at the shelter with the newspaper clipping.

With the bad economy there “are a lot more people who are not able to afford their pets,” Hurley said.

But there are also clearly plenty of people who are able to share their resources and love with a pet in need of rescue.

I adopted my Jack Russell Terrier from

a local animal control in 1998. Leo is 11, but still very puppy-like. I have yet to find a human who will celebrate my arrival with quite the same joy.

So, when I heard about BeeBee and Scout, I was happy both for the pets and their new families. Hurley said a house-trained goat – how cool is that? – named Mr. Thommiss has a new home as well.

Here’s hoping for Penelope and Jo Jo on page 9.



open book

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To find out more about Suffolk schools - including test scores, photo galleries, graduation rates - go to HamptonRoads.com/SchoolZone.



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DESPITE BUDGET CUTS, SUFFOLK SCHOOLS WILL STILL INTERVIEW TEACHERS AT JOB FAIR

I’m assuming most folks have heard the grim news about Suffolk’s education budget for 2009-10. Unless federal stimulus bucks come through, some school division workers may find themselves with different job titles next year – or maybe with no job at all.

That’s because 50 occupied positions are slated for elimination in the upcoming budget. Another 54 positions that are now vacant will be nixed.

And, just a couple weeks ago, Superintendent Milton Liverman told the School Board that retirement notices were down from previous years, perhaps a product of the weak economy. So it’s likely there will be fewer job openings for next school year.

But Human Resources Director Karen Brickey is staying optimistic. She’s hoping to find a crop of potential hires at the division’s annual teacher recruitment fair, scheduled for 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. March 21. School officials will interview and discuss employment possibilities with those attending the free event at King’s Fork Middle School.

“It’s a good way to attract people that want to come to the Suffolk area,” she said.

As is typical, all 150 to 175 reserved slots are full, but there’s still room for 25 walk-in candidates, Brickey said. Participants are asked to bring resumes, college transcripts and copies of their teachers licenses.

Information about specific job openings may not be available the day of the fair, but Brickey said she wants to have a pool of solid applicants on file if the time comes to hire. The fair usually draws people from all over Virginia and beyond.

TEACHERS ARE GAME

Wanna see teachers shooting hoops and exuding spirit on the sidelines? If so, check out the faculty/staff basketball game set for 7 p.m. Thursday at Lakeland High. The players and cheerleaders will all be Suffolk Public Schools employees.

Representatives from all three of the city’s public high schools will have a turn to play, with King’s Fork and Nansemond River facing off first. The event is a fundraiser for the PTSA representing each high school. In Lakeland’s case, the money will go towards two scholarships for graduating seniors, said PTSA treasurer Karen Rannings.

Tickets are \$3 and available at the high schools. The school with the most students in attendance gets a special award.

OH SNOW!

Suffolk students got a day off from school March 2 because of the white stuff that sprinkled lawns and left roads slick.

School officials heard reports that weather conditions could worsen and they didn’t want to take any chances with the city’s many rural roads, said spokeswoman Bethanne Bradshaw.

“We can’t take the risk with buses and kids driving,” she said.

The division built in extra days in the school calendar in case of emergencies like this, Bradshaw said. But students at one school – King’s Fork High – may have to make up the lost time because of an earlier day off due to heating problems.

RESIDENTS TOLD NOT TO EXPECT BIG DROPS IN CITY ASSESSMENTS

Suffolk City Assessor Sid Daughtrey treads carefully when he speaks, often pausing mid-sentence to ponder his choice of words.

A city employee for nearly 25 years, he is entering his first spring as the voice of his office, and he hopes this year is calmer than 2008. The City Council promoted him last year after hundreds of residents complained about their property values and the council fired his predecessor.

Daughtrey told the city’s finance committee Wednesday that residents should not expect the huge drop-offs in assessments they might have read about in the national news.

“We’re not Phoenix, we’re not Florida,” he said.

Generally speaking, overall assessments will probably see “a slight drop” in values, with higher-end homes seeing the biggest losses, he said. Some homeowners will still see their assessments rise. He said he couldn’t provide specific figures because he hasn’t crunched the numbers yet.

“We are,” he said, pausing, “in the same shape we see most of the other cities in Tidewater.”

Daughtrey will present the annual assessment report to the

City Council on Wednesday. He expects to have individual notices in the mail the first week of April.

• **Vehicle tax bills plummet:** The city expects the values of vehicles registered in the city to drop 24 percent for the next fiscal year. That’s up from the normal depreciation of 10 percent to 15 percent, said Commissioner of Revenue Thomas Hazelwood.

That means smaller personal property tax bills for residents and about a \$2 million loss in revenue for the city, Hazelwood said.

• **Budget talks continue:** City Manager Selena Cuffee-Glenn continues to meet with staff to craft the budget she plans to unveil on April 1.

Budget Officer Anne Seward told the finance committee that falling revenues are forcing them to take “some pretty serious, serious measures” to balance the budget. After the meeting, Cuffee-Glenn declined to identify specific measures beyond what has already been publicized.

The city has a hiring freeze on noncritical vacancies and stopped nonessential overtime. Cuffee-Glenn also raised the prospect of layoffs in a letter to city council.