

# Cherokee Scout

Since 1889



## On a mission

Local nurse, dentist John and Tina Woods leaving everything to move to Honduras. 1B



## Christmas wishes

Local children share their letters to Santa Claus with Cherokee Scout readers. 1D



4 Sections • 52 pages

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Murphy, North Carolina

50 cents

# Report: Student sticks classmates with needle

### Health department sent away at least 3 blood samples for testing

By CINDI HERR

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Andrews - At least two Andrews High School students await test results to see if they became infected with a blood-borne disease when they allegedly were pricked with a needle by another student.

According to reports, a girl brought a dirty sewing needle to school and stuck several other students with it. "On Dec. 13, some students were stuck with a fabric needle. When the incident was reported, we began an immediate investigation to find out who the students were that had received needle sticks. As soon as the students were identified, our school nurse, Carolyn Crosby, contacted the Cherokee County Health Department," Andrews High Principal Tim Coffey said in a prepared statement. The girl was allegedly involved in a

similar incident off of school grounds prior to bringing the needle to school, School Resource Officer Chief Randy Phillips said, so the Andrews Police Department also was involved in the investigation. Andrews School Resource officer Stacy Denny detained the girl, but she was not taken into custody, Phillips said. Charges have been filed, he said. However, Andrews Police Chief Ray Gregory did not return calls. It was not a hypodermic needle, school Board Chairman David Ackerman said,

but the school is following established procedures for dealing with needle sticks. Crosby would only say "a few" students were involved, but did confirm it was less than 10. Health department officials reportedly advised Cherokee County Schools officials to contact the parents. They recommended that all students whose skin was broken or punctured by the needle be taken to the health department for a baseline blood test and hepatitis B shots, if they did not have one, Crosby said. The

school is following protocol established by the Centers for Disease Control. "The school is taking all necessary precautions," Superintendent Jeanette Hedrick said. Health department officials said at least three blood samples were sent away for testing. As of Monday, results of one test came back negative for hepatitis C. Two other samples have been sent to a state laboratory to be tested for HIV and hepatitis B, and results should be returned in 10-14 days. *see NEEDLE, 8A*

# Awesome power on display



SCOTT WALLACE/Cherokee Scout

Earl Music of Pike Electric Inc. uses a raw chicken leg to demonstrate what happens when a person comes in contact with a "hot" power line Thursday morning at the new Murphy Power Board substation on Harshaw Road. An electrical current of more than 11,000 degrees surges through the bone and flesh in a sixth of a second. This type of burn, called a contact burn, is virtually undetectable but is very deadly, as the human body is used to conduct the path of electricity to the ground.

# Law enforcement, fire, rescue personnel view dangers of electricity

By CINDI HERR

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Murphy - Electricity is a friend in today's world, but it needs to be respected, Murphy Power Board assistant manager Larry Kernea said. In light of three major events involving power lines in the last six weeks, Kernea asked Pike Electric Inc. of Mount Airy to come to town Thursday and perform a demonstration of proper procedures for handling incidents that involve electricity - and what could happen if precautions are not taken. Pike Electric, one of the largest electrical contractors in the eastern United States, assists local power boards with restoring power in extreme conditions, such as in the wake of hurricanes and ice storms. Kernea owes them a lot, especially guest

speaker Sammy Goad, who helped save his brother's life in 1988. Goad was joined by demonstrators Jimmy Tanner and Earl Music, based out of Monroe, Ga. Electricity is dangerous because it cannot be seen, heard, tasted, smelled or felt, Goad said. "It only takes 1/5 of one amp to get the human heart out of rhythm and cause you to die," Goad said. Kernea said the average power line in Murphy has hundreds of amps of electrical current. To emphasize the importance of wearing and maintaining the proper protective gear, Goad passed a standard rubber glove around the crowd, the kind electricians and power company employees wear as part of their protective gear. The glove appeared unharmed but had been poked with a pin.

An uncooked hot dog, similar in consistency to a man's finger, was placed in the glove and tapped along a hot power line. When it touched the line, it sparked and smoked. When pulled out of the glove, the hot dog was still cold, but a large, charred chunk was blown out where the hole was. When electrocuted, the human body continues to cook for three to seven days, Goad said. Synthetic materials should never be worn, as they burn into the skin if they catch fire, as demonstrated by another hot dog. He also stressed grounding all equipment and lines before starting any work, especially trucks, as charged vehicles can kill a passerby who touches it. Tanner and Music demonstrated what happens when items such as tree limbs, *see POWER, 8A*

# New school board chairman almost elected by coin flip

### Ackerman re-elected after two ties between Watson and Clonts

By CINDI HERR

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Murphy - New Cherokee County School Board member Randy Barnett broke policy by twice refusing to break a tie vote for this year's chairman, saying the board was divided and he wanted members to learn to work together without his vote. The board eventually voted 4-3 to re-elect David Ackerman as this year's chairman during a special organizational session of Thursday's meeting at Murphy Elementary School. Ackerman declined his first two nominations for the position. He later said he thought a fresh start under new leadership could alleviate some of the tension that had built up over some tough issues in the past two years. Instead, Ackerman nominated Paul Watson, who served as vice chair this year, saying she would do a better job. Board member Brian Mitchell nominated longtime board member Winfield Clonts. Randal Shields argued that Clonts should not be allowed to be chairman because his wife works for the school system, and

that would be nepotism. Board attorney Ellen Davis said it was not a conflict since Clonts always abstained from votes that would affect his wife. The first vote was a 3-3 tie between Watson and Clonts, with Shields and Ackerman voting for Watson and Hogan and Mitchell voting for Clonts. Barnett initially refused to vote to break the tie, saying it was a conflict of interest. "It is not in the best interest of the students of Cherokee County for there to be division on the board. This board has been fractured for some time now, and we need to start acting as a cohesive unit," Barnett said. "My choosing a side does not solve anything. I would like to see this board work out this decision without my vote. I think it will be a step forward to us working as a team for what is best for the students of Cherokee County."

Davis said under common law, members of public bodies have a duty to vote unless there is a legal reason not to vote. Barnett's reason did not qualify. "If they want me to vote, then I can flip a coin," Barnett said. Perplexed, the board voted to put off the organizational session until the end of the regular meeting. Davis then quoted two school policies that say all board members must vote unless an acceptable reason is given prior to the vote. Barnett's reason was not acceptable, she said, so he was in violation of board policy. *see CHAIR, 8A*



Ackerman



Barnett

# County health board will remain the same

### New commissioners to study matter, make changes if necessary

By ROBERT HORNE

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Murphy - Mary Miller will remain chairwoman of the Cherokee County Board of Health - for now. During an extended and sometimes heated discussion Monday night, the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners voted 3-0 to not take action on a letter sent to Miller on Nov. 6 advising her the commissioners were remov-

ing her from the health board. "It was the only prudent thing [the commissioners] could do," Miller said Tuesday morning. "I think we need to move forward. It is obvious the previous board of commissioners did not provide the tools and resources for the health department to do what it is required to do for the county. I think it's time for all of us to move forward." Commissioner Dana Jones, the former chairman, sent Miller a letter on county letterhead noting, *see HEALTH, 9A*



SCOTT WALLACE/Cherokee Scout

Gabriel Michael Cochran, 25, of Morganton, Ga., is pulled out of the 1989 Cadillac hearse he was driving by Cherokee County Emergency Management Services Capt. Doug Vuick late Thursday morning.

# Hearse hits truck dead on

### Nobody seriously hurt in two-vehicle crash Thursday on U.S. 64

By SCOTT WALLACE

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Murphy - A Georgia man was injured Thursday when the empty hearse he was driving struck the back of a flatbed truck making an improper turn. Truck driver Thomas Allen Palmer, 45, of Buckhannon, W.Va., was hauling a load of hardwood flooring for Buccaneer Enterprises through Murphy on Thursday. About 10:55 a.m., as Palmer attempted to pull into Cook's Carpet on U.S. 64 West, his flatbed truck was struck from

behind by a Cochran Funeral Home hearse driven by Gabriel Michael Cochran, 25, of Morganton, Ga. "When I started my turn, I checked and there was no one behind me," Palmer said. "He came out of nowhere. I sure hate for this to happen right before Christmas." Fred Cook, owner of Cook's Carpet, was standing outside his store and witnessed the accident. "The road was empty when [Palmer] started to pull in," Cook said. Then the hearse came up and couldn't stop. I don't like to say it, but [the hearse] was flying." According to Trooper David B. Williams of the N.C. Highway Patrol, *see HEARSE, 8A*



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Expect partly cloudy skies with highs in the upper 50s to lower 60s for the holiday. 6B

Gov. Easley, other Catholic Democrats seek middle ground in abortion debate. 6A



Murphy offensive lineman Ryan Stiles named to All-WNC team. 1C