

Chatlist post

Date: Tue, 4 Mar 2008 11:28:39 -0500

From: "Dee Reid" <deereid.pittsboro@gmail.com>

Subject: Starkweather and The Herald

Dear Neighbors,

I've tried to stay out of the commentary about Jeffrey Starkweather's candidacy since I'm clearly biased (I've been happily married to him for 22 years). But I do want to share my perspective on his leadership of the Chatham County Herald, since someone stated on the Chatlist and the bulletin board recently that he was responsible for the newspaper going out of business, which is not accurate.

The Herald was undercapitalized when Jeffrey and his first wife Linda were asked to revive it almost from scratch in 1973 (when they were 26 years old). Chatham did not have enough business back then to provide sufficient ad revenues for more than one newspaper (the Chatham News was already well established). The Starkweathers forged ahead anyway because they wanted to make a positive difference in their community.

The media business experts were amazed that they managed to keep it going for 11 years, during which the newspaper won 24 N.C. Press Association Awards (a state record) for investigative reporting, news and feature writing, sports, photography and public service. The paper succeeded because the Starkweathers and their staff were willing to work extremely hard for little financial return. When they could no longer afford to keep it going, they sold it for a modest sum in 1984; the next owner sold it again and the subsequent owner went bankrupt soon after.

The Herald was a huge success editorially. Its readers would line up at convenience stores across the county on Wednesday nights, waiting for the paper to be delivered. Its tell it like it is coverage of important local issues had far reaching impacts that are felt across Chatham to this day. (For this I am grateful to Jeffrey and to Linda, who remains our good friend; she and her husband Ned Kelly are among the biggest supporters of Jeffrey's candidacy and all the campaigns he has been involved in.)

When I arrived in Pittsboro in 1978, a front page Herald headline said: PCBs to be buried in county landfill. The County Commissioners had made a secret pact with then Gov. Hunt to bury toxic chemicals in the county landfill. (Chemicals from NY had been illegally dumped along 40 miles of N.C. roadways, much of it in the Silk Hope area.) The Herald blew open the deal, explained the health dangers, and the Commissioners wisely changed their minds about a plan that could have polluted our groundwater forever.

Before The Herald, government meetings often were held illegally behind closed doors. Some public officials thought it was okay to make racist jokes, and it was hard to find any positive local news coverage of African Americans.

The Herald insisted that government officials abide by the Open Meetings and Public

Records laws, which made it possible to uncover the news about the PCB pact, about financial conflicts of interest on the planning board and about problems in the police and sheriff departments, social services and the schools.

The Herald's features also celebrated what was good about Chatham: farmers, artists, churches, businesses and community leaders. Its comprehensive coverage of all communities helped to make it feasible for Carl Thompson to become the first African American County Commissioner in 1978 when he was in his mid 20s.

When The Herald was on your side of an issue, you loved it. When it wasn't, you worried. But many agreed that if you wanted to know what was really going on, you had to read The Herald.

I'll let the voters decide if they want intelligent, fearless and compassionate leaders like Jeffrey Starkweather and Sally Kost on the Board of Commissioners. I hope you will take the time to compare their longtime professional and community experience (and proven commitment to racial, ethnic and gender diversity) with that of the other candidates. Jeffrey has been a community advocate in Chatham since 1973, even longer than the current County Commissioners, and Sally, a native of North Carolina with valuable extensive experience as a public budget analyst, has lived in this area for 20 years.

I apologize for the length of this message. Please know that you are welcome to have a cup of coffee with us anytime. It's harder to tell the truth to each other face to face, but it's usually well worth the effort. Let's talk.

Respectfully,

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