

The Union Appeal

Volume 89

Union, Newton & Neshoba Counties, Mississippi, November 17, 1999

Number 16



Allen Perry

Perry: "It's time to make the changes"

To Allen Perry, the formula is a simple one. Identify the problem, mobilize the forces, make the necessary changes.

The 65-year-old retired Navy officer has lived in Newton County since his retirement from the military and it's safe to say that he has touched a few lives during those 20-plus years.

"Anything I set out to do, it's not about doing it for myself or some other individual, it's about doing it for the community," he said.

Perry, who lives on 50 acres of wooded land about four miles from the Conehatta community in north-west Newton County, is currently concerned about the lack of support from the Newton County Board of Supervisors when it comes to fire protection, and he also says it's about time for the board to move to a Unit System of government. "There is just too much waste going on," he said.

But the fight Perry is not famous for was the one he took on in the 1980s.

School consolidation is very rarely a subject that just sails easily into the night and Newton County was no different.

"I just saw it as something that had to be done," said Perry, who was one of the point men in the drive to consolidate the schools at Decatur, Hickory and Beulah Hubbard into Newton County High School.

He said his first contact with the subject was indeed a personal one. His two younger children came home from school with their new class schedules and Perry was concerned that they weren't getting the classes he would like them to have to be prepared for college.

"I went to the school to ask about it," he said. "They explained to me that because of the size of the school and the available teachers that they could only teach those classes every three years. That just amazed me.

"It seemed to me that the thing to do was to consolidate," he said.

Cont. page 8... See Perry...

Perry..

Cont. from page 1

Perry was raised in Clay County in Alabama, a rural area just south of Anniston.

"It's really very similar to Newton County in a lot of ways," he said.

When he went back to Clay County to visit his mother he asked her about school consolidation. "She told me the same thing had happened in Clay County when I was in the first grade," he said. "The older people were still talking about it, but

the kids didn't know any better. All they knew is that they got a pretty good education."

Perry, who does shy away from speaking his mind, said his intentions were never to close down Hickory and Beulah Hubbard when he began fighting bond issues that were put on the ballot to give the rural schools money needed to build.

"All I was looking for was an expanded high school situation where our children would have a better place to learn and get a better, more rounded education," he said. "There is certainly

a place for local schools in the various communities. And it wouldn't surprise that if one day the elementary schools were returned to those areas. They probably should be."

But Perry said he looked at as an all or nothing situation. "There really was no negotiating," he said. "The people who wanted the bond issue wanted the money to spend like they wanted to."

"I told them I didn't have any problem with them building anything they wanted to, I just didn't want them to use my money to do it," he said.

The Newton County School Board made the controversial move to consolidate the three schools in the late 1980s, a decision that most likely cost then Superintendent of Education Ken Pouncey his job.

He was not reelected after the decision was made.

"Yes, I think it probably cost him the election, but I also know that it was the right thing to do, and it has proven out to be just that," Perry said.

He said that there are probably still some that are upset about it, but there are many more that have come to see the benefits of a larger high school that has more to offer.

"I've had some come to me and say 'Allen, you were right,'" he said. "And that does make you feel a little better."

But accolades from others has never been what Perry was seeking.

"It's just kind of a situation where you see something that needs to be done, and you go and do it," he said.

Perry and his wife of 47 years Patsy, see eye-to-eye on most issues. "We are a lot alike in that respect," he said. "We pick and choose our battles, but if it is a battle worth fighting, then we give it our all."

Perry retired out of the Navy after 28 years and worked for 11 years for a chicken processing plant in Scott County. But these days he is truly retired and spends a lot of his time watching his trees grow.

"We do like to travel," he said. "We have a motor home and we visit our children in California when we can."

The Perrys had several places they could have chosen to live after his retirement, but Newton County seemed like the right place.

"We bought some land from one of my wife's aunt in 1964 and we came by to look at it every time we got a chance," he said. "When we retired, we just felt like this as the best place for us."

He said there was no doubt that he would retire to the South. "A lot of people like San Diego and that type of thing, but this is the place for me," he said.

When the school consolidation issue was at it's highest flame he said he caught a lot of flak from people who considered him an outsider.

"I told them that I chose to live here and this was my home too," he said. "I am still considered an outsider by some and maybe always will be. But we chose to live here and really love it."