



Geneva County Reaper



Vol. 106, No. 32

Geneva County's Oldest and Largest Newspaper Since 1899

2 Sections, 22 Pages 50 Cents

Wednesday, August 16, 2006

Ricky Wilson Given Five Years Probation

**Ann Henderson
Geneva Newspapers**

A former Geneva contractor was granted probation Wednesday, Aug. 9 for a conviction seven months ago of scamming an elderly couple out of their life savings and never completing the renovation of their home in Black.

The jury deliberated about four hours on March 8 to convict Ricky Wilson, 32, now of Bonifay, on a felony charge of theft by deception charge in connection with a housing remodel for James and Linda Strickland.

"We lived in turmoil," said Mrs. Strickland after the probation was announced.

She said four other contractors had to be hired to complete the remodel, a project that eventually totaled \$54,000.

Wilson was sentenced to 10 years in a state penitentiary by Geneva County Circuit Judge Ben McLaughlin following the trial in March. But he was allowed to re-

main out of jail pending a probation report.

During the probation hearing, Wilson testified along with his pastor, Tracy Hobbs, and his wife Nicole.

When asked by Chief Assistant District Attorney Bill Filmore about Wilson, Hobbs said he knew he was under indictment for the criminal

charges while he and his family attended the Pentacostal church north of Bonifay. "He has come consistently for the past three years."

His wife characterized Wilson as the "kind of man, the type of person who was home with his family. He's home every night."

She said her husband's

job as a contractor with a business in Dothan is the family's only income. "The system will have to support us if he is sent to jail," said Mrs. Wilson, who admitted to not having completed high school.

"I'll help pay the restitution," she said. "it will be Wilson, see page 5A"

Stedman Gets 18 Years

**Stephen Crews
Geneva Newspapers**

Legal problems continue to mount for former Enterprise firefighter Kenneth Stedman. He pleaded guilty to first-degree and second-degree sodomy charges last week in Geneva County.



Kenneth Stedman

Stedman was already sentenced to three years in jail after a pre-trial agreement in Coffee County. He now has agreed to 18 years in prison in Geneva County.

Stedman was facing rape charges involving a teenage girl. He was sentenced on Tuesday, August 8 at the Geneva County Courthouse.

Both the Geneva and Coffee County prison sentences will run concurrently. "I am very pleased with the agreement that was reached in this case," said Geneva County District Attorney Kirke Adams. "I have committed to do as much as I can to make sure that Mr. Stedman stays in prison for as long as he can."

Charles Morgan Sentenced for Sex Crimes

**Stephen Crews
Geneva Newspapers**

A Geneva County man who attempted to solicit a minor over the internet for sex was sentenced Tuesday, August 8 at the Geneva County Courthouse.

In March 2006, 39-year-old Charles Jerome Morgan of Samson was arrested in Ozark during a joint investigation by several local and state agencies. Investigators say while on the internet, Morgan arranged to meet a 13-year-old girl at an Ozark motel.

It was later learned that he was really corresponding with an undercover police officer monitoring the chat room. Morgan was sentenced Tuesday to 10 years behind bars.

"The parole board has assured district attorneys that they take a very close look at any crimes involving a child, especially sex crimes," said District Attorney Kirke Adams. "All of the law enforcement agencies worked hard on this case together and they are pleased with the outcome. This is a great day for Geneva County."



Pictured above is at least one crack that has formed in the temporary jail facility at the county courthouse. (Staff photo by Stephen Crews)

Cracks Forming in Temporary Jail Facilities

**Stephen Crews
Geneva Newspapers**

Geneva Newspapers learned this week that several cracks have formed in the new temporary jail facility behind the Geneva County Courthouse.

When responding to the tip, several cracks were confirmed at the base of the structure where it had been secured to the concrete. Most of the cracks are around the bolts securing the structure to the ground.

Jail inmates have still not been allowed in the facility because there has been no

approval by the state fire marshal as of Monday. The subject was aired out on WGEA radio Thursday and Friday. Sheriff Greg Ward was on the program Thursday to respond to numerous rumors that have surfaced around the county stating that the facilities were ready for occupation but that he had chosen to simply not house inmates in them yet. Ward said that he knew who had started the rumors and that he had decided that he wasn't going to sit back and take it anymore.

Ward also talked about the issue of a work-release

program and it's association with the temporary facility. "The temporary jail was built to handle the overcrowding problem only," said Ward. "That's what the commission stated when they began this project."

Since that time, Ward says that some of the county commission is now saying that the two domes are to be used for a work-release program.

"We have a problem with overcrowding," said Ward. "I don't have a problem with a work release program but these domes were not planned for that."

When asking about the cracks that have formed on the structure the most reasonable explanation is that the structures were bolted down too tight for the expansion of the concrete.

Repairs were made to the cracks on Monday afternoon. Caulking was used to cover the cracks as well as a hole in the side of each dome that has been filled with a cork originally. The repairs had at least one commissioner questioning the actual safety of the structure. For more on the commission meeting see next week's paper.

Geneva Nursing Home Beauty Among Top 10 in Alabama

**Ann Henderson
Geneva Newspapers**

"I know now why I didn't win. It was my hair," said Martha Earnest of the recent competition to become Ms. Alabama Nursing Home.

"Look at it in this picture," she gestures to a photograph taken shortly after being crowned Ms. Wiregrass Nursing Home. "It looks so much smoother."

Earnest was among the Top 10 reigning beauties from across Alabama chosen to compete in the final segment of the pageant on Aug. 8 at the Wynfrey Hotel in Birmingham.

She was chosen to be in the Top 10 from 65 contestants from across Alabama. The Top 10 were interviewed prior to the pageant and during the competition.

While on stage, Earnest was asked what she would teach young people today.

"I'd tell them to behave themselves, to mind their parents and to never take any dope," she said was

her answer while discussing the pageant in her residence at the nursing home in Geneva.

Earnest was in the middle of creating another purse, this one from a pink floral pattern.

"I've sewn all my life," she said.

The wall above her bed showcases her purses ranging in patterns from a hunt scene to Auburn orange and blue. Each one sells for \$10. "I make what I want to."

She keeps \$3 from each sale. "I buy stuff like I want, make-up or shoes, some clothes. But I make most of my clothes."

She also sews pull-over cotton shirts similar to nurse's tops. Each one sells for \$10.

The remaining money from her sewing projects goes to her half-brother, Glenn Earnest, to buy more supplies for her cottage industry.

"If I get tired of sewing, I go visit patients or walk in the yard, but only when it's not too hot," said

Queen, see page 2A



Ms. Wiregrass Nursing Home Martha Earnest, center, poses with Laura Beth Dykes, daughter of nursing home administrator Greg Dykes, and Miss Alabama 2006 Melinda Toole a few minutes before the state pageant on Tuesday, Aug. 8 in the Wynfrey Hotel in Birmingham. (Submitted Photo)

Staph Infection back in County Jail

**Stephen Crews
Geneva Newspapers**

It's back! Geneva Newspapers Inc. has received several calls from family members of inmates in the Geneva County jail in recent weeks reporting that a staph infection is once again in the jail. Geneva County Sheriff Greg Ward confirmed the reports this past week.

Geneva County Sheriff Greg Ward says the quick action of his correctional officers averted the spread of a contagious disease to the entire jail population. Sheriff Ward says a man who authorities say displayed signs of staph infection was arrested last week and booked into the Geneva County Jail.

After a physician confirmed the disease, the inmate was quarantined, and his cell mates were also tested. Those tests were all negative.

Sheriff Ward says his department has taken hygiene measures to try and minimize the chances of inmates or officers from contracting a staph infection.

Staph is a type of infection caused by a Staphylococcus (or "staph") bacteria. Actually, about 25% of people normally carry staph in the nose, mouth, genitals, and anal area. The foot is very prone to pick up bacteria from the floor. The infection often begins with a little cut, which gets infected with bacteria.

These staph infections range from a simple boil to antibiotic-resistant infections to flesh-eating infections. The difference between all these is how deep and how fast the infection spreads, and how treatable it is with antibiotics. The antibiotic-resistant infections are more common in North America, because of our overuse of antibiotics.

The type of staph infection that involves skin is called cellulitis and affects the skin's deeper layers. It is treatable with antibiotics.

This type of infection is very common in the general population -- and more common and more severe in people with weak immune systems. People who have diabetes or weakened immunity are particularly prone to developing cellulitis.

What does staph infection look like?

Staph cellulitis usually begins as a small area of tenderness, swelling, and redness. Sometimes it be-

Staph, see page 3A



From left, Charlotte Davis of Geneva County placed first in the heirloom division for a pink dress with triangular lace accents on the sleeves, blouse and skirt hem. Placing second was Kimberly Ingram of Lee County for a dress modeled by Carla Ingram. (Submitted Photograph)

Chancellor Resident wins Cotton Fashion Sewing and Quilting Contest Category

Special to Geneva Newspapers

Cotton was king in Alabama Aug. 5 as the Alabama Farmers Federation Women's Division announced the winners of the Cotton Fashion Sewing and Quilting Contest held in conjunction with the 34th annual Commodity Producers Conference in Huntsville. Seamstresses from Crenshaw, Lamar, Geneva, Randolph and Russell counties took top honors in the contest, which featured garments, quilts and crocheted table linens made of 100 percent cotton fabrics and blended fabrics of at least 50 percent cotton. The competition, which is supported by the Federation's Cotton Division, promotes the comfort, versatility and style of cotton clothing while preserving the arts of quilt making and crocheting. Betty Barnes of Lamar County placed first in the crocheted table linens category for a circular table doily featuring a poinsettia-style center. Second place went to Margaret Caldwell of Talladega County, and Annie Harris of Cleburne County placed third.

In the quilting contest, Deloris Mount of Crenshaw County took top honors for her yellow-and-white creation with butterfly and sunflower accents. Faustina Gosa of Lamar County placed second, and third-place honors went to Frances Roark of Randolph County.

The sewing contest included four categories: heirloom, children's clothing, adult garments, and outfits constructed by teenagers. In the heirloom

division, Charlotte Davis of Geneva County placed first for a pink dress with triangular lace accents on the sleeves, blouse and skirt hem. Placing second was Kimberly Ingram of Lee County for a dress modeled by Carla Ingram.

First place in the children's clothing division went to Faye McCord of Randolph County for a floral-pattern dress modeled by Lindsay Fincher. Sandra Barber of St. Clair County placed second for a young boy's casual suit modeled by Benjamin Abel, and the third-place winner was Jennifer Oden of Etowah County for a dress modeled by Sarah Oden.

In the adult division, Sissie Dougherty of Russell County placed first for her black-and-white pant suit with coordinating multi-colored blouse. Second place was claimed by Medie Machen of Talladega County while Lillian Slay of Chambers County placed third.

The teen division featured garments sewn by students age 19 years and younger. First-place in this category went to Hannah Brown of Randolph County for a bright-yellow dress with black accessories, and Hillary Barber of St. Clair County placed second.

Winners in each division received cash awards of \$150 for first place; \$100 for second place and \$75 for third place. Contestants qualified to compete in the state contest by winning their respective county competitions.

Last year, Alabama farmers harvested 545,000 acres of cotton, producing 848,000 bales. Nationally, Alabama ranks 10th in cotton production.

Wallage Announces Recent Graduates

Wallace Community College conferred degrees upon 13 graduates of the Radiologic Technology program and 10 certificates to graduates of the Practical Nursing program. In addition, 77 Associate Degree Nursing degrees were conferred, making the summer 2006 class the largest graduating group in the College's ADN program history.

The graduates of the Radiologic Technology program are

Coffee Springs: Karla Huguley
Hartford: Tabitha Dawn Dexter, Maenell Marsh
Westville, Florida: William Keith Petty

The graduates of the PN program are

Hartford: Jenny Wiggins

Wilson

Continued from Page 1A

huge. But it's worth it."

Wilson appeared to tear up on the witness stand as he looked at Mrs. Strickland who was sitting in the audience. He said he was "sincerely apologetic" and "did not do it intentionally. I'm willing to do anything to make my wrongs right."

"It's a hard question to answer," Mrs. Strickland said when asked if she thought the probation was appropriate.

"I feel sorry for him in a way," she said. "I can't get inside his head. I hope he has learned his lesson. It's just pitiful what he did to them. It was worse than us."

She was referring to a botched renovation job at the home of Jerry and Mildred Grimes. Wilson was also arrested and charged with theft by deception in that case. But a jury found him not guilty.

"We got a judgment for \$82,757," said Mr. Grimes, who attended the probation hearing. "It's for 10 years and will renew for another 10 years. I'm hoping to track down whatever we can. I'm hoping it's difficult for him to file bankruptcy."

During the trial in

March, the Stricklands testified they contracted with Wilson on Aug. 21, 2003, to replace the roof and build a bathroom onto their master bedroom.

They said he was given partial payments through Nov. 21. His last discussion with the couple was Dec. 3.

"This was the first time in 20 years we could not have Thanksgiving and Christmas at granny and grandpa's house," said Mr. Strickland following the trial. "For a while, Ricky was a good boy. He was a good carpenter. But he was not doing things right."

While Wilson was on the witness stand, he said he had \$10,000 that could begin to repay the Stricklands. He admitted \$8,200 had come from an account of his mother's at Regions Bank that he now has the power of attorney.

He said she had recently been admitted to a hospital for treatment of a mental disorder. Wilson said he was the only relative to take care of her financial business.

But when Filmore asked about siblings, he admitted to having an older brother and two older sisters.

"She's there by court

order," said Wilson. "I visit three times a week and take her food and clothing."

Wilson's defense counsel, David Harrison, told MacLauchlin that if Wilson was sentenced to prison, the payment of the restitution would not begin under after he was released. "I think he's learned he needs to handle his business a different way."

Harrison said Wilson did not have a criminal conviction prior to the theft by deception. "I hope you grant him the opportunity to be on probation."

Filmore said he felt Wilson's actions were "one of the worst crimes because he was taking advantage of elderly people. He did what he had to do to gain their trust to do a construction job and then took their money."

MacLauchlin reviewed the case files which also included several bad check charges and nine civil judgments dating to 1997 in Geneva County.

In granting probation, MacLauchlin said that if Wilson was convicted of another worthless check or fraud, his probation would be revoked.