

Currents

Something Fishy

Fish ponds fill former farms

Story and Photos by
WILLIAM R. TOLER
THE INDEPENDENT REGISTER

As you drive through Craven and Beaufort counties, you may find several old fields under water.

They're not flooded from overflowing rivers or from downpours of rain. Former tobacco and corn fields have been converted into ponds full of fish. The types of fish range from catfish or hybrid striped bass to trout and tilapia.

"In our area we raise primarily hybrid striped bass and catfish," said Matt Parker from the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. "I think there is also a tilapia farm in Beaufort County."

According to statistics from the state Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, "Over 250 individuals hold NCDA-issued licenses for pond and tank aquaculture." These include both commercial and non-commercial producers. "We have 18 aquaculture licenses in Craven County, one in Pamlico, 24 in Beaufort," Parker said.

One of those in Craven County is Tarheel Fishery owner Wayne Toler in Cayton. He began with two ponds in 1990, on farmland that had previously been used for corn, tobacco and soybeans. "I dug two, but only stocked one," Toler said. "I couldn't afford to do any more."

Throughout the years, he has added four other ponds, along with his father James Luther, for a total of six. In 1999, he built an on-site production house to box and temporarily store the fish. "We built that so we wouldn't have to haul ice from Hobucken," he said. "That ice machine has been a lifesaver." Before then, he was hauling the fish in coolers to a site in South Creek in Beaufort County. Toler said he was paying 15 cents per pound to box the fish plus a 4 percent commission to sell them.

Two of the ponds are used for fingerlings at the beginning of the raising process. Twenty thousand small fish are placed in each pond and split between the other four once they reach a certain size.

As fingerlings, the fish are fed three times a day until fall. As the cold weather approaches the feeding decreases. "Sometimes you don't feed them but once a week," Toler said.

"It's very time-consuming," he added. In addition to the daily feedings, he also has to check the oxygen levels in the ponds. In the cooler months, he checks the levels twice a day. During the summer, depending on the heat, he may have to check them up to five times.

Beginning in September, Toler harvests the ponds finishing up around March the following year. "My average yield is about 15,000 pounds per pond," he said.

"Last year was a bad year," Toler said only harvesting 48,000 lbs. But two years before had yields of more than 70,000 lbs. "You have bad years farming fish, just like you have bad years farming anything else."

Low yields can be associated with loss due to low oxygen levels in the summer and predatory birds such as osprey.

The fish are packed whole, in ice, at 50 lbs per box. They are then distributed by Evans Seafood in Washington, N.C. to retailers in the north. "A lot of my fish go to Canada, New York and Chicago," he said.

"It's high risk but a high gain," he said. "It's like playing the stock market."



James Luther Toler weighs and sorts hybrid striped bass at the Tarheel Fishery production house in Cayton in northern Craven County.

*Disclosure:
Wayne and James Luther Toler are
uncle and grandfather to the
author of this article.*



Wayne Toler pauses on his four-wheeler to observe his fish during feeding time.



Tom Ipock (left) ices down the fish as Tony Cayton brings the box top.



Bass are packed in a box and ready for another layer of ice and a lid.



Juan Valdiviez transfers fish from the cooler to the sorting table to be weighed.



Matthew Ipock places fish side by side in iced boxes after they have been sorted by weight.

Craven County Senior Services schedules activities for elders

STAFF REPORTS
THE INDEPENDENT REGISTER

Craven County Senior Services recently released its November calendar of events, which includes opportunities for fun and fellowship in all corners of the county. All programs are open to seniors 60 and older.

New Bern seniors are invited to participate in weekday events at the George Street Senior Center, including bingo, exercise, crafts and guest lectures. Activities begin at 10

a.m., with lunch following at noon. Transportation can be provided in most cases. For more information, contact Linda at (252) 638-1790.

Havelock seniors are invited to daily events from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday. For more information, call Cora at (252) 444-6445.

Senior citizens in Harlowe can participate in bingo, exercise classes and crafts between 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. For details, call (252) 638-1790.

Vanceboro seniors are invited to take part in sewing, informative speakers and exercise classes from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at the Vanceboro Community Building. Contact Nevada at (252) 244-1219 for more information.

Craven County Senior Services is also seeking older adults who enjoy playing bridge to take part in 2 p.m. Monday sessions beginning Jan. 9, 2006. For details, call Linda at (252) 638-1790.

No monkey business

'Inherit the Wind' to be shown at CCC

STAFF REPORTS
THE INDEPENDENT REGISTER

Americans United for Separation of Church and State will be screening the Stanley Kramer classic "Inherit the Wind" in Orringer Hall Auditorium at Craven Community College Friday, Nov. 11, at 7 p.m.

The 1960 film, starring Spencer Tracy and Fredric March, is about the trial of a man who was arrested for teaching the theories of Charles Darwin in the classroom. "Inherit the Wind" is a fictional

account of the 1925 "Scopes Monkey Trial" that took place in Tennessee.

An optional discussion on "The 80th anniversary of the Scopes Trial" will be held following the movie.

The sponsoring group believes that the government should "remain neutral on religious questions, leaving decisions about God, faith and house of worship attendance in the hands of its citizens."

Admission is free and refreshments will be served.

'Chicks 101' in session

Filmmaker Lovinder Gill screens movie at ECU

BY WILLIAM R. TOLER
THE INDEPENDENT REGISTER

GREENVILLE — A handful of friends and fans turned out for the screening of "Chicks 101" at East Carolina University on Oct. 28.

More than two years after wrapping production of the film, former ECU professor Lovinder Gill returned to show off the long-awaited project.

"We've been working on it for two years," said Gill. "We're finally done."

The "we" Gill kept referring to was himself and producing partner Geoff Thompson. Thompson is currently teaching at ECU and portrayed Blackbeard this summer in the revival of "Knight of the Black Flag." Gill now teaches at Winston-Salem State University.

After the script was finished, five casting calls were held, including sessions in New York and Los Angeles. But Gill found most of his talent within a tri-state area, with actors from North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia during the N.C. sessions.

The only person that didn't have to read for a part was lead actor Keith Harris ("Big Fish," "From the Earth to the Moon"), whom Gill met at film school. Harris and female lead Kate Leahay, from Charlotte, had instant chemistry during auditions, which led to her getting the role.

Crew members and extras included, among others, ECU students and alums Ashley Mangum and Kevin Harp.

"Chicks 101" was shot in 19 days during the summer of 2003 in locations around Winston-Salem and Greensboro. With less than nine hours of footage, two years of editing and massive fund-raising, a 94-minute feature film resulted.

Gill said that the original intention was to shoot in eastern North Carolina locations, including New Bern, Kinston and Greenville. Much to his surprise, he received no support for his project in Greenville.

"It's that whole 'jump and the net will appear' mentality," said Gill, "and we jumped off and a lot of good things happened along the way."

One of those "good things" was recently winning Best Feature Film at the Reel Backwoods Film Festival held at Carolina Pinnacle Studios in Yanceyville. After entering several festivals, Gill and company were honored to be accepted and even more honored to receive the highest accolade.

"We couldn't believe it," Gill said regarding the festival win. He described awards night as a miniature Academy Awards ceremony, including tuxedos and limousines. With all the highs and

lows of the evening, the "Chicks" crew was exhausted and shocked when the film was announced.

"We're at a point now where the film is over and we're in the marketing process," Gill said. While attending a conference on filmmaking in Los Angeles, Gill said the best advice he received was from Eli Roth, director of "Cabin Fever."

Roth hired a publicist who scheduled magazine interviews and helped create a large enough buzz about the movie. Within the first 10 minutes of the premiere, Roth was getting offers for the film.

Gill is continuing to promote the film by creating new posters, making DVD copies of the film and through the Web site, www.chicks101movie.com.

There are a few companies currently interested in distributing the film. Despite the fact that independent filmmakers only receive a small percentage of what the film brings in, Gill said, "We're not against a distribution deal."

Ever optimistic, Gill said if the movie doesn't get picked up, it will be available on DVD from the Web site, sticking to the driving quote from the film by Susan B. Anthony, "Failure is impossible."

Indie romantic comedy formulaic, but well done

BY EVAN BRINKLEY
THE INDEPENDENT REGISTER

"Failure is impossible."

This particular quote from the godfather, sorry, godmother of feminism, Susan B. Anthony, isn't quite what you think of when you hear the title of our film, "Chicks 101."

But alas, it is the rallying cry for our main character as he attempts to turn a bunch of misfits into womanizers.

If "Chicks 101" was made in Hollywood on a larger budget, it would most likely be a starring vehicle for Vince Vaughn and a Wilson brother. But the movie makes use of fresh, new talent.

Keith Harris plays Louie King, a ladies' man who finds himself fired from his corporate job when he is caught in a pretty unfavorable position with his female boss.

Louie's nerdy best friend, Noel, played by Brandon Roberts, persuades Louie to show him the ways of attracting the opposite sex. This move proves to be successful

for Noel and soon, some of his geeky coworkers begin to come to Louie for help.

Louie and Noel move the group into a classroom at the local college. It just so happens that Louie's class is right across the hall from a feminism class taught by the feisty Marla Mann, portrayed by ultra-cutie Kate Leahay.

Further chaos ensues when one of Louie's students (Geoff Thompson) bets him money that he can't get Marla in the sack.

Overall, it's a very formulaic romantic comedy, but it works, and that's what really matters. All of the performances were extremely good, especially for unknowns. The script was well written and full of witty dialogue.

The only criticisms I have are technical ones (i.e. sound, picture, etc.) but those are personal, and this is no place to get real nitpicky.

So when it's finally distributed on DVD, go to your local movie rental or sales center and indulge in "Chicks 101."

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Bands: Send your gig announcements to william@indieregister.com



INDEPENDENT REGISTER / WILLIAM R. TOLER

New Bern novelist Nicholas Sparks (right) receives an award from principal Terry Fuhrman for his contributions to New Bern High School Nov. 4 during halftime of the New Bern-J.H. Rose varsity football game.

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Craven Community College Spring Registration

Nov. 14 - 17

8:30 a.m. - 6:30 p.m.

Nov. 18

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Come join us, and become again!

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