

## New Hill residents cry foul

Wake sewage plant unwelcome



Wayne Womble (not shown), owner of Womble Corvettes in New Hill, displays his displeasure about a proposed sewage treatment plant coming to his community. The facility would be built between Shearon Harris and New Hill-Holleman roads on the south side of Old U.S. 1.

*Staff Photo by John Rottet*

By **TOBY COLEMAN**, Staff Writer

NEW HILL -- Once upon a time, Babe Ruth stopped at this crossroads settlement for a chicken dinner. Notorious bank robbers Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow bedded down here for a night. The way folks here tell it, all kinds of people used to stop in New Hill when U.S. 1 came through.

Nowadays, U.S. 1 bypasses New Hill, and its restaurants and motor court are closed. Residents no longer talk about famous visitors. They talk about how their community has become the place for the stuff nobody else in Wake County wants.

The Shearon Harris nuclear plant. Transmission lines. And now, a sewage treatment plant for Apex, Cary, Holly Springs and Morrisville.

"We're pretty upset that we're the dumping ground of the county," said Wayne Womble, a New Hill native who runs a Corvette repair shop near the crossroads that mark the center of New Hill.

But instead of shriveling up, residents say, New Hill has found new life as the townsfolk fight the treatment plant. The closed shops at the junction of Old U.S. 1 and New Hill-Olive Chapel Road are decorated with signs reading "Stop Cary" and "Preserve New Hill, Don't 'Waste' It."

The residents have created a virtual community center on the Internet to replace their old one, the now-closed Farmer's Supply Store. And, for the first time since the town dissolved in 1917, residents have organized a representative body, the New Hill Community Association.

Paul Barth, the association's first president, is talking about printing New Hill car stickers and starting a museum to capitalize on his neighbors' growing sense of pride in their community.

"That's really the only good thing to come out of this," he said. "People who typically live far apart and who saw each other in passing or at the convenience store, and didn't know each other really well, now know each other well."

**More crops than shops**

The dairy farmers and tobacco growers who used to work the hills around the New Hill crossroads have given way to horse farms and secluded homes for lawyers, engineers and others who work in the Triangle. Although the community of about 1,000 has grown some, it remains a rural place. Soybeans, corn and tobacco cover more land than parking lots and stores.

New Hill residents were drawn together in May, after they learned that the four nearby towns planned to condemn more than 200 acres near the New Hill Baptist Church for a sewage treatment plant. A rare community meeting was called, and a crowd gathered at the church "like you've never seen before," said Max Horton, 74, a New Hill retiree.

The response was exceptional, especially for a group that did not put up a big fight when the nuclear power plant was built a mile or so away about three decades ago. Inside the church, the area's residents agreed on one thing. They were not going to take anybody else's ... well, you know.

### **A fight that unifies**

"I think it touched everybody the same way," said Johnnie Judd, 60, a retiree who has lived in New Hill for three decades. "It sort of catalyzed the community."

Soon, a group of residents began to scrutinize the engineering documents of the four towns' partnership, trying to figure out why it wants to build the plant in New Hill. They learned that the town was chosen because it is near U.S. 1, has relatively cheap land and is still in Wake County, among other things.

They began a campaign to urge the towns to build the treatment plant on the unused land around the Shearon Harris plant.

At least that would be out of "smelling distance," said Bob Kelly, 62, an IBM retiree who has lived in New Hill for 35 years.

So far, the campaign has not had much success. The partnership says it can't build a treatment plant on the Harris land because no land is available. Progress Energy is keeping some in case it wants to expand the power plant, said Kim Fisher, head of Cary's public works and utilities.

Other parcels may end up under water someday if the power company decides to expand Harris Lake, Fisher said.

That has left some New Hill residents convinced that they will have to put up with a sewage treatment plant in a few years.

"There isn't nothing we can do about it," said Richard Horton, 66.

### **Historic heart at risk**

Others, though, won't give in. They say a sewage plant would foul the historic heart of their community, which still looks remarkably like the place the Babe drove through about 70 years ago.

C.J. Bright's country store still stands near the spot where the trains used to stop, and the green-and-white cottages of W.T. Roundy's Motor Court remain behind the old heart of New Hill, the Farmer's Supply Store.

But there is one difference. Except for the old-timers who occasionally gather outside the old stores, all three of those historic emblems are now abandoned.

These days, New Hill residents go online to exchange information and vent their frustrations about the treatment plant.

Barry Credle, for instance, recently used the New Hill e-mail group to show his neighbors the

tongue-in-cheek letter he wrote to New York City's mayor. In it, he offered New York "the historic downtown districts of Cary, Apex, Morrisville and Holly Springs for any future sewage plants."

"Certainly," he wrote, "it would follow that if they can dump on us, you would be more than justified to dump on them."

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