



## AN INDIAN CELEBRATION

5A



## CARY ACADEMY WINS 3RD STRAIGHT

SPORTS 1B

# THE CARY NEWS

SERVING CARY AND MORRISVILLE

carynews.com

# Red-light loophole lets drivers off hook

Dozens used 'It wasn't me' excuse to avoid fine

By ANDREW KENNEY  
akenney@newsobserver.com

**CARY** Imagine escaping a traffic ticket with one argument: "It wasn't me."

That's what dozens of drivers have done in response to tickets issued by local governments' red-

light cameras.

In Cary, at least 72 people have had their camera-generated tickets dismissed this year by claiming that they weren't driving.

Some of those drivers were taking advantage of a hard-to-enforce rule: According to state law, vehicle owners are not necessarily responsible for their car's actions in Wake County if they weren't driving.

The town of Cary shuttered its

camera system Saturday, but the loophole also applies in Knightdale and Raleigh, which host two of the state's last three red-light camera systems. (Wilmington operates under different rules.)

The law that governs Wake County's camera systems outlines the easy out: To nullify a ticket, drivers can provide the mayor's office a sworn affidavit that they weren't behind the wheel when the camera

clicked. Affidavits are serious business – filing a false affidavit is a felony akin to perjury – but the loophole is temptingly cheap. An affidavit can cost just \$5 to notarize, while red-light violations run \$50 each.

Local officials say it's nearly impossible to prove or disprove the claims, which most often come in the form of affidavits. Instead, Cary and Raleigh almost always dismiss

the contested cases.

"We take them at face value," said Maj. Tony Godwin of the Cary Police Department.

So does Raleigh, which receives about 100 "didn't do it" claims per year; Knightdale doesn't track the claims, which go to Redflex, its red-light camera contractor, according to town staff.

SEE CAMERAS, PAGE 6A

## 4-cent max tax hike for bonds

Morrisville may not have to levy that rate

By ALIANA RAMOS  
aramos@newsobserver.com

**MORRISVILLE** Property owners could face up to a 4-cent property-tax rate increase to repay \$20 million in street and parks bonds if voters give the go-ahead in November, town officials said last week.

A resident who owned a home at the town's average value of \$298,835 would pay an additional \$119.53 per year in taxes if the bond passes. That's about \$9.96 per month, but only if the town decides to levy all 4 cents.

For months, the Morrisville Town Council has considered what it will take to pay back the bonds and handle existing debt over 20 years. Analysts have estimated 3 to 6 cents added to the town's existing rate of 36.65 cents per \$100 in assessed value.

Councilwoman Liz Johnson stressed the importance of getting residents a hard number versus using a range.

Voters need to understand "what specifically it means to them, and we need to make sure we are not wishy-washy on that message," Johnson said at a meeting Aug. 14.

Town Manager John Whitson is projecting that the tax increase will be phased in, with a 2-cent increase implemented in 2014 and another in either 2017 or 2018.

Other factors such as the town's growth rate, timing of bond sales, interest rates and reduction of existing debt could also affect the tax rate for the positive.

"I do think the figures are conservative," Johnson said. "They might come in better. We may not have to issue the additional cents."

Residents will get a brochure detailing the bond projects and the tax-rate increase with their next water bill. The brochure is available now on the town's website.

SEE RATE, PAGE 6A



PHOTOS BY LIZ CONDO

Sneha Venkatraman, right, searches for large red onions alongside Sneha Bhalodia, left, at the farmers market in Raleigh. The high school students run The Little Green Bus produce-delivery service.

## Local teens deliver fresh produce

Little Green Bus is 4 girls' award-winning business effort

By SARAH NAGEM  
snagem@newsobserver.com

Four local teens had an idea: Start a food-delivery business that would promote healthy eating habits and support the local agricultural economy.

So The Little Green Bus was born.

Actually, there is no bus. The four girls drive their cars or a friend's minivan to the Raleigh Farmers Market on Saturday mornings and load up with the produce orders they've taken from customers throughout the week. Then they spend the day delivering the goods to families – mostly in Cary, Morrisville and Apex.

The idea, they said, is to make locally grown fruits and vegetables easily accessible to busy families who don't have time to shop at farmers markets.

"We believe that buying healthy



From left, Sneha Venkatraman, Sneha Bhalodia and Ruchi Desai search through zucchini in the wholesale building at the farmers market in Raleigh.

food shouldn't be a chore," said Serena Advani, 17, a rising senior at Cary Academy. "In fact, it should be a pleasure."

The teens have been making deliveries since June, but the idea came about when they entered a competition in Raleigh two years ago for aspiring young entrepre-

neurs. Their business plan for The Little Green Bus snagged them a second-place award and \$3,000 to get the business off the ground.

They won an additional \$1,000 in June through Banking on Youth, another business competition.

Now the teens – Advani; Sneha Bhalodia, 17, a rising senior at

Green Hope High School; Ruchi Desai, 16, a rising senior at Cary Academy; and Sneha Venkatraman, 16, a rising junior at Apex High School – are getting a taste of what it's like to be business owners.

The hardest part is marketing, Venkatraman said. The business started out delivering produce to family friends, but they have relied on others to spread the word. Sometimes they hand over an extra business card for existing customers to give to neighbors.

So far, The Little Green Bus has about 25 customers, who usually place their orders online, then wait for fresh okra and tomatoes to arrive at their doorstep.

Customers pay a 15 percent fee for the service. That's not much when peaches cost only 70 cents each and blueberries go for \$2.50 a box.

The business might not make the teens rich, Venkatraman said, but it has turned a profit every week.

"It's just really cool to be able to say, as a teenager, I started a busi-

SEE FOOD, PAGE 6A

## Lazy Daze Arts and Crafts Festival set for Saturday

Hurricane scrapped last year's festival

By ANDREW KENNEY  
akenney@newsobserver.com

**CARY** Ana Sumner is the poster child for local art.

Sumner retired at 52 to make sewn mixed-media art full time. She sells almost exclusively to Cary residents. And her art literally is the poster for Saturday's 36th annual Lazy Daze Arts and Crafts Festival.

As this year's featured artist, she sewed thousands of stitches into an elaborate cloth mosaic that shows

downtown Cary from above, its streets lined with the crowds of vendors and patrons that mark the yearly arts gathering. An image of the quilt-like art is the town's icon for this year's event.

"Lazy Daze gives the artist a wonderful opportunity to showcase and to share what they're creating. It's a good place to start," said Sumner, who has only considered herself an "artist" for five years. On Saturday, she'll join hundreds showing their wares to as many as 60,000 visitors.

The festival returns after suffering its first cancellation last year, during Hurricane Irene. It will be stuffed with about 350 painters, glass-blow-

Want to go?

Lazy Daze is from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 25, along Academy and Chatham streets in downtown Cary. Learn more at [TownOfCary.org](http://TownOfCary.org).

ers, crafters, jewelers, photographers and other creative types. The event also hosts two stages of music, a children's section and ice- and wood-carving competitions.

In all, this year's event will cost about \$88,000 to put on, but the town expects to turn a profit from fees paid by artists and concession sellers. The town donates proceeds to local arts and cultural groups.

Local artists pay \$140; out-of-town-ers pay \$160 to participate.

In its early years, the event was an anchor for a once-fledgling local arts scene; today it draws artists and artisans from nationwide. Town staff say another cancellation is unlikely, given the clear skies and mid-80s weather on the long-term forecast.

"We haven't seen any hurricanes on the horizon," said Cultural Arts Manager Lyman Collins. "We're feeling pretty confident. It takes severe weather, meaning thunderstorms, severe winds," to cancel the event.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Ana Sumner with this year's Lazy Daze poster.

Kenney: 919-460-2608 or [twitter.com/KenneyOnCary](https://twitter.com/KenneyOnCary)

## CAMERAS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

### Hidden option

While Cary and Raleigh accept the “nonresponsibility” excuse, they haven’t exactly advertised the option.

Until recently, camera-generated citations from Cary proclaimed that “You Must Select One of the Following Options” – pay the ticket, tell who was driving, or request a hearing.

Knightdale still uses the same wording that Cary did and runs its program with the same contractor, Reflex, as the larger town.

Raleigh’s citations, meanwhile, don’t offer any option except payment, according to a sample released by the city.

“We don’t tell you that you can sign this affidavit to get out of the ticket,” said John Sandor, an administrator of Raleigh’s systems.

“I don’t think that when any of these cities set these programs up they wanted to invite people to lie,” Sandor said.

Cary, however, changed its ways this year on the advice of a judge.

The town began to notify drivers of the “nonresponsibility” option after “the (Wake County Superior) Court raised a concern it had over the wording of the Safe-light Cary Notice of Traffic Violation,” according to a March letter from Elizabeth Martineau, an attorney for the town.

The wording of the citations came up during discussions of a class-action lawsuit involving the cameras.

The town’s revised \$50 citations explicitly told vehicle owners that tickets to absentee drivers would be nullified; in recent months, the town even included blank affidavits so the wrongfully accused could swear their innocence more

conveniently.

### Going public

One man in particular has brought the affidavit option to light.

Brian Ceccarelli has mounted a legal crusade against Cary’s now-defunct Reflex system, and he has had legal help from N.C. House Majority Leader Paul “Skip” Stam of Apex.

Their class-action suit focuses primarily on the timing of Cary’s traffic signals, but the proceedings have included conversations about the citations.

Ceccarelli says he and Stam informed the town of the potential problems with the citations as early as January 2011, and he contends that the Reflex-generated tickets intentionally mislead recipients.

In response to what he describes as an omission, Ceccarelli has published pre-printed nonresponsibility claims on his website, Red LightRobber.com.

Sandor said he worries that Ceccarelli is encouraging drivers to commit perjury, and he notes that the city keeps a record of the excuse-givers.

Ceccarelli responds that the affidavits he provides are intended only for use by wrongfully accused drivers, and he argues that the governments and their contractors are legally obligated to tell ticket recipients of their options.

“Whether the individual people can use this to get out of paying a ticket, that’s their problem,” Ceccarelli said.

“That’s their decision.” The town of Cary declined to respond directly to Ceccarelli’s comment, as it pertains to ongoing litigation.

**Kenney: 919-460-2608 or twitter.com/KenneyOnCary**

# After 78 years, closing time

## Stephens Hardware in Fuquay-Varina says goodbye to customers

By ALIANA RAMOS  
aramos@newsobserver.com

**FUQUAY-VARINA** In a whisper, Wray Stephens lets out the word “never” and tears up. His wife and daughters rush in to give him hugs of support, their eyes glistening with tears as well.

“Never” is when it will seem real that the 78-year-old family business, Stephens Hardware, is finally closed.

The store’s last day was Saturday.

Stacks of bare shelves and empty space stood where the store’s popular pet paraphernalia used to be. Overhead, the motorized toy train set that drew fascinated gazes from children for decades rolled along. Until the very last minutes, customers flowed through the doors in search of a good deal; inventory was 40 percent off.

Some came to the old one-story brick building at 405 Broad St. in Fuquay-Varina just wanting to say goodbye to a place that was a community staple.

Al Jackson of Holly Springs had shopped at Stephens Hardware since 1996. He visited twice Saturday, once to talk to Wray Stephens, and again to redeem a gift card. Jackson called the store’s closing sad.

“You can walk in the store, and you have a bolt or a screw, and you need just one, you can buy just one here,” Jackson said. “And you get someone to personally help you and take you to where it is. You can’t do that anywhere else.”

“People from all over the area



ALIANA RAMOS-aramos@newsobserver.com

Wray Stephens gets tearful hugs from his wife and two daughters as their family-owned store closes for the last time on Saturday. The shop opened in Fuquay-Varina in 1934.

know where Stephens Hardware is.”

Wray Stephens and his four brothers, who jointly own the store, announced plans to sell last September. While the company was able to survive amid competition from big-box retailers, the brothers had another problem: no third-generation heirs willing to run the day-to-day operation.

Customer outcry kept the store open while the owners searched for a buyer, but in early July the Stephens family said they were closing for good and would lease the space.

The family originally estimated it would take until September to sell off the shovels and power tools, the hoses, pet gear and coffee. Again customer response was overwhelming, and they were able to close Saturday.

Next month, an auction will dispose of the odds and ends. Owners are still deciding the future of the train set.

Among those saying goodbye Saturday were Wray Stephens’ daughters.

“It’s surreal,” said Sherry Stephens, who lives in Raleigh. “I have fond memories of playing here. My

first job was passing out popcorn to customers. The pay was iffy, mostly because I ate most of the profits.”

Wray Stephens’ other daughter, Sherry Kirkman of Greensboro, said the day was bittersweet.

“Our granddaddy (Isaac Stephens), he would’ve been so proud it’s lasted so long and served so many people. I’m hopeful of what’s to come and celebrating what’s been.”

### Closing time

About 4:50 p.m., Wray Stephens’ voice came over the loudspeaker: “Stephens shoppers, thank you for joining us. This is our last day. Please wrap up your purchases.”

At the register, the customers look grim.

At 5 p.m., store manager Keith Davis locks the doors.

“It’s for the last time,” he says.

By about 5:20, the last customer, James Lowery of Bunnlevel, has left the building. There isn’t a dry eye among the Stephens family waiting at the front of the store.

Facing his family, Wray Stephens offers some words of comfort: “We can flip the page.”

**Ramos: 919-460-2609.**

I live alone

but I'm never alone. I have Life Alert.

For a FREE brochure call: 1-866-387-4196

## Sling/Mesh Problems?

It may be possible to obtain a confidential, out of court, non-publicized settlement in a timely manner.

Contact Egerton Law for more information.

222 Commerce Place  
Greensboro, NC 27401

Phone: 1-800-800-4529 (4Law)

## RATE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

Morrisville voters will have to decide in November when they head to polls if they want to pay up to \$14.3 million in street improvements and \$5.7 million in park renovations and upgrades.

The town plans to use the bond money for 1.7 miles of a new roadway from McCrimmon Parkway at N.C. 54 to Aviation Parkway, and renovations at the Aquatics and Fitness Center and phase III of Morrisville Community Park.

The pool at the aquatics center would be enclosed, the aerobics room would be expanded, and lighted tennis courts and a Frisbee golf course would be added at the community park.

The town does have flexibility with the funds once they are approved by voters and can reallocate money to other street or parks projects if future needs change.

For more information on the bonds, visit [www.townofmorrisville.org](http://www.townofmorrisville.org).

**Ramos: 919-460-2609**



LIZ CONDO

Ruchi Desai, left, and Sneha Bhalodia deliver produce to one of their customers in Morrisville as part of The Little Green Bus produce-delivery service.

## FOOD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

ness,” Venkatraman said. “So that kind of motivates me.”

It’s not just about the money, anyway. Advani said she wants more people to buy locally grown food because the environmental impact isn’t

as severe when tomatoes don’t have to travel halfway across the country. And it’s important to make connections with North Carolina farmers, she said.

The teens already have formed relationships with some vendors at the farmers market who cut them good

deals for buying in bulk.

The Little Green Bus is already hiring new workers. The girls brought on two other teenagers to help with weekend deliveries.

But for now, this is just a summer enterprise. It’s tough to juggle high school classes and entrepreneurship.

However, the teens hope the business will live on even after they finish school and head to college. Others could easily take it over, they said.

Maybe someday there will even be a real, eco-friendly green bus; the girls chose the business name to promote the idea of green living.

**Nagem: 919-829-4758**

## Kirschbaum, Nanney, Keenan & Griffin, P.A.

Attorneys at Law – Serving clients for over 35 years

- Family Business Succession
- Business Purchases & Sales
- Shareholder Agreements
- Asset Protection
- LLC and Corporate Formations
- Employee/Contractor Matters

(919) 848-0420

[info@kirschlaw.com](mailto:info@kirschlaw.com)

# Lazy Daze

Arts & Crafts Festival 2012

An End-of-Summer Tradition in Cary!  
Saturday, August 25, 2012 / 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
Downtown Cary, N.C.

Free Admission! Yummy food! More than 350 Artists from across the USA \* Kid's World Three Stages of Entertainment!

BECOME OUR FAN ON FACEBOOK!

For More Info: (919) 469-4061 or [www.townofcary.org](http://www.townofcary.org) (Search: Lazy Daze Arts and Crafts Festival)

Artwork by Ana Sumner

### Thanks to our Sponsors



Competitive rates on all loan products including:

- Auto Loans
- Boat, RV & Motorcycle Loans
- Personal Loans
- Lines of Credit



Coming Soon: Our new location across from WakeMed in Cary.



First Flight Federal Credit Union is one of North Carolina's fastest growing credit unions.



Founded in 1952 – celebrating our 60th year of quality member service.

Scan this code with your Smart Phone for more information.



Celebrating 60 years of service First Flight FEDERAL CREDIT UNION 1952-2012