

## Sesquicentennial celebration

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By NATE HUBBARD/Staff

Bland County is getting ready to party.

Molly Thompson of the Bland County Historical Society approached the Board of Supervisors during its monthly meeting last week to ask for support for a celebration of the upcoming 150th anniversary of the county's birth.

Although the county won't mark its third half-century of existence until late March 2011 – 20 months from now – Thompson said the Historical Society has already begun to formulate preliminary ideas for the bash.

"We really are getting hyped up about the sesquicentennial," Thompson said.

Bland County was founded on March 30, 1861, when the Virginia General Assembly passed an act approving the establishment of the new locality.

The Historical Society requested the attendance of the supervisors at its September meeting where the group plans to reflect on the county's centennial celebration in 1961 and begin making plans for 2011.

Thompson said her group is envisioning at least a week's worth of activities and events for the county's sesquicentennial, similar to the county's 100th anniversary celebration in 1961 that she recalled as "a really grand week."

Along with community events, Thompson said the group is also planning to put together volume two of the Bland County history book to commemorate the sesquicentennial.

Thompson received a positive response from the supervisors regarding their support for the 2011 celebration as Supervisor Henry Blessing said he too has already begun thinking about ways to mark Bland County's 150th birthday.

"We have several plans," Blessing said. "We'll bring our stuff to your meeting and we'll talk about it."

Blessing said he'd like to see celebration events take place in all the various communities around the county with a "grand finale" in Bland.

At the supervisors' June meeting, Blessing allocated \$1,400 from his district's community development fund toward the upcoming sesquicentennial.

During her presentation last week, Thompson also asked the supervisors to waive her group's building fees associated with its renovation of the old county jail and to consider eliminating one or two parking spaces in front of the jail to reduce space constraints.

"It is really, really tight if you're carrying boxes or computers or the different things we have to haul in and out of there," Thompson said.

The supervisors agreed to waive any future fees associated with the jail renovation (and reimburse the group for a fee it already paid) and asked county staff to research the parking issue.

Supervisors said the addition of a new parking area on the opposite side of the courthouse may make it feasible to spread out a few of the spaces near the old jail.

Also at last week's meeting, which was the first with Willie Howlett in his new role as county

administrator, the supervisors approved a request brought by the county's recreation committee for a new picnic shelter in Mechanicsburg.

Randy Newberry said the current shelter, which Mechanicsburg resident Elmer Chewning estimated is 30 to 35 years old, is in bad shape.

"It's really not worth putting any more money in it," Newberry said.

Newberry reported that he'd received one bid for a new structure that totaled \$6,400 for all labor and materials.

The supervisors directed the rec committee to obtain two more bids for the project, but went ahead and approved funding toward the endeavor.

"I'd rather see it [done] sooner than later," said Supervisor Jason Ramsey.

Ramsey appropriated \$2,000 out of his district's community development fund for the project, while Karen Hodock and John Thompson likewise chipped in \$1,000 and \$500, respectively, from their district's funds.

Whatever remaining balance is left to complete the new shelter, which will be built at the same location as the old facility, will be taken out of the rec committee's annual budget.

After approving the Mechanicsburg picnic shelter project, the supervisors also reappointed Randy Moler to the rec committee as an at-large member. Moler had to leave the committee last year due to health problems, but said during last week's meeting that his health is much better and he's eager to resume his service.

"It is my love, you might say," Moler said about improving the county's recreational facilities.

The supervisors' next three monthly meetings will be held away from the courthouse, continuing the governing body's effort that began in May with a meeting in Ceres to make its gatherings more accessible.

On Aug. 25, the supervisors will hold their monthly meeting at 5 p.m. at the Little Creek firehouse.

The governing body's September and October meetings will be held at the Mechanicsburg Community Center and at Rocky Gap High School, respectively.

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