

# The Charlotte Observer

MONDAY, MARCH 19, 2007

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C D E F • • • | Price varies by county | 50¢

## Looking Ahead

<b>TODAY</b> Partly cloudy 28 / 61	<b>TUES.</b> Mostly cloudy 44 / 72	<b>WEDS.</b> Mostly cloudy 49 / 59	<b>THURS.</b> Mostly cloudy 46 / 67	<b>FRI.</b> Partly cloudy 48 / 74

Complete WCNC Forecast, 6B

On the Internet | 2A

### Move over, Oscars ...

YouTube will host the first awards for the best user-created videos of 2006. The awards will be handed out in seven categories, including best comedy and most inspirational. Also, MySpace.com says it will create a Web site to be used for the 2008 presidential election.



Sports | 1D

### Johnson outruns Stewart

Jimmie Johnson beat Tony Stewart in a duel through the last laps of Sunday's race in Atlanta. Juan Pablo Montoya finished fifth, by far his most impressive run so far on a NASCAR oval track.



Nation & World

■ **FAMED MUSIC PRODUCER PHIL SPECTOR** goes on trial today in California for a death that occurred at his mansion. | 5A

■ **WALTER REED REPAIR CONTRACT** was delayed for years by bureaucratic squabbling. | 4A

Charlotte & the Region



■ **TALLEST COASTER AT CAROWINDS** closed following a test run that malfunctioned with employees on it. | 1B

■ **VIDEO POKER PHASEOUT** reached another deadline in North Carolina this month. | 1B

■ **SEE WHO** is in today's Carolina People. | 3B ▶



Business | 8A

■ **GAS PRICES WILL LIKELY NOT JUMP** to \$3 a gallon this summer, experts say.

■ **BUSINESS COLUMNIST DOUG SMITH ON** "naked flats" in the Optimist Park neighborhood of Charlotte.

Coming Tuesday | Health & Family

### College Countdown: Tours

Columnist offers advice on making the most of campus tours.

Business.....	8A	Horoscope.....	5D
Classified.....	1E	Living Here.....	1D
Comics.....	4D	Movies.....	3D
Editorial.....	12A	Obituaries.....	4B
		TV.....	3D

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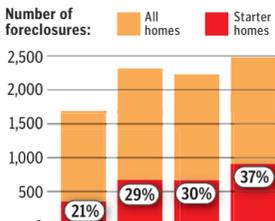
**Sold a nightmare** ■ PART TWO OF FOUR

## Starter homes, sad endings

Number of foreclosures climbs as 1st-time buyers lose low-priced houses

### Mecklenburg Foreclosures

Spike in foreclosures since 2003 largely the result of starter-home failures.



SOURCE: Observer analysis of Meck. County data

BY BINYAMIN APPELBAUM, LISA HAMMERSLY MUNN AND TED MELLNIK  
Staff Writers

A wave of loan defaults in starter-home developments is pushing the foreclosure count in Mecklenburg County to record heights, an Observer analysis shows.

Lenders foreclosed last year on more than 900 Mecklenburg starter homes, up more than 150 percent since 2003. Foreclosures of older or more expensive homes rose by only 18 percent during the same period. The failures are Charlotte's piece

of a national problem.

Millions of lower-income families used easy-money loans to buy first homes over the past decade. Many put nothing down, paid no closing costs and received low introductory payments.

When the payments start climbing, many families can't keep up. Experts predict more than 1.5 million families who bought homes in recent years will lose those homes during the current wave.

Foreclosures are personal disasters, but it is increasingly clear that clusters of foreclosures damage en-

tire neighborhoods. Home prices drop. Remaining owners can't afford to sell their homes for less than they paid. Additional foreclosures result. Renters move in. Crime can rise.

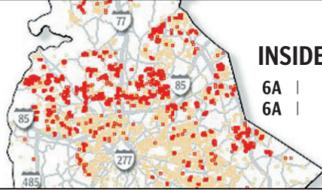
In Mecklenburg, the problems are concentrated in neighborhoods of vinyl-sided houses built in the past decade and priced below \$150,000.

The Observer identified at least 35 starter-home developments in the county where 20 percent or more of the homes have foreclosed. That is more than six times the national foreclosure rate.

SEE TREND | 6A

## HOW ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

Online map allows you to scan Mecklenburg developments for foreclosures. [www.charlotte.com](http://www.charlotte.com)



### INSIDE TODAY

- 6A | Tips for new homebuyers.
- 6A | Map of starter-home foreclosures.

## Long wait for a jet out



College students Nichole Rumley and Alyssa Kuchler, both 19, were trying to get back to upstate New York for classes this morning after a spring break trip to Florida but were stuck in Charlotte with hundreds of other passengers stranded by the weather.

## Stranded flyers held up in Charlotte

### US Airways scrambles to recover from storms

BY STEVE HARRISON AND CARRIE LEVINE  
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US Airways is beginning to recover from this weekend's winter storm that snarled travel in the northeastern U.S. and caused massive backups in Charlotte, the airline's largest hub.

But travel today is expected to be crowded with passengers still trying to make their way home, many after being diverted to Charlotte/Douglas International because other airports were para-

lyzed by the ice and snow.

Airline officials are telling passengers to arrive two hours before their scheduled departure today. It hopes operations will return to normal by late Tuesday or Wednesday.

After canceling 2,100 flights Friday and Saturday, the airline cancelled 160 Sunday system-wide, but none since 10 a.m.

US Airways spokesman Philip Gee estimated a few hundred people would be waking up at Charlotte/Douglas this morning after spending Sunday waiting for flights. That's significantly better than the 3,000 passengers who were stuck in Charlotte Saturday night, some from trans-Atlantic flights diverted from Philadelphia,

Gee said.

Passengers said check-in lines stretched outside early Sunday evening, but by 8 p.m. the lines were shorter. An employee at the Hertz car rental counter at Charlotte/Douglas said they have been out of cars since Saturday.

The storm's impact was especially severe because it came during the busy March travel season, when people are flying on spring break. The airline's flights are nearly sold out with 275,000 passengers booked, which means it has few open seats for stranded passengers.

"It's all the misconnections that are the problem," Gee said Sunday night. "We had over 100,000

SEE AIRPORT | 8A

GREENSBORO TROOP

## Search continues for missing Boy Scout

Boy was hiking near Blue Ridge Parkway

Associated Press

Search teams on Sunday combed rugged mountain terrain for a 12-year-old Boy Scout who vanished on a group hike in mountains 90 miles north of Charlotte.

About 10 scouts and their three adult leaders of Troop 230 from Greensboro noticed Michael Auberry was missing after eating lunch together Saturday in Doughton Park, which is part of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The park is part of a vast wilderness area along the parkway, including Stone Mountain State Park. It is filled with gullies, cliffs, waterfalls and steep terrain.

David Bauer, a ranger with the parkway, said Auberry stayed behind with an adult leader while the rest of the troop went for a hike Saturday "because apparently he wanted to sleep in." The troop members returned and ate lunch with Auberry and the leader. Soon after, between 12:30 p.m. and 1 p.m., they noticed Auberry was missing from the camp, he said.

Searchers overnight Saturday found part of Auberry's mess kit less than a mile from the camp, he said. They also found some potato chips and candy wrappers.

"At this point we're looking at every possibility," Bauer said. "The most probable thing is that he walked away."

He said searchers would streamline their search using trails and fire roads last night because of the danger involved in searching the more rugged areas in the dark. They'll continue the broader search come daylight today, he said.

SEE MISSING | 9A



STARTING THIS FALL

## Davidson College dropping loans from student aid

### Work study, bigger grants intended to replace debt

BY APRIL BETHEA  
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Davidson College will no longer offer loans in its student financial aid packages, partly to attract students who shied away from applying to

the school because of its costs.

Starting this fall, students eligible for aid will receive work study and bigger grants to make up for the lost loans. Families can still take out personal loans if they want, but the school won't require them.

About 33 percent of Davidson students receive need-based aid, but officials said that number could grow under the no-loans policy if more lower- and middle-class students apply to the school. Students

will pay \$43,520 in 2007-08 for tuition, fees, board, books, travel and other costs.

Many schools have eliminated loans for students from poorer families. But Davidson is following the Princeton University model in promising a debt-free package for all undergraduates eligible for aid.

READ MORE ON HOW LOAN-FREE FINANCIAL AID PACKAGES HAVE GROWN IN POPULARITY. | 11A