

# Not always easy going home

By Luis Melodelgado and Nora Haenn

When migrants arrive to Mexico from the United States no welcome committee awaits them. Passing through Mexican immigration they might encounter the "Fellow Countryman Program," a program that started in the 1980s, and orients returnees offering basic information such as the uniforms different authorities wear. It is a well-intentioned initiative, and responds to worried Mexicans who years back complained of mistreatment when returning home. This program aside, returnees have to saddle back on their own. For migrants returning here, to Calakmul, any institutional support stays at the border. There are no social services for migrant families here. (As a parenthesis, in this regard, we find returnees need more than roadmaps to the country's bureaucratic maze, they need other kinds of support. For example, families must adapt to a returning father who has been absent for years and could have picked up addictions to deal with the dangerous journey north, the constant threats of deportation, homesickness, etc.)



Men like Mortadelo don't just travel for the money, they travel to prove their value as workers.

PHOTO BY NORA HAENN

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# Chatham supports early adoption of rules to protect Jordan Lake

By Heather Leigh Wallace

Chatham county residents are living downwind from one of the largest medical waste incinerators in the country. The medical waste incinerator located in Graham, NC, and owned by Stericycle, Inc., puts Chatham County's drinking water from Jordan Lake at risk from toxic air pollutants such as mercury and dioxins. The Stericycle incinerator receives medical waste from 24 states; many which do not allow incineration of medical waste in their own state.

On May 17, 2010, the Chatham County Commissioners unanimously voted to adopt a resolution which would require medical waste incinerators in NC to come into early compliance with new rules issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2009. The resolution requests that the NC Environmental Management Commission require medical waste incinerators in NC to comply with the new EPA rules by 2012 — instead of 2014. The new EPA rules set more stringent standards for air pollutants from medical waste incinerators that include mercury, lead, dioxins, cadmium, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, hydrogen chloride, and nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matter.

The Haw River Assembly requested the County Commissioners to add the discussion of the resolution to their May agenda. The request was accepted without hesitation. Elaine Chiosso, Haw River Keeper notes "what goes in the air falls to the ground and rainwater washes it downstream to Jordan Lake."

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“The levels of some of the air pollutants currently being released at Stericycle have been deemed unsafe by the EPA,” said Sue Dayton, a staff person with the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL). “The new standards will reduce emissions of toxic air pollutants, some by as much as 98 percent. For example, the new standards reduce the limits for mercury emissions by 97 percent; dioxins and furans by 98 percent; lead by 97 percent; and cadmium by 94 percent. Four years is too long for residents of nearby communities to wait for cleaner air.”

Heather Bjork, a resident of Alamance County and mother of two small children, expressed her feelings to the NC Department of Air Quality recently at a public hearing regarding the permit renewal for

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## FOCUS: WATER



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**Beth S. McCullough on the retirement of Jimmy Warfford, Jordan-Matthew's iconic baseball coach**

# New study details Rocky River decline

By Sonny Keisler

A major new study documents the decline of many types of aquatic species throughout the Rocky River watershed in Chatham County. The study, prepared by Alderman Environmental Services for the Rocky River Heritage Foundation, summarizes its findings in one sentence. "Without meaningful changes in our behaviors, the Rocky River's aquatic biodiversity...will probably be reduced to insignificance within the next ten years."

The in-stream study involving 32 sites in the watershed points out that of 21 invertebrate species (freshwater mussels, crayfish, snails and clams) that were previously found in the Rocky River watershed, only four probably will survive in the foreseeable future. The study also notes that while the federally endangered Cape Fear shiner is found in relative abundance in the lower 20 percent of the river, the fish no longer lives in the upper 80 percent of the river.

## The study encourages five management strategies.

1. Rather than continuing to discharge wastewater into Loves Creek that flows into the Rocky River, Siler City should seek other disposal means such as land application and/or other advanced technologies including designed ecosystems. These technologies could greatly reduce discharges into the river of excessive nitrogen and phosphorus and other possible contaminants such as harmful pharmaceuticals.
2. During summer low river flows, additional water needs to be released into the Rocky River from the Siler City reservoirs.
3. Wide forested buffers need to be established along all waterways within the watershed.
4. Levels of nitrogen and phosphorus in the Rocky River need to be reduced.
5. High-technology, environmentally-friendly industries need to be recruited into the watershed.

The study highlights the need for local governmental leaders and residents to become aware of one disturbing reality. Native Americans lived here for thousands of years, European settlers moved in during the 1700s, and all known native aquatic species were present during the 1960s. What is especially troubling, according to Alderman, is "the documented declines in Rocky River species diversity occurred since passage of the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969 and the Clean Water Act in 1972." In this regards, he notes that the Rocky River along with a few other remaining biological jewels in North Carolina such as Lake Waccamaw are now beginning to experience significant biological collapse.

The decline can be halted if political leaders of Siler City and Chatham County actively support better management of the Rocky River. Otherwise, Alderman concludes, it is likely within 10 years the Rocky River will become just another biologically impoverished river in the southeastern United States. The Rocky River aquatic survey can be located on the Rocky River Heritage Foundation website. The address is rockyriverchatham.org.

Sonny Keisler is Secretary of the Rocky River Heritage Foundation.