

Sterilization

(Continued from Page 6) fering she's gone through since her sterilization.

She had kept her secret for 40 years.

Reading her file angered her so much, she went public with her outrage.

According to Debbie Blake, supervisor of the State Archives/Records, since 2002, of the 38 requests for medical records that have come in, only eight sets of records have been found and sent out.

"The rest could not be found," Blake added, noting that there was one request they're still searching for.

But that may well be the last one that the staff of the State Archives honors.

By agreement with Cultural Resources, as of August 1, the N.C. Dept. of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has custody of the eugenics medical records, according to Blake, even though technically, the records are still physically in the State Archives.

That means the NCDHHS, and not the State Archives, is officially tasked to honor all requests for eugenics victims' medical records.

But there's a problem.

Two-and-a-half years after Gov. Easley apologized to the eugenics victims and their families; two years after the governor's special legislative task force recommended that NCDHHS take the lead in researching the records, identifying the victims and providing services; and two weeks after the agreement with Cultural Resources took hold, the state's largest agency is not ready to handle any significant volume of medical records requests.

In fact, NCDHHS still has to hire a staff person specifically designated for the job.

As a result, said Debbie Crane, department spokesperson, there are no formal procedures set up as of this time for eugenics victims to request and receive their medical records.

That doesn't mean if someone sends in a notarized request, it wouldn't be honored.

But no one there has been specifically assigned to handle the job, for now, admits Crane.

Debbie Blake in State Archives confirms that her department has been trying to ascertain for the past two weeks who has been assigned so they could redirect inquir-

ies there, but she could not get an answer.

Part of the problem is that there have not been many requests for records, due to the state's refusal to fund a media campaign to inform eugenics victims about their rights.

"We actually want to find them, Crane told *The Wilmington Journal*, but have few ways other than free media to do so.

For now, Crane is advis-

ing that eugenics victims call the Citizens Services toll free line at 1-800-662-7030, and ask for Michael Leach to get direction on how to obtain their medical records.

But State Rep. Larry Womble [D-Forsyth], expressed concern to *The Wilmington Journal* about NCDHHS not devising a legislative package of services for the eugenics victims by now, as recommended by the governor's special task force

in 2003, and reiterated this week by Easley in an exclusive statement to the *Journal*.

"The practice of eugenics was a sad and regrettable chapter in the state's history, and it must be one that is never repeated again," Gov. Easley wrote.

"That is why I directed [NCDHHS] Secretary Carmen Hooker Odom to head a task force to closely examine the issue and make recommendations. Current

state efforts are focused on identifying and locating survivors, and implementing the task force recommendations to provide health care and educational benefits to victims."

But two years have passed and the recommendations have not been acted on.

Why?

NCHHS spokesperson Debbie Crane says the agency has to hire a temporary staff person to cull the

eugenics medical records to identify the victims, match that information up with NCHHS's database to determine who is still living, their age and location, and then fashion a legislative package based on that information.

Crane admitted however, that NCHHS is not sure how long the process will take. No one, so far, has been hired to begin the work.

Cash Michaels writes for the Wilmington Journal.



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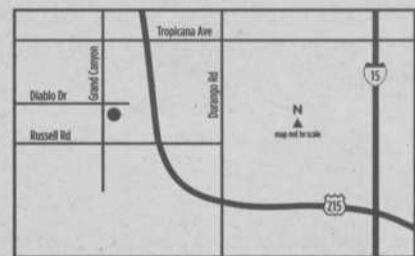
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