

Gillett takes 2nd shot at getting charter school

By Christina Verderosa

The proponents of the Gillett Heritage Academy charter school think they've found the right approach this year to winning approval from the state Board of Education.

"We're not going to talk about the other schools in the area," Buzz Menard told a group of about 40 people at the charter school public hearing last Thursday. The state board wants to see "uniquely different things," and this time, members of the Gillett group thinks they've found that with a focus on entrepreneurship.

The Gillett Civic Group, the charter school's sponsoring organization, found some unexpected help in setting up an entrepreneurship program, when Jennifer Menard attended a workshop on rural development last Tuesday. There she met Matt and Maria Hampton and invited them to come to Gillett

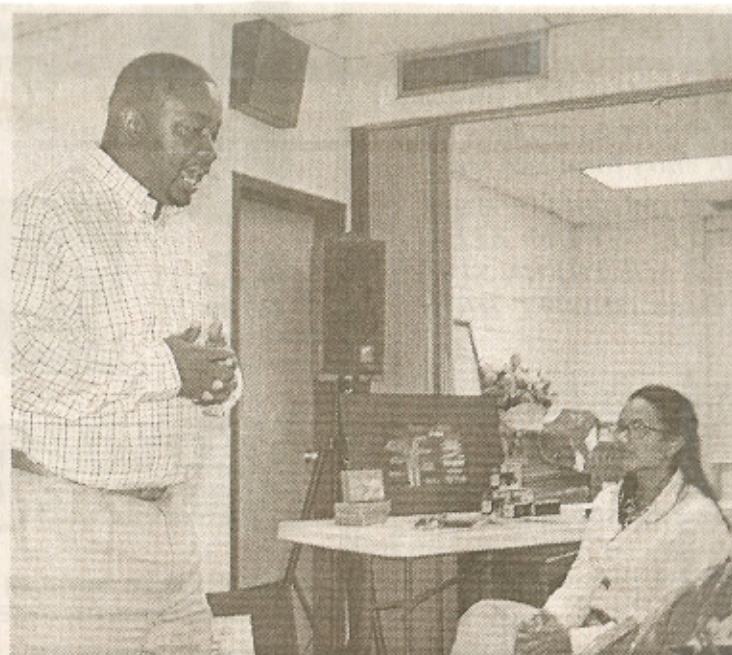
two days later.

The Hamptons have been traveling the state teaching entrepreneurship in such diverse locations as Little Rock and North Little Rock schools, the Varner prison unit and alternative learning classes. Matt Hampton explained how he got his start at the age of 15, after reading an article on teenagers in New York who started their own businesses.

"I thought, I could do this," Hampton said. So he went to the pawnshop, but instead of buying just one lawnmower, he bought five and subcontracted the work out. Soon he was doing the same with babysitting and a number of other services.

Hampton took a rather reluctant break from business to go to college, but discovered that "the stuff they were teaching me was helping me make more money."

After college, he started the



Matt and Maria Hampton talk about entrepreneurship at last Thursday's meeting on the proposed Gillett charter school.

Gunn Funeral Homes (including one in Stuttgart) and then went into venture capital. But then he decided to take a different approach to teaching young people about business.

"I learned about business at an early age by going out and doing something," Hampton said. Instead of having students start "cute" businesses, he would teach them to start real, moneymaking businesses.

Hampton explained that this fits

in perfectly with what the Gillett Heritage Academy intends to do.

The problem in small towns is that the young people go off to college and don't come back. "But if they learn [business skills and practices] here," and are able to establish their own moneymaking enterprises, "they will stay here," Hampton said, or return after college.

Buzz Menard explained some proposals for the charter school. See CHARTER, page 7A

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that fit in with this entrepreneurial model. One plan is to establish a greenhouse and have the students grow vegetables. These will be used in the cafeteria to prove healthier and less expensive meals, but any surplus can be sold. "We want to provide real-life experience for these kids," Menard said. Another plan is that members of the community will submit proposals for jobs, such as construction projects to the supervising teacher. The students will prepare an estimate and then complete the project on weekends or over the summer.

Hampton gave several examples of student-run businesses that have been established in Little Rock. The owners of Sidney's Snacks, which places honor boxes of healthy snacks in different locations, won a \$1,000 prize in a business competition.

The entrepreneurship program would be "an enhancement and a supplement" to the state mandated core requirements. Hampton said often the students who benefit most from this program are the ones "who don't fit into the normal world."

The next step for the Gillett Heritage Academy supporters is to submit the full application by Aug. 31. The state Board of Education will hold hearings on charter applications in November or December.