

Viewpoints

Hoke Co. is addressing its problems

There is little question that poverty exists in Hoke County. It is a disease that affects the lives of about a fifth of this county's residents, of whom almost half are under the age of 17.

However, Hoke County is not unique and by no means has cornered the market on being poor. Despite the Reagan Administration's pronouncement to the contrary, poverty is a national problem.

The disease is common throughout the rural south, where, like in Hoke County, most of its victims are able to endure it. In more urban areas, the poor, many of whom are visible sleeping in doorways and on manhole covers, are not as lucky and life is perhaps harder.

Although problems exist in Hoke County, there are strong signs that efforts are being made to find solutions and to improve the quality of life here.

Because of the recent negative press about Hoke in a Cumberland County newspaper, we feel it is appropriate to note some of the bright improvements which are underway:

•In the last few months, a group of citizens has been meeting weekly to help upgrade the county's already good schools. As part of this 20 member committee's study, it was noted recently

that one county school needs replacing in the next five years and another should be remodeled. Neither school is considered "unsafe," and committee members are outlining a financial plan for the improvements, which will more than likely be made within the time frame.

•Under the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Robert Nelson, a program has been launched to emphasize what's good about the Hoke County schools and to make weak points better. Currently college prep students have little problem attending the institution of their choice. Once in college, Hoke students also seem to hold their own academically. New equipment is being purchased and improvements are being made to the county's vocational program which is already superior to many in the state. Special emphasis is being placed on preparing pupils for achievement testing, and as a result, scores are expected to go up. Hoke schools also have a cultural arts program which is better than most in the state, including ones offered by much larger districts.

•A satellite branch of Sandhills Community College appears likely to occupy the old Bank of Raeford building on Main Street. Chamber of Commerce members and others see the college as a shot in the arm for downtown and a first step in revitalizing the area.

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•Following the recent lifting of a state ban on industrial use of the Raeford sewer system, county leaders have begun to address the question of expanding the tax base by cranking up industry search efforts. In addition, existing manufacturers, like Burlington Industries and Faberge Inc., have announced multi-million dollar expansion plans.

•First steps have been taken to improve relations with Fort Bragg in hopes of attracting retired military personnel to settle in Hoke County. In conjunction with the campaign, Chamber leaders are seeking to establish direct telephone communication with Fayetteville.

•During the last year, retail sales have increased dramatically in the county, indicating that more residents are shopping at home. Unemployment has also dropped. Although some old businesses have failed, many new businesses have opened.

•A need still exists for improved housing here, but 78 new apartments opened in 1983 and additional units have been announced for construction in the coming months.

•A campaign is underway to allow mixed

drinks in the county. The issue is expected to come up for a vote this summer. Backers see the change in the law as necessary for continuing commercial growth and improving living conditions. Supporters also say a motel is waiting in the wings if the mixed drink bill is passed.

•Also, a spring festival has been organized and scheduled for the first weekend in May. The event, which will include a performance by a nationally known musical group, is expected to draw visitors from other areas of the state and will help promote the image of Hoke County.

No one is denying that Hoke County has problems, but it is clear that the maladies are not being ignored.

The current activity in Hoke County has given rise to a feeling of optimism among residents, and those who are watching can see that changes are beginning to happen.

There is little need to dwell on the advantages offered by Hoke County like: beautiful homesites, good land and real estate prices, clean air, a lower cost of living, no traffic congestion, limited crime and friendly neighbors.

It is sufficient to say that Hoke County is a good place to live and to work, and with what's afoot to improve it, life here can only get better.

"Although a great many of us did not appreciate the March 10 Observer-Times article on Poor little Hoke Co. We have to realize where the writer of that article was coming from, living in a city the size of Fayetteville, one must be bored to tears writing about the crime, the noise, the traffic. What better way for a reporter to brighten her day than to write an article on the plight of Hoke Co..

Then there is the bright side. We made the front page."

Madilyn



Truth must be faced by county

By Raz Autry

One statement which is universally accepted is that people are afraid of the truth.

A husband or wife does not want to hear it said by one or the other "I don't love you anymore." The Russian people did not want to hear that their fighter pilots shot down an unarmed civilian airplane. Americans are not interested in hearing we are a second class power or our standard of living is not the highest in the world.

The conversation which has taken place concerning the front page story in the Fayetteville Times on Saturday, March 10 entitled *Hoke Outlook Upbeat Despite Recurring Poverty* would fill *The News-Journal* for an entire month. It was a well written story. Quotes from several citizens were frank, honest and optimistic. Conversations, opinions and well intended statements are good; if the intention behind the rhetoric is to do something about the situation.

Failure to face the truth and the facts which accompany it destroys individuals and counties. Hoke will be no exception. Why let it happen? The solution to any problem lies within each of us. A simple fact which accompanies the truth is that we are poor in comparison with other counties. Why should we be compared with other counties? We are going to always be poor when we are compared with other counties. We have more poor people than most of the counties. This has always been true and unless the poor move to another county this is not going to change. We should compare Hoke with no one. It all boils down to what are we willing to do to improve ourselves.

The improvement should not be in relation to other counties, but in relation to where we are now and what we want to become.

We talk about improvements in test scores in the school system. Sure our test scores will improve, but not when they are compared

Looking On

with other school systems. While we are improving so will the other school systems.

The important thing is that we improve.

Every citizen in this county that is truly interested in the school system must have gone through a period of depression and hopelessness when the engineers from Raleigh gave their report. They knew Hoke County did not have \$20 million to spend on their schools.

The Board of Education knows it is not necessary to spend \$20 million on the schools. County Commissioners have no intention of trying to find \$20 million to spend on the schools. Both boards know what the schools need and know where to find the money. It is a simple matter of which board is going to make the first move and how honest they are going to be with each other. Politics, personal egotism and failure to place all hangups on top of the table will only result in more of the same.

Many of our citizens want Hoke to progress yet remain as a small peaceful place to live. I can relate to their feeling as long as those citizens are willing to face the simple truth. If those in control are satisfied with Hoke County as it is, they simply must be willing to accept and defend poor physical school plants, a soon-to-be deserted Main Street, and a whole lot of poor people.

However, if they want the atmosphere for living and the improvement for progress they must be willing to:

- Pay more property tax.
- Select their industry.
- Become interested in the downtown area.
- Provide good physical plants for their children.
- Attract and keep good teachers.
- Most of all, step aside and let some of the young men and

women have a chance at the political affairs of the county.

Every move for change requires some individuals or complete boards to have enough nerve, individually or collectively, to stand tall and suggest change. The individual or board know their suggestions will not be accepted favorably by all who pretend to listen.

It can be compared to living in the city or living in the country. When one convinces the spouse to accept country life by selling the wide open spaces living he had better be prepared to give the other side of the story. Mosquitoes must be endured. Carrying the garbage to the dumpster is a daily chore. Water systems knocking off is a weekly event. Paying for fire protection and being blessed with a surplus of gnats is a great fringe benefit. It was a privilege this lover of the country was prepared to face before he moved.

If the truth and the facts that accompany it are faced and decisions are made on the truth and those facts, then those making the decisions owe no citizen an apology.

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A good meal will always clear a bad head

By Warren Johnston

The Marines had landed at Fort Bragg. They had cranked up the big guns.

After days of listening to the chandelier rattle and the plaster crack, my wife began to complain.

"We need to get out of town. All this target practice has given me a headache, and I'm tired of your Groucho Marx jokes about military spending," she said.

For several days, each time a shell exploded, I would act like I was smoking a cigar, raise my eyebrows and say something like: "Is that a thunderstorm I hear, or is it just our tax dollars at work?"

I'll admit that after the fifteenth time, the routine may have lost some of its humorous edge, but that was no reason for her to hurl the cat across the room at me.

"You think that you are tired of the jokes, what about the cat?" I asked, removing the unnerved feline from the window curtain where he was hanging.

It was at this juncture, and just as I was launching into a discourse on the devastating effect the spring shelling and the Sandhills pollens had on the sinus cavities, that the telephone rang.

"We've been invited to spend an evening in a room full of food editors," I told my wife as I hung up the telephone.

The Puppy Papers

Someone, who was not looking for any excuse to get out of town and away from the distant thunder and the eye-watering pollens, might have questioned the planned agenda, but not my wife. She was packed and in the car within moments.

"What's a food editor and where are we going?" she asked, after we had been driving for about an hour.

I had also been anxious to escape the effects of the mock war zone, and had failed to get all the details.

All I knew was that the event would be held at the Pawleys Island Inn and would be the beginning of a long series of celebrations scheduled to commemorate the first harvest of crawfish from South Carolina's coastal rice fields.

Most food editors that I know take their work very seriously, and it shows. So being in a room full of them might be a little like, being cooped up with a bunch of overweight life-size Tweedledum and Tweedledee dolls, I told my wife on the drive down.

As it turned out, we had foolishly underestimated our hosts Louis and Marlene Osteen.

We knew the Osteens had a long history of throwing pretty good crawfish celebrations, and we had expected a fine time. But what we got was one of those evenings seen in few places outside of Camelot or the pages of magazines with French names.

The affair kicked off with cocktails accompanied by platters of mussels, mounds of crabmeat and an assortment of fine cheeses.

We moved to a private dining room. Some of the food editors were already beginning to glow with anticipation. By the end of the evening they would be overcome with exuberance, the fine California wines served with each course and the after-dinner brandy.

The feast began with Bulls Bay oysters on the half-shell, which were topped with local caviar. Then came a light broth with Winyah Bay sturgeon, which was followed by an exceptional salad, shad roe garnished with grits and finally breasts of squab served on homemade pasta. For dessert there was a choice of apples baked in pastry or napoleons.

It was one of those rare and special evenings.

The next day, on the drive back to Raeford, instead of counting cows, my wife and I fondly remembered each course, noted that our sinus headaches had disappeared and wondered if the food editors had had a good time.