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Proposed phone rates called windfall

By Warren Johnston

If proposed local service rates between Hoke County and Fayetteville exchanges are implemented, Carolina Telephone Company could have a "windfall" revenue increase of \$1.75 million during the first year, a spokesman for the Tarboro firm said last week.

With the rate schedule proposed to the North Carolina Utilities Commission, Carolina Telephone would have an approximate gross revenue of \$2.38 million during the first year for the service from Hoke County to Fayetteville.

Long distance service between the exchanges is currently grossing \$634,000 annually, spokesman David Tharrington said.

Tharrington, who is the local

rates manager for Carolina Telephone, said he was unsure how much of the increase would be profit, but that the "potential existed" for the company to make a "windfall."

"The rate structure we proposed is based on companywide EAS (Extended Area Service) costs. We can't tell if the costs for providing EAS from Fayetteville to Raeford will be high or low," Tharrington said.

Ten years ago EAS was established between Parkton and Fayetteville for \$250,000.

Costs estimates for equipment to put Hoke County on the Fayetteville exchange were not available and were not used to figure the proposed rate structure.

"We say we will provide the service no matter what the costs," Tharrington added.

Although apparently no costs have been determined for switching the service from long distance to local, Carolina Telephone is proposing a 57% increase in rates for Hoke County residential and business phones and a 13% in Fayetteville rates.

Here is how the argument over the change in service is taking shape:

Local supporters feel the shift in service would improve the quality of life by making Hoke County more attractive for new residents, businesses and industries to move here.

If the county grows, individual

property taxes will decrease, more services can be provided and schools can be improved, backers of the change say.

In January, Carolina Telephone records showed 91,136 base telephones in Fayetteville and Ft. Bragg would be affected by the change in service. About 16,000 of the phones are business.

In Hoke County about 4,800 phones would be affected, which is about 1,000 more than the county had in 1976 when a vote on the change failed to pass.

Over \$53,000 per month is billed by Carolina Telephone for long distance service between the exchanges. About \$29,000 of the monthly billing is made from Hoke

County to Fayetteville.

If the billing of long distance calls from Hoke County is spread over the total number of local phones affected by the shift, the monthly average would be \$6.05 per phone, which is greater than the proposed residential rate hike of \$4.52.

Intrastate long distance calls will be de-regulated in the next two years, and the costs of calling between Hoke County and Fayetteville will be affected.

Previously Tharrington said costs might go up, but after more investigation, he said Monday the "short haul" charges might decrease.

"The overall impact (of the de-

regulation) might be that the rates come down," Tharrington said.

Currently Carolina Telephone pools the revenue from intrastate long distance calls with other North Carolina firms.

Profits are based on average costs of all the companies taking part in the pool. After de-regulation, revenues will no longer be pooled.

Tharrington was unsure whether de-regulation of intrastate calls would reduce Carolina Telephone's costs, but did say that the present rates for calls between Raeford and Fayetteville were profitable.

"The present rate structure is not losing money," he said.

County backs motel sewer

By Ed Miller

Members of the Hoke County Commission agreed Monday to cover half of the cost of installing water and sewer lines to a new motel planned for Raeford.

The move was the first time in recent memory, that the county has agreed to joint venture a utility project with the City of Raeford to provide service for an incoming business.

In action last week, the city had agreed to provide the lines in hopes that the county would share in the cost.

"We've pretty much got our necks out on a limb," City Councilman and Raeford-Hoke Economic Commissioner Vardell Hedgpeth said during a presentation in Monday's meeting.

"We knew we couldn't afford it all but we felt that we had to take action," Hedgpeth said.

According to the City Councilman, the project is estimated to cost about \$40,000.

"The city felt that a 50-50 arrangement was fair," he said.

Figuring a \$900,000 tax evaluation on the motel and an accompanying restaurant, it should take the county about five years to make back the money invested, said County Manager William Cowan and Commission Chairman John Balfour.

"This is the kind of investment I like to see us make," said Commissioner Wyatt Upchurch, adding that taxes from the motel will bring revenue to the county for years to come.

According to Cowan, the city figured \$7,500 for running the water line and the balance for construction of the sewer line.

There is about \$20,000 in the county's contingency fund that can be used for the construction, said Cowan.

During the course of discussion, Balfour voiced fear that the project would go over the budgeted \$40,000.

"Usually, the estimates we get are pretty close to correct," Hedgpeth said.

College OK'd

In other action, the Commissioners approved a motion to accept as "proposed for the budget" a \$15,000 request from the Hoke County Higher Education Foundation.

Although the request may be turned down at final budget time, it will be considered.

The money will be used to pay for maintenance and utilities costs associated with using Hoke County High School to house classes for a Sandhills Community College satellite, Foundation President Bill Archer said.

Archer also asked that the County Commission help the Foundation locate a proposed director for the satellite when the need arises.

According to Archer, the Foun-



Presenting the fox

State Representative Danny DeVane shows members of the Hoke County Commission a newspaper article from Alamance County about the over population of foxes in that area. DeVane is pushing a bill that will

appear soon in the Legislature opening a fox hunting and trapping season in Hoke County. DeVane would not consider taking the bill to Raleigh unless the County Commission endorsed it, he said.

dation received approval from the Hoke County Board of Education last week to use Hoke High.

In answering questions about future costs to the county for the satellite, Archer said: "Hopefully, we can pick up additional help

from the state once the need is established."

"If we are successful in the first year, we could come under the umbrella of the Community College System," Foundation Member Steve Parker said.

Having just returned from a meeting with many of the nation's county commissioners, Balfour said: "I came back from Washington down in the dumps because of the attitude up there."

(See FOX, page 9A)

Around Town

By Sam Morris

The weather is still nice and if we can get by another week, I believe that the cold weather will be over for the year.

It is just a week until spring and usually we don't have much bad weather after spring arrives. It was cold enough in January and February to take care of winter.

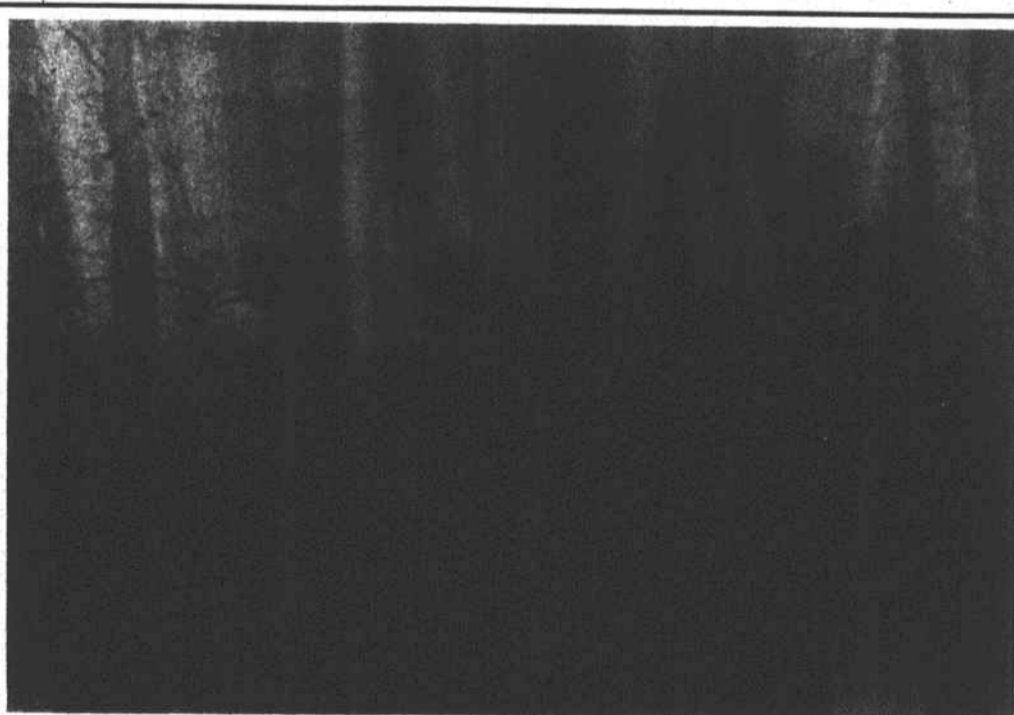
It seems only yesterday that the television screen was filled with political advertisements. Now according to the news, Senator John East is going to start his campaign ads on TV. It is almost two years away before the election and this seems to me, a bad idea. Most people are tired of looking at political ads on TV.

Now don't get me wrong, I believe in ads and think, of course, newspapers are best, but remember it is how and when you advertise that pays off. As the old saying goes, "it would be hard to sell refrigerators to Eskimos."

Don't forget to mark your calendar in April for the circus to be sponsored by the Raeford Kiwanis Club. It has been years since I have been to a circus. The last time was in Raleigh when my children were small. Now I believe I can go again and take my grandson, James, and enjoy it once AGAIN.

It was good to read last week about the new motel coming to Raeford. This is something that has been needed in the city for many years. When we used to have men here to work on the equipment at Dickson Press, it was bad to have to send them to Southern Pines or Fayetteville to spend the night. Besides it added to the repair bill because of the mileage in their rental cars. Yes, we do need a motel.

The restoration of the old (See AROUND, page 9A)



No fun

Four of the county's nine fire departments fought a woods and grass fire at Oakdale Gin Tuesday. Many of the county's firemen went all day Tuesday without food while battling blazes which burned in

all parts of the county. High winds did not help matters as flames readily blew across roads and creeks to ignite dry materials on the other sides.

Man charged with rape of 9-year old

By Ed Miller

A 35-year-old Hoke County man has been arrested and charged with the rape of a nine-year-old girl.

Harold Jones McNeill, 35, of Rt. 5, Box 319D, Raeford, was out of jail Monday on \$10,000 bond, after being charged with the February 23 incident, according to reports from the Hoke County Sheriff's Department.

According to Sheriff Dave Barrington, McNeill allegedly had sexual relations with the little girl three times.

According to a statement given by the child, she had been making up the bed in her bedroom and decided to go to the bathroom.

When she returned to her room, McNeill was there, the statement said.

He pushed her onto the bed and raped her, she said in the statement.

The first alleged attack happened on a Wednesday, according to the statement.

Also, according to the child's statement, another incident happened on the following Saturday. "She's old enough to testify

against him," Sheriff Barrington said Monday.

According to Assistant District Attorney Jean Powell, age has little to do with trying to decide whether a person should testify or not.

Powell added that persons under 14 years of age must be "qualified" to the court before testifying.

"They must understand the oath and the consequences of what they are doing," said Powell.

McNeill is scheduled for a first appearance hearing on March 22.

Turkey races scheduled for September festival

By Ed Miller

Do you thrill to the sight of large birds dashing down carefully measured lanes?

Perhaps flying feathers and poultry on the hoof send your spirits soaring.

If so, the turkey races at this year's first annual North Carolina Turkey Festival will certainly tickle your fancy.

The races are scheduled for Main Street in Raeford on September 21.

For Raeford natives, the sight of turkeys is not uncommon.

Racing the birds is another story.

Although supporters of the

North Carolina festival would probably like to call the races their idea, it is not.

For the folks of the Inn on Lake Waramaug, in New Preston, Connecticut, racing turkeys has been a venture that started five years ago with the "Live Turkey Olympics," a spokesman said Friday.

According to Peter Cunningham, the races are the climax event of the olympics which include other specialties like the high jump and the slalom.

In the Connecticut Olympics, the birds are raced in 12 lanes 50 feet long.

There are a number of heats in-

(See TURKEY, page 9A)

Depot fund over \$5,000

Fundraisers have crossed the \$5,000 mark in efforts to raise the money needed to restore the old Aberdeen Rockfish Depot in Raeford.

Contributions from residents and businesses had reached \$5,220 by Monday, Raeford-Hoke Chamber of Commerce spokesman Steve Parker said.

The Chamber-sponsored Restoration Committee is attempting to raise \$30,000 to restore the building.

Currently the building is little more than an exterior shell, and will need new wiring, plumbing, heating and air conditioning, as well as interior walls, ceilings and floors before it can be used to house the offices of the Chamber and the economic developer.

The building was constructed around 1900 and committee members hope to restore it to that period.

(See DEPOT, page 8A)

