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Board of Education OK's school structure change

By Ed Miller

After more than an hour's discussion, members of the Hoke County Board of Education voted unanimously Tuesday to approve a middle school structure for the county schools.

The rescheduled regular meeting of the board lasted past 1 a.m. During discussion of the move, Hoke Superintendent Dr. Robert Nelson withdrew his recommendation, made over three months ago in support of the change, because one board member had "many, many unanswered questions."

Board member Shirley Gibson, who voted for a motion to go to the new organization in the end, said she felt there is not enough information on paper about the changes the switch will cause for the schools.

Gibson did not want to lock the school board into an organization that may prove hard to cope with later, she said.

"(The change) simply cannot be made overnight or over a summer time," Dr. Nelson said.

According to Nelson, the actual change will not be made in the school organization for at least a year.

The vote was needed from the

Board of Education because the schools have to have a direction to organize toward, said Nelson.

There were also questions from board members about how existing facilities will be used to fit the new program.

The program comes first. Facilities can be tailored to the program, Nelson said.

"The building should never determine the program," he said.

Currently, the Hoke County Schools are operating under no widely accepted organizational structure, said Nelson.

For the last two months, board members have been travelling to different school systems around the state in an effort to see the advantages and disadvantages of middle school systems and junior high school systems.

Monday night, board members were given a choice between the two types.

According to Nelson, either choice will entail the "retraining" of some teachers who currently teach in grades five through eight.

Nelson stressed that the administration needed a direction from the board as to where to go with organizing the school system. One principal in the system has

had to be restrained from making administrative decisions because Nelson did not know how the board would vote, the Superintendent said.

The middle school organization will benefit the children of Hoke County more than other types, said Nelson.

Children who will be attending the middle school, or those in grades six through eight, need a special transition period between elementary school and high school, Nelson has said.

In a previous meeting, Nelson told board members there are children currently changing classes in the fourth and fifth grades just like high school students.

"That's much too early," said Nelson.

In the middle school system, students will change classes less often, he said.

School days will be divided into three 110 to 120 minutes blocks.

Students will stay with teachers long enough to develop a relationship with them. The same is true for teachers, Nelson said.

A child will be more than just someone who forgot his homework yesterday to the teacher, Nelson said.



Up on the roof
Local roofing contractor Richard Odom expertly covers a portion of the old Aberdeen-Rockfish Depot roof with dark green paint. Odom repaired and painted half the roof before running out of

paint Saturday. The job, which is part of the restoration of the Raeford building, is expected to be finished this weekend.

Shannon man given life for slaying, offers apology

By Ed Miller

A Shannon man, convicted last week in Hoke County Superior Court of slaying his estranged wife, apologized for his crime, before being sentenced to life in prison.

Don Michael Woods, 34, who never took the stand said he was sorry to the court and to family members, before being sentenced to life by Superior Court Judge Edwin S. Preston of Raleigh.

It took an eight woman-four man Hoke County Superior Court jury two hours and 40 minutes of deliberation to find Woods guilty of the September 3 felony murder and first degree kidnapping of Isabell Henderson Woods.

Although Woods never took the stand in his defense, he made a statement reflected in the court minutes.

The statement was too low to be heard throughout the courtroom;

however, the convicted man said there were circumstances that did not come out in the trial, according to defense attorney Phil Diehl.

Woods apologized for the shooting in general and especially to one sister of the victim, Diehl said.

According to sources in the Sheriff's Department, Woods asked to be taken by the cemetery where his wife is buried before he was transported to Central Prison in Raleigh.

Although Assistant District Attorney Jean Powell was seeking the death penalty, Woods was found guilty of murder under the "felony-murder" rule which carries a maximum sentence of life, said Powell.

A person can be convicted of felony-murder when a murder is committed while a felony is in progress, in this case, kidnapping, Powell said.

"Life under this sentence is a minimum of 20 years," said Diehl.

Although it took attorneys two full days to choose a jury, testimony in the case lasted only another two days.

Called to the stand first in the case was the oldest son of the defendant, Don Michael Woods Jr.

Michael, as he was called during the trial, was in the family home just before the fatal shooting occurred.

Although he had been living with his mother in the months after his parents separated, he had been invited to spend Labor Day weekend with his father.

On Friday afternoon after school, Michael rode the bus to his father's home, he testified.

According to Michael, the plan was to spend the weekend with his father and join his mother in church on Sunday.

That is exactly what happened, the 16-year-old testified.

It was on Sunday that Michael realized he had left his running suit and shoes at his father's house, he said.

Although Michael wanted to retrieve his equipment that day, his mother wanted to wait until Monday for fear that Woods may have been drinking.

At least three times during his testimony, Michael said that when his father drank, he became like a different person.

During his father's periods of sobriety, Michael referred to Woods as "the regular old father I know."

That was how Woods appeared Monday afternoon when he arrived home to find Michael and his mother at his house, said Michael.

According to Michael, Woods arrived home with a neighbor

minutes after he and his mother went into the house.

Although Michael left the house three times that day, his mother was allowed to leave only once, to get some lunch, and then only at gunpoint, Michael said.

On two other occasions, Isabell tried to leave the house and each time Woods would say: "Go ahead and leave and see what I do," Michael said.

The boy could not see the gun while in the car, but he said during testimony that his father had the weapon in his hand when he got into the car and when he got out.

Before lunch, Michael had left the house once before to get his father some beer and had taken the gun with him, he said.

The boy left the gun in the car when he re-entered the house, but Woods made him go get it, he said. Two other times, Michael tried

to keep the gun away from his father, he said.

Before he left the home for church on Sunday, the boy had hidden the gun, he said.

Michael gave the gun back at Woods' request, the boy said.

Just before Michael left the house for the last time before his mother's death, he unloaded the gun and hid the bullets under a pillow in the den of the house.

As Monday wore on, Woods steadily became more violent, said Michael.

Whenever Michael left the house, Woods would lock the doors.

At one point during the afternoon, Woods told Michael to get a pencil and some paper.

He dictated this note to his son: "Love is something a person can't explain. I love you pop and mom. I couldn't help it."

(See LIFE, page 11A)

Around Town

By Sam Morris

The weather has been perfect but according to the forecast Monday it will be below freezing Monday and Tuesday nights. I don't believe it will get cold enough to hurt the peaches and other plants or any of the garden crops.

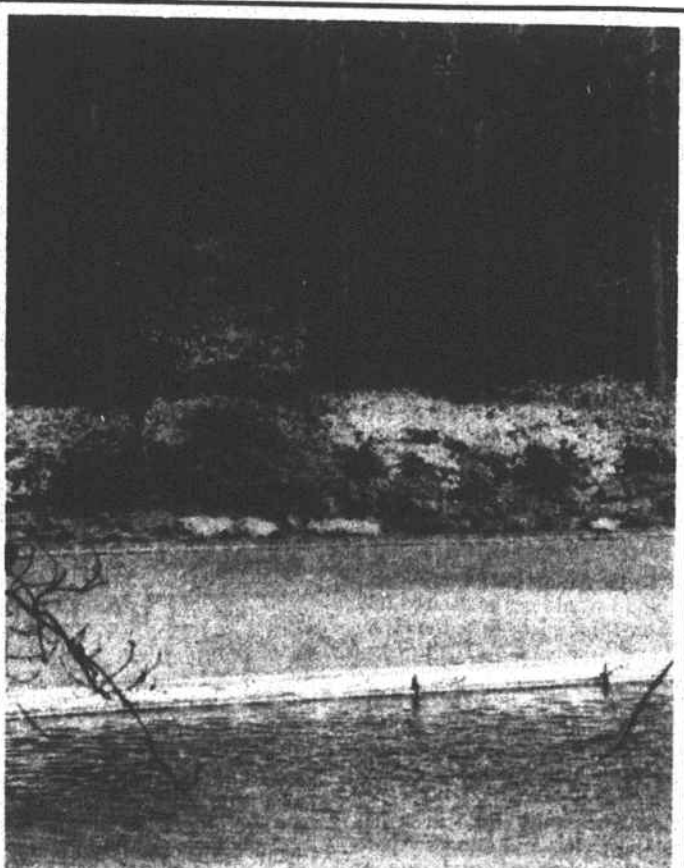
We need rain very badly, but there isn't any predicted any time soon.

Easter was a nice day and except for the wind, it was almost perfect. There were large crowds at churches and according to reports the beaches were crowded also. When many people go to the beach on Easter, it seems that visitors take up the empty pews at the local churches.

Don't forget that the Franzen Brothers Circus will be in town next Tuesday. There will be performances under the big top at the old National Guard Armory. The time for the events are 5:30 and 8 p.m. Tickets can be purchased from any Kiwanian or at local stores. Advance tickets are cheaper than the ones you purchase at the door.

The circus parade down Main Street will start at 12:30 p.m. and besides the circus performers, there will be the Upchurch Junior High Band. So see the parade and the circus next Tuesday.

Jeff McNeill, the McNeill with the perfect child, was in the city (See AROUND, page 9A)



Welcoming visitors to spring
Spring would not be the same without a tour of the azalea gardens of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Barbour on the edge of Hoke County. The carefully manicured flowers are in full bloom and local residents are invited to tour the gardens which are located between Rockfish and Hope Mills, Mrs. Barbour says.

Mobile home law is approved

An ordinance which would strictly control the development of mobile home parks in Hoke County was approved Tuesday night by the newly formed Hoke County Planning Board.

Under the new law, which is slated to be presented to the Hoke County Commission on Monday, existing mobile home parks would be required to obtain an operating license and to meet all health and safety standards.

The ordinance will be required to be aired at least once publicly before it can be adopted by the commission and made law, board Chairman Brown Hendrix Jr. said during the meeting.

Although the new board has only met four times, the mobile home ordinance was given "speedy" attention because of the recent growth of parks in the county.

At least six new mobile home park developments are reported to be attempting to begin operating in the county prior to passage of the new ordinance, county officials have said privately.

During the past two years, the Hoke County Department of Health and the Hoke County Commissioners have received complaints of substandard mobile home parks operating in the county.

Other than state health regulations, Hoke County has no laws on the books which would govern the housing developments.

One complaint, which has been received, is that some parks are being built in areas where septic tanks cannot percolate or drain properly.

Sewage is reported to seep out of the tanks on the ground and to back up in the units in these parks, officials have said.

The new law is an updated and revised version of one which was drawn for Hoke County in 1976 by the Lumber River Council of Governments (COG).

(See PARK, page 10A)

Hoke ranks 4th in teen pregnancies

By Ed Miller

Hoke County is maintaining a fourth place state ranking in per capita teenage pregnancies, according to recent figures released by the North Carolina Department of Human Resources.

That figure is down from previous reports which said Hoke County was number two in the state.

In a book entitled "Indicators for Health Care," published by the state, and according to the latest data which is from 1982, the only counties with more pregnant teenagers than Hoke are Mecklenburg, Cumberland and Graham.

Teen pregnancy is the number one cause of infant mortality, not

only in Hoke County, but around the state and country, according to Mary Sappenfield of the Hoke County Health Department.

Sappenfield said that 6.3 out of every 1,000 babies born in Hoke County die.

That figure is down from the 1979 rate of 14 per 1,000, she said, adding that the rate of death for non-white babies is much higher than that for white ones.

Hoke ranks 15 out of 100 counties in infant mortality, she said.

Teen pregnancy rates are usually measured on a per 1,000 basis with no regard for the number of people in the county, said Sappenfield.

Since Hoke is a small county, having just over 21,000 people, the

state ranking is 34th on a number of pregnancies per 1,000 basis, she said.

However, when comparisons are drawn on a per capita basis, Hoke County has more pregnant teenaged girls than 96 counties in the state, according to Sappenfield.

In North Carolina in 1983, 1,109 babies died at birth, said Sappenfield.

Girls too young to have children, or girls in their teens, are more likely to have babies with low birth weights, Sappenfield said.

In Hoke County, in 1983, 95.3 out of every 1,000 girls aged 15-19 become pregnant, statistics say.

(See TEEN, page 9A)