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Reflection in a broken window

Recent cool bright days are reflected in the windows of this old barn located in the McFarland area of Hoke County. The barn may have once been the

center of agrarian activity, but recent changes in farm populations and techniques have made the building of little use except to rodents and birds.

Shortage of federal funds may delay US 401 widening

By Ed Miller

A scheduled widening of US Highway 401 between Raeford and the Cumberland County line could be in jeopardy because of a recently discovered shortage of federal funds, a spokesman for the state Department of Transportation (DOT) said Monday.

Engineering studies of the highway 401 widening were scheduled to be completed during the upcoming fiscal year; however, DOT spokesman Jim Sughrue said all projects now on the department's Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) are up for review and may be delayed because of last year's state overbudgeting of federal funds.

Skirting and resurfacing of the same section of highway 401, which was planned for September, may be also delayed by as much as a month, Sughrue said.

Although Sughrue does not think 401 will be affected, the DOT Highway Commission will be rearranging priorities on the 10 year TIP over the next few months, he said.

North Carolina received \$50 million more than expected from the federal government this year, but the highway commission of last year spent \$35 million that should have gone to projects in this fiscal year, said Sughrue.

Most of last year's board members were replaced when Governor Jim Martin took office earlier this year.

There is \$370 million earmarked to be spent on projects in this fiscal year, which for the federal government runs from October of 1984 to September of 1985, Sughrue said.

The former Highway Commission slated \$478 million for projects during the year, he said.

There was an "overprogramming of \$108 million," said the spokesman.

For fiscal year 1986, there are \$392 million programmed for construction, he said.

"Our best estimate now is that we will get \$353 million," said Sughrue.

There is a difference of \$39 million.

In the final assessment, projects projected outweigh those that can be paid for by \$147 million, said Sughrue.

"The problem is we just had too many projects programmed into the improvement plan for this year," said Sughrue.

"It is not a problem that this board created, but they will have to deal with it," he said.

"And, we could do the same thing but next year we may have to stop completely" because the highway fund would be out of money, he said.

"I think what you will see in the July meeting (of the Highway Commission) is enough priorities to get us through the year," Sughrue said.

According to Sughrue, the Highway Commission may have to start phasing projects as a short-term solution to the funding shortage.

As for the resurfacing and skirting project proposed for the end of this fiscal year, Sughrue said: "We may be back to letting projects by September."

Commission orders proposed tax rate trimmed

By Ed Miller

Hoke County Manager William Cowan was directed to trim a proposed ad valorem tax rate increase by four cents Tuesday night.

The move may slice into the county's current level service, and further cuts could affect the schools, the literacy council, the sheriff's department, economic development, the Sandhills College Satellite and the recreation department.

During a called budget meeting Tuesday, members of the Hoke County Commission called on Cowan and County Finance Officer Charles Davis to get the tax hike down to three or four cents from a proposed seven cents increase.

According to Cowan, a three cents tax hike this year would only

mean an actual two cents onto the rate because there was a loss of tax base in the county last year of just over \$30,000, or about one penny.

Every penny added to the tax rate brings the county an additional \$31,280, Cowan said.

If the county commission cuts the raise in taxes to three cents, there will be an addition in revenue of only about \$62,560.

"It can be worked out, Mr. Chairman," Commissioner James Albert Hunt told John Balfour.

"We don't want taxes raised over three cents if we can help it," said Commissioner Wyatt Upchurch.

"If you want me to cut that kind of money, you're going to have to give me some direction about what services you don't want to offer at the same level you have in past

years," Cowan said.

"Basically that's going to cut out everything but your trash collection," Cowan told commissioners.

According to Balfour, if services have to be cut, recreation will be the first county department to suffer.

Balfour did not elaborate on where the recreation budget may be cut.

In the three-hour meeting Tuesday night, commissioners reviewed every dollar of "new money" placed into the budget.

Being eyed by commissioners as a possible place to cut first are the schools.

To begin, \$11,500 for an outside firm to come into the schools and inventory the contents of every building was urged cut from the

revenue sharing portion of the school budget along with \$6,400 for the refurbishing of tennis courts at Hoke County High School.

That would total about \$17,900 or just over one-half cent in tax revenues.

That money could be taken and put into the county's current expense budget and cut one-half cent from the tax rate, said Balfour.

County Commission members are also hoping to lose another one-half cent in the school's budget when the state picks up the salary of School Business Manager Don Steed, Balfour said.

Commissioner James Albert Hunt suggested that another penny in tax revenues, or \$31,280 should be pulled out of the cost of living raises proposed for county

employees next year.

Originally, Cowan proposed a 5% cost of living raise for all county employees to keep up the same amount being given school teachers.

A penny pulled out of that line item would drop that cost of living raise to 3%, according to Cowan.

Commissioners were advised not to cut a \$25,000 figure included in the budget for merit pay raises and overtime.

According to Cowan, the commissioners will probably run into situations next year that will require sheriff's deputies, Emergency Medical Service (EMS) personnel and Department of Social Services (DSS) personnel to have to put in some overtime.

Other proposed cuts could come from the Sandhills Community

College Satellite planned for next year, said Balfour.

Including money set aside for renovating an office for Satellite Director Betty High, \$15,000 for expenses in using classrooms at Hoke County High School and a secretary's salary, the total recommendation from Cowan for the college is about \$27,000.

"It may be the circle I travel, but I can't find a single person out there that wants it (the college) except the committee," Balfour told Hoke County Higher Education Foundation member J.H. (Buddy) Blue, who was present at the meeting.

Balfour also expressed concern over how much the college would cost the county next year.

Slaying suspect freed

By Ed Miller

A Raeford man was out of jail Monday on \$5,000 bond after being charged with murdering John Ed McRae, according to officials of the Raeford Police Department.

James Wilbert Thomas, 55, of 507 Saunders Street, jailed on an open charge of murder, was released from the Hoke County Jail last week, a spokesman from the Hoke County Sheriff's Department said.

At about 10:35 p.m. last Thursday, police were dispatched to an area near the Raeford Fire Depart-

ment to investigate reported gunshots, Police Chief Leonard Wiggins said.

Upon arrival, law officers found McRae's body lying in some hedges, said Wiggins.

According to Wiggins, McRae was 40 years old.

"Apparently, it was a domestic type squabble" that led to the shooting, Wiggins said.

McRae, who was shot twice, lived at 1913 Tyllertown Loop in Raeford, said Wiggins.

Wiggins would not say what kind of gun killed the man.

Three charged for LSD

By Ed Miller

Three Raeford men have been released from the Hoke County Jail after being charged with possession of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).

According to a report by Hoke County Sheriff's Deputy C.E. Harris, Gregory William Jordan, 30, Robert C. Cunningham, 31, and John Wesley McLean, 31, were all charged with possession of the Schedule One Controlled Substance.

The men had 10 tablets of the acid in a car along with some marijuana, Harris said in the report.

According to Harris, he was on routine patrol when he saw a car operating with the interior light on.

Harris pulled the car over and approached the three men, according to the report.

As he neared the car, he noticed John "Duck" McLean, of 1816 Cockman Street, trying to eat a

bag of marijuana, the report shows.

According to the report, Harris told the man "not to choke on the dime bag."

McLean was in the back seat of the car, according to Harris.

When back-up units arrived, the car was searched, Harris said.

Finding the LSD tablets was the result of that search, he said.

Nine tablets of "purple microdot" were found under a seat in the car, according to Harris.

A 10th was found in the passenger's seat of the front area of the car along with some marijuana seeds, the report says.

That seat was occupied by Cunningham of 1215 Fuller Street, Harris said in the report.

Jordan, of 223 Scotland Avenue, was driving the car, according to the report.

Apparently, no statements were given by the men.



Working for progress

Elected and appointed officials of Raeford, Hoke County and the local school system attended a meeting Tuesday called "Look-Up Raeford-Hoke" at the Raeford Civic Center. The meeting, which lasted from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., featured guests from the Look-Up Gaston Foundation and

representatives from the Gaston County schools. Pictured, F.L. (Rick) Smyre, III addresses the group. Smyre is the Executive Director of the Look-Up Gaston Foundation. It is hoped the program will aid officials in dealing with a diverse population effectively.

Youth sent to Troy after kidnapping

By Ed Miller

A former Sandhills Youth Center inmate is now in a Troy prison unit after being charged with escaping from prison, kidnapping a Hoke County man and robbing his house.

Jonathan Patrick Venable, 18, and another inmate escaped from the center on June 8, according to Hoke County Detective Jimmy Riley.

Adam Randall Henderson, the other youth, turned himself in the next day, according to a report from Riley.

Venable did not. Last Tuesday, Venable showed up. Not at the youth center, but in the home of Sydney Allen Johnson.

According to Riley's report,

Johnson came home about 11:45 p.m.

As the man entered his home, Venable stepped out of his bedroom holding Johnson's shotgun.

Venable told Johnson to empty his pockets, which he did.

The youth went through the man's wallet but discarded it, reports say.

Venable then told Johnson that he was taking him to Mt. Airy.

Venable rode on the right side of the back seat and held the shotgun on Johnson.

"He told me unless I drove him there, he'd kill me," said Johnson Monday.

"When we got to Mt. Airy, I drove down a lone dirt road and

when I stopped, he got out," Johnson said.

The youth just left the car and went into the woods, sheriff's reports say.

According to Johnson, Venable was not cruel to him during the trip.

"We talked a lot about music. He had looked through my record collection at my house, and he liked some of them," said Johnson.

"He seemed like a pretty nice guy, really."

"He wasn't mean or belligerent or anything. He even apologized," said Johnson.

"He just said he was an escapee. I just assumed he was from McCain," said the man.

(See KIDNAPPING, page 16)

Around Town

By Sam Morris

The weather has been nice for the past few days, but it turned hot again Monday. We had 1 1/4 inches of rain Sunday morning. It was a slow rain and most of it soaked into the soil. If we could get another rain or two like the last one, it should make the corn crop.

The forecast is more 90 degree weather for Tuesday. There is a possibility of rain Tuesday night and then the temperature is supposed to fall. It is forecast that the temperatures will be in the 70s over the weekend.

Mr. and Mrs. L.S. Gordon of Waldwick, N.J. have attended all three of my high school class reunions. Mrs. Gordon was the former Nannie Russell Harris who lived on U.S. 401 South. Saturday night after the reunion we had a chance to talk for a long time in our room in Southern Pines.

The conversation started about the nice gifts that were given to our class members by Faberge. It seems that the Gordons lived near the Faberge plant when it was in New Jersey. They said that their daughter used to work in the accounting department there.

Then we talked about how close, after 50 years, these class members were to each other. Gordon stated that in a large place like where he graduated, most folks didn't know each other and didn't try to keep in touch after graduation. He was saying how nice it must have been to live in a small town.

Of course with consolidation of schools, the people are not as close now as they were 50 years ago. They have more to do and move (See AROUND, page 11)