

Viewpoints

Rockfish school could aid growth

Members of the Hoke County Board of Education are on the right track by looking for a school location in the Rockfish area.

The county officials are also checking into the feasibility of remodeling the old Rockfish School-manufacturing company buildings as a less expensive site for the new facility.

Rockfish is the fastest growing area in the county and is in need of a neighborhood school.

Although there are lower land prices in Hoke County than neighboring Cumberland County, new residents, who work in Fayetteville, are slow to move to the Rockfish area because of the distance to schools.

Just across the Hoke County line, residents only have to drive a few miles to new schools, which are on their way to work.

Hoke residents, living in Rockfish and commuting to Fayetteville for work, must drive out of the way to either take their children to an overcrowded Scurlock School or bring them to Raeford.

A school in Rockfish would remove one barrier from living in Hoke County, and would be an inducement to residential developers.

It is hoped that school officials will move with speed to resolve the Rockfish School question.

Those paying taxes in Hoke County could stand a little help from new residents.

Downtown cleanup would help image

Figures recently collected from the county tax department show the downtown Raeford business district is a vital part of Hoke County's economy and cannot be allowed to deteriorate further.

County and city leaders, businesses, merchants and downtown property owners should start an immediate clean-up campaign to improve the embarrassing appearance of Raeford's central commercial district before the streets are jammed with 30,000 visitors for the North Carolina Turkey Festival.

There is a strong economic motivation for all who live in Hoke County, not just those who would benefit the most financially, to put our best foot forward during the festival and a little quick clean-up of downtown would do a great deal.

Besides adding substantial income to Hoke and Raeford coffers through sales tax revenues, the collected businesses in the downtown area are the sixth highest ad valorem taxpayers in the county.

The 49 stores and firms, which make up the downtown business district, contribute over \$41,000 annually to the county and \$28,000 to Raeford in ad valorem taxes. The figures show if downtown is allowed to decline further, the lost revenue will be felt by all of Hoke County.

Restorers of downtown areas say a community must look at the district as one industry or shopping complex, not as individual merchants on the same street.

Hoke County needs to begin looking at downtown Raeford as single complex and needs to get started again on revitalization efforts by unifying merchants and property owners in the cause.

However, in the meantime, removing signs that advertise firms long since out of business, repairing broken windows and cleaning weeds from the cracks in the sidewalks would do much to make downtown look better.

In the long run, merchants and property owners, who will probably admit business could be better, need to develop a strong association with a leadership who will speak for the interests of the entire group.

Efforts are being made to improve the downtown restoration plan to make it more affordable. Once that plan is completed, it must be adopted and enforced as the only blueprint for exterior improvements.

Proper restoration of the area may also involve the establishment of a special tax district for long-ranged street, sidewalk and parking improvements.

Merchants and property owners will need to take advantage of low interests loans, which are already available, to make improvements that will make downtown a competitive shopping area.

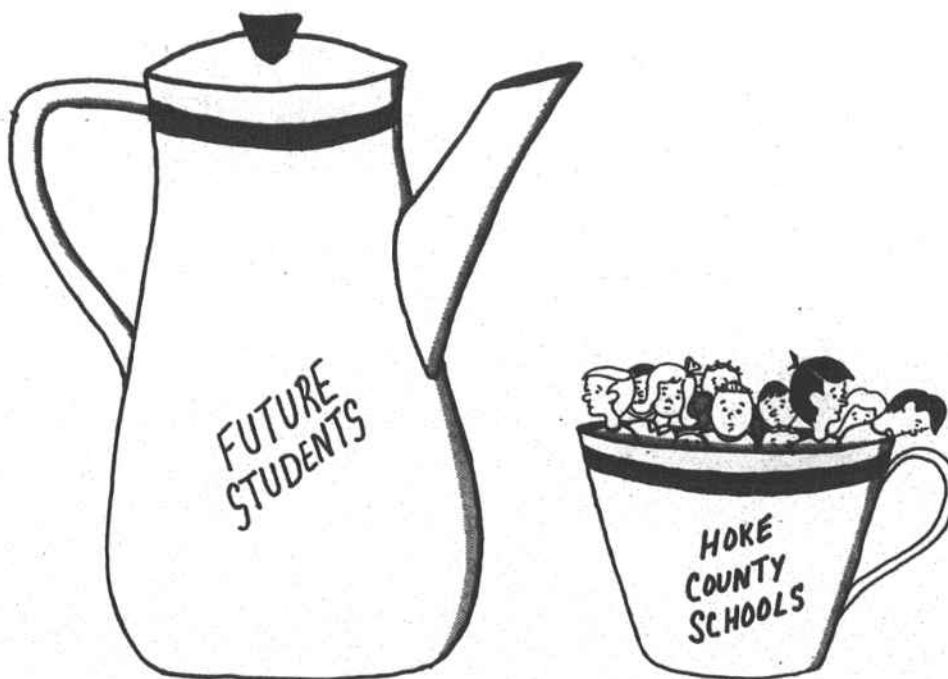
A revitalized downtown Raeford is essential to a healthy Hoke County economy and should be the concern of all residents.

Events like the North Carolina Turkey Festival, scheduled for Raeford on September 18-21, will bring large numbers of visitors with money to spend in the downtown area.

Those coming to the festival may be more likely to return and shop, and perhaps move here if they see an inviting central commercial district.

Hoke County needs to widen its tax base, not to diminish it with a dying downtown Raeford.

A clean-up campaign before the festival could do a great deal to let a captive audience know that Hoke County is a good place to live and shop.



FILL IT TO THE BRIM?

Significant state tax reduction lingers

RALEIGH -- Gov. Jim Martin and the legislature spent most of 1985 haggling over a package of major tax cuts. Lost in all of that hullabaloo was the passage of at least 30 other minor tax cuts which, depending upon the individual taxpayer, could be much more significant.

About 150 tax cutting bills were filed this session. Most were killed in committee, some were incorporated into the \$112 million cut formulated by the Democratic leadership and then enacted. Several others remain alive for the 1986 short session.

Of those tax cuts passed, the most significant are probably the two aimed at helping farmers.

The first will allow tobacco farmers to deduct as a business expense the leaf assessments they pay under the tobacco program. Federal tax policy in this area is hazy and the state has neither encouraged nor discouraged farmers from taking the deduction. But for the coming tax year, at least, it is

quite clear. The assessments can be deducted.

The second tax cut will stem from changes in the assessment of farmland. Farmers often find their land being appraised on its market value. That probably means higher taxes. The legislature hopes it has now found a convenient and reasonable method of evaluating farm land according to the value of the products grown on that land.

In recent years, the state has begun giving an extra tax break to people who suffer from debilitating diseases. This year, those who suffer from severe head injuries, spina bifida and multiple sclerosis were made eligible for the tax break. A head of household can now claim both the \$800 dependent's exemption for these people and a special \$1,100 deduction. People who are elderly, blind, deaf, severely retarded, physically handicapped, or hemophiliacs, and people who suffer from kidney disease or cystic fibrosis already qualified for similar tax breaks.

Prior to this year, a divorced



Watching
By Paul T.
O'Connor

parent could deduct medical expenses for his or her child only if he or she already claimed the child as a dependent. A new law allows both parents to deduct from their own taxes whatever amount they contribute to a child's medical expenses.

Self-employed individuals may now establish a \$5,000 tax-free death benefit for their survivors. This exclusion was already in effect for those who do not work for themselves.

Military personnel got a tax, and headache, break. Previously, when they sold their homes, they had four years to reinvest without paying state law on the profits. Now they will have eight years.

Leaded fuels helping farms

Many people think there isn't much use for leaded fuel anymore and it could be the impression was shared by the Environmental Protection Agency when it proposed to seriously restrict the use of lead fuel as a fuel additive this year and ban it totally by 1988.

As it turns out, many older engines that need the lubricating effect of leaded fuel are still in use on the nation's farms.

A nationwide survey, conducted by Farm Bureau, revealed that the average farm operator has 11 gasoline burning engines in use on his farm, 10 of which use leaded fuel.

They aren't all on obsolete pieces of equipment, either. Most farmers surveyed plan to use those engines for another 5 to 10 years, if fuel with sufficient lead content to keep them working properly can be obtained.

The jury is still out on whether the results of this survey will cut any ice with the EPA or not, but Farm Bureau is trying to protect the interest of the nation's farmers and ranchers against an unnecessary speedup of the EPA timetable for banning lead as a fuel additive.

Landowners who designate their property as a natural reserve and agree to certain state regulations should see their property taxes fall.

The land will have to be assessed according to that use and therefore should carry a much smaller tax value.

The Highway Patrol has a voluntary pledge program. When a patrolman dies or retires, his colleagues all chip in \$10 each. The retiree or survivors then get about \$10,400. The legislature exempted this payment from both income and inheritance taxes.

Finally, to clear up a mistake made by the people who print the state's laws, a bill was passed saying that businesses which sell slingshots need not pay a special privilege license tax to do so.

None of those tax cuts -- with the possible exception of the leaf assessment deduction -- will have a major effect on state revenues. But, if you qualify for one of them, it could save you a nice piece of cash.

Creek voyage was lengthy adventure

It has been a long hot summer for the Hoke County Culture Club.

Most of the June meetings were tied up with a lively garden comparison contest conducted between Sadie Louise and Earl Saurerbraten. Because there was so little else to do, club members remained spellbound by the pair's daily exchanges, which centered around measuring watermelon plants and reporting the first ripened tomatoes.

At first there was a healthy competition between the two, and all the other members were amused by the sporting attitude exhibited.

The event climaxed one afternoon when Sadie Louise laid a full grown watermelon on her scrawny undernourished vine and invited Earl over to compare his grape-sized fruit with hers.

Earl, who had been fooled by the trick and had suffered the kidding of the entire membership, countered with a 12-inch chili pepper.

He claimed the pepper was a new variety "and was as mild as a cucumber." After Sadie bit into that thing, her ears smoked and she didn't stop cussing for a week.

During July, the club members grew weary of the gardening contest and began looking for other entertainment.

"Let's get into some mischief," one member said, suggesting that the group take a voyage down Drowning Creek.

Well, nobody in the club had ever been down the local tributary, so we decided to hire The Hub and Otten Outfitters, "an experienced Drowning Creek navigational and explorational team."

Some of the boys down at the local store had suggested all we needed was a large flat bottom barge and a potato rake to steer us, but we decided to give the experienced guides a shot at the trip.

The fellows worked cheap. They had been out of work for some time.

Since their last trip down the creek in 1956, Hub developed a problem with his sacroiliac, which was caused by grabbing low hanging trees, while in the back seat of a speeding convertible.

The bad back condition was somewhat aggravated by a recent bout with cheap wine and a night of sleeping in the bushes.

Hub was in no condition for the rigors of the journey down the stream; however, Otten was anxious to go.

A couple of leaky boats were lined up, and the Culture Club wayed anchor at "O dark:thirty" on a Sunday morning for a five-hour jaunt down Drowning Creek.

Sadie Louise and Earl were splashing each other with the paddles, so we put them both in the same boat, and the rest of the club climbed in with the guide.



Warren Johnston

The Puppy Papers

"We'll be back in time to tell about it in church," Sadie Louise said, as she gave Earl with a faceful of water.

The two vegetable growers got into another contest to see who could paddle the fastest, and they soon disappeared ahead of us around the first bend.

The creek was peaceful. Birds were singing and the air was clean. It seemed a fine way to spend a Sunday morning. All of us in the other boat said so.

"This is a fine morning to be on the creek," we said.

The tranquillity was suddenly broken by blood curdling screams from ahead us.

"Wait. Wait. Wait. Ahhh, sh....," came the cry from around the bend, followed by a sound much like that made by the Titanic sinking.

We cleared the curve and found Sadie Louise and Earl submerged in chest deep water, deriding each other's heritage and boatmanship.

We righted the boat, poured out the water and gathered the adrift luggage. The voyage settled down, and we took the lead in our boat.

Birds started singing again. Fish occasionally jumped. Earl and Sadie Louise travelled in glum silence, lagging far in the rear.

"Wait. Wait. Wait. Ah, sh....," came the shrill cry from behind us, followed by the familiar splashing sound.

Before long, Earl and Sadie Louise appeared floating along beside their awashed boat, holding on to their remaining possessions.

After five more sinkings and five more rightings of the boat, we separated the two and were able to finish the trip shortly before dusk dark.

It was a great outing for the Culture Club, even though we had to wait a week to tell everybody at church about it.

Many of the members want to make a return voyage, as long as it is in the same boat with Otten-the-Guide.

All we have to do now is find a boat that is large enough to accommodate the entire membership.

We're thinking about using a flat bottomed barge and guiding it with a potato rake.

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