

The News-Journal

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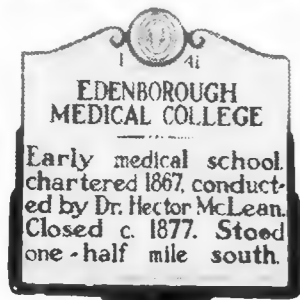
No. 50 Vol. 92

50 cents

Wednesday, March 15, 2000

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This week



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Around Town



BY SAM C. MORRIS
Contributing Editor

The cold weather will not go away. Monday morning there was frost once again. After the rain on Saturday a cold front came through and the temperatures dropped. We didn't have any of the severe winds that were in other states. As stated last week Easter is late this year, so the weather could still be cold some of the days.

The forecast for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday, calls for the highs Wednesday and Thursday to be in the 70s and the lows in the 40s. Friday and Saturday the highs will be in the low 60s or high 50s and the lows will be in the 30s. There is a chance of rain on Thursday night and on Friday.

I was sorry to hear the death of Louise Bevan Sawyer of Burlington last week. She was a native of Hoke County and finished high school here in 1936. Louise operated a beauty shop for many years. She was very active in community affairs and especially the Shiloh Presbyterian Church. She was on the committee that had a homecoming at Sandy Grove Presbyterian Church in the Fort Bragg reservation after more than 60 years.

Even after her health failed and he moved to Burlington, she stayed in contact with her many friends in Hoke County and Raeford. She was buried at Shiloh last week. We offer (See AROUND, page 12A)

Ten cent tax increase fractures board

BY VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke County Manager Bernice McPhatter was given guidance by county commission-

ers for the annual Department Heads' Budget Retreat being held today in Southern Pines. Try to avoid any tax increase and "scrunch the numbers," the board requested of McPhatter.

Her directive on budget challenges resulted after a recess from the regularly-scheduled Commissioners' meeting Monday night, when Commission Chairman James Leach was absent

and budget documents weren't available. The board reconvened on Tuesday morning.

Commissioners are looking at a possible 10 cents per-hundred-dollars tax increase for next year,

unless money is withdrawn from the general fund balance or normal tax revenues will generate enough money to cover budget requests.

(See TAXES, page 11A)



Girl Scout Week

Special activities are planned for Girl Scout Week (March 12-18), one of which is a display at the Hoke County Library put together by local troops and leaders. Shown at the display are girls and leaders of troops 1399 (Brownies), 1166 (Juniors) and 821 (Daisies). They are, from left, Ashley Cook, Tiffany Allen, Aubrey Rafinski, Laura Cook (leader), Brittany Cook, Shelby Coleman, Ashley Roberts, Kirsten Rafinski, and leaders Michele Allen and Renee Kudrna. (Photo by Pat Allen Wilson)

Water lead levels endanger two families

BY VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke health officials, state water quality specialists and the Environmental Protection Agency in Atlanta are still perplexed about what links high levels of lead to the homes of Kenneth and Sylvia Small, Nick and Brenda Mayo and one gas station in western Hoke County — some seven

miles apart.

These agencies have investigated the problem since July 1999. Soil and water samples have yet to determine the cause, says Jeff Eudy, a Hoke environmental health specialist. According to him, these are the first known cases of lead poisoning in Hoke County private wells in almost 15 years. He investigated only one other incident in 1999, which involved

higher levels of lead detected in a child due to mini-blinds in a home.

Only two things are shared in common by both families and the business: Each utilizes private wells, which are now providing unacceptable drinking water, and they all reside near the Hoke-Moore county line. In spite of the mystery, Eudy said both families will be connected to county water by (See LEAD, page 10A)

Lt. Gov. Wicker speaks at Hoke Civic League

Wicker unaware 'town meeting' appearance was closed to outsiders

BY VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff Writer

Lt. Governor Dennis Wicker visited Hoke County Monday night. But, Wicker was unaware his appearance — at what he thought was a public forum for candidates — turned out to be the best kept secret in Hoke County.

Wicker was invited to the Hoke County Civic League's monthly meeting, which was held at Leach Springs Missionary Baptist Church. A historically black church located on Arabia Road, Leach Springs' sanctuary was filled to capacity, Wicker noted.

"It was a successful meeting and I felt good about the response," Wicker said. "But, I thought it was open to the public. I didn't know it was closed. There were also other local candidates there who spoke," he said.

"I apologize if it caused any embarrassment to news media. I didn't know until afterwards the news reporter we invited wasn't allowed to stay," he said.

Wicker, a Democrat candidate for governor, directed his apology to a news reporter from *The News-Journal*, who was told to leave the meeting by President Mary Kemp Thomas of

Hoke's Civic League. His campaign office invited *The News Journal* to cover what Wicker was told was a "town meeting."

Wicker's publicized itinerary said he would "make brief remarks, respond to questions from the audience and be available for news media interviews."

However, Thomas told a contradiction (See WICKER, page 11A)



Wicker

School board suspends student long-term for essay on violence

KRISTIN GUTHRIE
Staff writer

The Hoke Board of Education decided last night to suspend Russell Almanza long-term for his controversial English essay with violent contents entitled "The Hoke High School Massacre."

Board members supported Hoke

High School Principal Dr. Wall's request to suspend freshman student Almanza long term in an effort to keep the large campus safe.

In response to a growing concern about safety at Hoke High School, the school recently purchased 19 additional surveillance cameras that will be used to monitor the parking lots at (See ESSAY, page 10A)

Raeford-Hoke Expo set for March 22

Since the Raeford-Hoke Expo was begun five years ago, each subsequent one is bigger than the other.

Raeford-Hoke Expo 2000, slated for Wednesday, March 22, from 10 a.m. until 6:30 p.m., is filled to capacity. "Spaces for all booths both inside and outside are filled up," said Gordon Ragsdale, who is in charge of adver-

tising for the event. "We had to turn down requests."

The business Expo, to be held at the National Guard Armory on Teal Drive, showcases area businesses, and this year there will be 40 exhibitors. Admission to the event is free and prizes, food, entertainment and fun are on the all-day agenda.

Multi-million dollar shopping center planned

BY VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A legacy of prime cotton fields, inherited by Raeford resident William J. McNeill, may soon be converted into a multi-million dollar shopping center on U.S. 401's corridor next to East Hoke Middle School. Hoke's Planning Commission unanimously recommended McNeill's request for a conditional use permit to construct a shopping plaza on the highway site.

County commissioners will decide whether to grant approval next month for the acreage located at the southwest intersection of Club Pond Road and U.S. 401. In spite of the acreage zoned highway (See SHOPPING CENTER, page 11A)

NAACP rally won't take place

BY VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Future plans for a rally or downtown march in Raeford proposed by the NAACP are off, says Onnie Dudley, a representative of NAACP's Hoke County chapter. According to Dudley, William McNair, an out-of-county NAACP representative, reportedly requested a permit application on February 8 from Raeford City Manager Mike McNeill. But, the organization never turned in the final paperwork for processing to schedule an anticipated march, she added.

"That is correct," said Raeford attorney Gregory Thompson, president of Hoke's NAACP. "There will be no march."

Thompson also said contrary to another "controversial rumor" floating among citizens, he and Dudley denied the local NAACP organization is involved in obtaining signatures from black voters — or any voters — in support of minority candidates for the upcoming election. Dudley also indicated the local NAACP wasn't involved in planning for a march, circulating a petition instead. This petition was a result of long-range discussions and strategies with other like-minded citizens to stand behind county leaders, she said.

Originally, a member of the local NAACP, who asked to remain anonymous, claimed the pending march and petition revolved around the November election. The source, a leader in the African American community, insisted the first NAACP petition circulating requested backing for black candidates, seeking \$5 contributions.

"The second petition I saw asked people to donate \$1 and was intended to show support for all minority elected officials instead of candidates," the source (See NAACP, page 11A)



Horse host...

A vista of Bradford pear trees, the namesake of Bradford Lane Farm, beautifies the western Hoke countryside — home to a thoroughbred horse farm. (Photo by Victoriana Summers)