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Education team's visits taxing Hoke schools

Superintendent, board chairman frustrated that much of the team's work seems redundant

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

State teams from the Department of Public Instruction are continuing to scrutinize Hoke County Schools, ensuring it is utilizing all of its resources for at-risk students. However, since the state task force was mobilized several months ago,

progress has been backsliding, according to Hoke School Superintendent Allen Strickland.

Hoke, the pilot county for the educational task force, is under the microscope because it sued the state over educational funding and won. Wake Superior Court Judge Howard Manning demanded the state send a team to Hoke

to assess the situation because he was not satisfied with the state's progress with disadvantaged counties. He ordered the state to seek solutions to help economically disadvantaged counties such as Hoke and then to report back to him.

"We won the lawsuit that said all students are entitled to a sound basic education," Strickland said. "Yet, we

have not received one dime of additional low wealth funding to improve our programs.

"Our teachers have been staying after school working extra hours so they can accommodate the interviews being conducted by the state team. It is really taxing our school system, but we are trying to cooperate."

"We know what to do with the low wealth funding they are sending us, but it is not enough."

Hoke School Board Chairman Russell Smith said he was astounded at the state's attitude.

"They said they wanted to come back and assess the climate in the hallways," (See DPI VISIT, page 4A)



North Raeford Volunteer Fire Department names Keyatta Parker "Firefighter of the Year."

First black female firefighter in Hoke receives top award

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

When the siren sounds at North Raeford Volunteer Fire Department, Keyatta Parker responds to the emergency call as the first African American female firefighter in Hoke. Parker's perseverance to serve the Hoke community in 2002 has helped her attain the "Firefighter of the Year" award at North Raeford, said Assistant Fire Chief Later Baker.

Parker recently received her pump operator accreditation from Robeson Community College. She is the only certified water pump operator in Hoke. Currently a student at Sandhills Community College, she is studying to become a surgical technician, minoring in radiography.

"Keyatta is a valuable asset to our fire department," Baker said. "She is a remarkable young woman. We based our decision to recognize her because of the training hours she put in, her overall attendance for fire calls, and the effort she put forth."

Parker said she was completely surprised when she heard about the award.

"I would like to give a special thanks to the

North Raeford Fire Department for voting me on," Parker said. "To me, they are the firefighters of the year all the time."

"They deserve to share this award."

The 20-year-old, who hails from New York, said fellow firefighters fondly nicknamed her "Koala" after the tiny Australian tree-climbing animal. A Hoke resident, Parker was accepted on North Raeford's roster last summer, serving as a fire truck driver and department secretary.

"My first fire was a house fire, and it was so tragic," Parker said. "Fortunately, no one was in the house. The husband and wife came back from Food Lion with their children, and they had lost everything."

"That could have been me or you. You can lose everything, but once somebody loses his or her life that cannot be taken back."

Parker said people in Hoke need to be more conscious about fire safety at home.

When she is not attending college or answering fire calls, Parker is employed as a substitute bus driver with Hoke County Schools.

"I think of these firefighters as my brothers" (See FIREFIGHTER, page 6A)

This Week



Young equestrians compete at Holly and Ivy Show page 1B

Blaze takes firefighter's home page 3A

Democrats to nominate register of deeds page 7A

Girl Scout cookie countdown begins page 3B

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Hoke's top stories are on the web
www.thenews-journal.com

Sheriff, commissioners elections, McPhatter indictment, Tyler's death top stories of 2002

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

Politics dominated the year 2002 with campaigning already begun the previous year, a primary that was delayed four months, and eventually election results that have already brought changes in the way things are done in Hoke County.

That is why *The News-Journal* selects

the elections as the top story of the year, followed by the indictment of former county manager Bernice McPhatter on embezzlement charges as the second top story; the untimely death of superintendent Mitch Tyler and other happenings affecting Hoke Schools is chosen as the third top story.

Other local stories to round out the top ten for the year are a special audit and a

reorganization of the county's finances; weather-related news from drought in the summer to a winter ice storm; advances made toward establishing a Raeford-Hoke Museum; cutbacks at Burlington Industries; a daytime murder in the street in Robbins Heights resulting in six arrests; and a guilty verdict for two who went on a 2001 crime spree through Hoke and neighboring counties and seriously

wounded a Scotland deputy.

Elections

In December of 2001, Hoke Sheriff James Davis had political opponent and his former chief deputy, Hubert Peterkin, in court on charges of speeding, failure to stop for a blue light and siren and careless and reckless driving; Peterkin was found not guilty. A year later Peterkin was in the (See TOP STORIES, page 7A)

Unilever boost in sales brings stability to Hoke

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of articles on economic development in Raeford and Hoke County.

Chicago's loss has been Raeford's gain since Unilever Home and Personal Care, an international manufacturer of personal care products, transferred its entire deodorant operation to Hoke County two



Yvette Smith, administrative assistant, and Kevin Beck, Unilever plant manager.

years ago. Even though the national economy still appears somewhat depressed, business is booming at Unilever in Hoke and throughout the world, according to new plant manager Kevin Beck.

Unilever is the world's largest manufacturer of consumer products. It attained \$49 billion in sales in 2001. It produces and markets foods and personal care products such as Lipton, Ragu, Calvin Klein, Rave, Aqua-Net, Caress, Lever 2000, Brut and Suave.

"Cost is king and the dollar is the key to success," Beck said. "As the New Year arrives, we want to raise our local plant to a world class level."

"We will go to the top to ensure the survival of our Raeford plant."

Unilever's local plant employs 850 people. It operates seven days a week on a 24-hour basis.

"Profits are up with no staff reductions

in sight at this time," Beck said. "We are doing well because our total sales volume has been \$675 million annually at the Raeford plant. This plant is very important to Unilever."

"It is the sole source of the supply of deodorant we produce in North America."



An aerial view of the 67-acre Unilever site in Raeford.

Popular personal care products such as Dove body wash, Therma-Silk hair spray, and Degree deodorant are but a few of the items of hair sprays, mousse, deodorants (See UNILEVER, page 6A)

Dudley seeks register of deeds nomination

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke civic and church leader Onnie Dudley, retired assistant register of deeds, seeks to return to the Register of Deeds office after a brief hiatus. Dudley announced yesterday she will ask members of the Hoke Democratic Party to endorse her as their register of deeds nominee on Saturday. If she is selected as the successor of retiring Register of Deeds Della Maynor Bowen, Dudley will be distinguished as the first African American register of deeds in Hoke County.

Hoke Democratic Party chairman A.K. "Dooie" Leach confirmed that Dudley is one of three people who have contacted him, expressing an interest in the job as register of deeds. (See the related article inside.)

The 63-year-old Dudley said her extensive experience as former second-in-command at the deeds' office could likely make her the Democrats' choice to replace Bowen. (See REGISTER OF DEEDS, page 4A)