

The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

50¢

No. 47 Vol. 96

RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, February 11, 2004



An exotic touch
Top: South Hoke third graders are confronted by a South American tarantula during a Tropical Connections presentation at the Hoke County Library by a visitor from the N.C. Museum of Natural Science. Bottom: The youngsters experience a ball python from the rain forests of South America up close and personal.

Photos by Lawryn Shepard

New schools needed to match growth pace

Two schools could cost \$19 million or more

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke School Superintendent Allen Strickland told the Board of Education yesterday that Hoke County schools are growing by "leaps and bounds" and are in need of at least one new elementary school and another middle school. After a presentation, the school board approved a study to determine new schools needs and locations suitable for construction.

Strickland estimated the two proposed schools would cost \$19 million or more. It would take

students.

Anticipated class-size reductions and More At Four classroom programs taking up more space aggravate the situation further, Strickland told the board.

There are currently seven elementary schools, three middle schools and only one high school in Hoke.

"We have to make sure we do not exceed 21 students per classroom," he said. "We have been in discussion with some planners to determine where the growth is coming.

"We need to know what elementary and middle

"Our schools are already at capacity. We have grown at a rate of about nine percent over the last five years." — Superintendent Strickland

approximately three years to complete site purchasing, architectural drawings and final construction for one school, he added.

"The numbers (students) are shooting right up there," Strickland said. "Our schools are already at capacity. We have grown at a rate of about nine percent over the last five years."

"That is about two percent per year."

Strickland said there is nowhere to redistrict because West Hoke Middle School already accommodates 750 students, and East Hoke Middle School has 843 students with a potential of 900 next year.

"If we tried to move any children, it would be moving children around the clock so that is not an option," Strickland said.

In the 11 schools in the county, the current enrollment equals 6,550 students. Current capacity allowed is 6,615. Projected enrollment next year could exceed the capacity by more than 300

schools needs are and do something about the high school. We could use a new high school down the road.

According to Strickland, huts will have to be used at Hoke High to accommodate the increasing student enrollment and the future Ninth Grade Career Academy. Currently, 1,476 students are enrolled at the high school when the current capacity should only be 1,375. He anticipated the high school enrollment could increase to 1,565.

Other portable huts will have to be opened at Scurlock and Rockfish elementary schools, he said.

"In reality in Hoke County, we are growing at about 2.5 children per family," Strickland said.

"We are looking at the real picture here

"There could be 1,588 additional children here over the next three years."

Strickland and Brown Hendrix Jr., school fa-
(See SCHOOL NEEDS, page 8A)

This Week



Love and Espionage
page 1B

Jaycees honor Hoke firefighters
page 5A

Dog abuser gets jail term
page 10A

Index

Births	3B
Business/Farm	9A
Calendar	2B
Classifieds	5-6B
Deaths	12A
Editorials	2A
Engagements	3B
Legals	4B
Public Record	5A
Religion	11A
Schools	8A
Socials	3B
Sports	4A
Weddings	3B

Hoke's top stories are on the web; send us stories, subscribe

www.thenews-journal.com

State delays approval on Rockfish park work

Commissioners vote to complain to company, some residents say improvements are fine

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Even after renovations that include an elaborate playground and basketball court, Rockfish Park remains the subject of controversy. Hoke Commissioners last week said recent improvements are unsatisfactory and voted to notify the project supervisor. Some residents of the area, however, said they are happy with the park.

No one seems to know who cut from the park's budget \$28,000 in grant money that could have been used for new bleachers

or other projects. Hoke Parks and Recreation Department's grant was also allegedly "co-mingled" with other funds by former Hoke county manager Bernice McPhatter. Hoke finance director Scott Edwards told the Hoke board of commissioners at their annual retreat.

"I do not know why," said Edwards, who was hired after McPhatter resigned in 2001.

Funded by a \$94,988 grant received from the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the second phase to enhance Rockfish Park was be-

gun in 2001. The county contributed about \$67,000 in matching funds for the park upgrades.

It was only four years ago when Rockfish resident Carl Mounts said. "Even Babe Ruth would not have been able to play at Rockfish Park" unless the park was improved. Today, children and adults may play baseball, softball and basketball at the facility located where more than 20 percent of Hoke's population resides.

Yet after receiving two grants and almost \$200,000 since 1996 for the eastern Hoke park, Hoke commissioners are still

displeased with the quality of some work at the facility.

"There are still some needs out at the park that need to be addressed," Commission Chairman Bobby Wright said at the retreat.

After a recommendation from Commission Vice Chairman Charles V. Daniels, the board voted unanimously to let Hobbs-Upchurch engineering in Southern Pines, supervisory firm for the consecutive projects, know they "are not satisfied" with the most recent improve-

(See ROCKFISH PARK, page 9A)

Jail committee meets today, possible expansion or new building likely topics

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

As the Hoke County Jail Committee was scheduled to meet this morning, Sheriff Hubert Peterkin said he thought it would discuss expansion alternatives or propose sites for a future jail. He anticipates the group will be making a presentation to the board of commissioners soon to offer options.

"I expect we will know some of the

results from the Charlotte consulting firm that was hired to study the jail needs," Peterkin said. "But, I am not certain what will be addressed today specifically.

"I have tremendous confidence in the volunteers on this committee. I believe they will be very conscientious."

In spite of concerns over the jail, Peterkin said his agency accomplished 2,000 arrests last year, conducted 18 drug raids, and arrested 100 drug suspects. Six felony convictions were also attained at a

federal level by the Sheriff's Office.

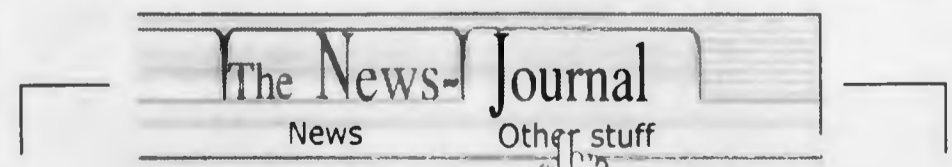
However, Peterkin flatly denied last week calling the Hoke detention facility a danger to inmates, employees and the community. In fact, he said, the minutes of the county's annual retreat last week would reflect that he never labeled the jail as being a hazard or danger while discussing it at the meeting.

"Obviously, the county commissioners are well aware of the liability that exists at the jail right now," Peterkin said.

"I do not have to tell them the jail is dangerous. They know the condition of the facility and improvements that need to be made," he said.

"The jail's immediate needs? We are still vulnerable right now. We are looking at installing bars at our fenced area."

Peterkin said yesterday he thinks commissioners are being attentive to the jail situation. He preferred to concentrate more at the retreat on accomplishments of the
(See JAIL COMMITTEE, page 5A)



By KEN MACDONALD
General Manger

of them true — of the characters around here.

Speaking of eating dinner with someone famous, I had that honor last week. National Public Radio's Carl Kasell and his wife, Mary Ann, were in town visiting friends — my aunt and uncle — and I got invited on the coattails of my wife, who actually has personality and can contribute to a conversation.

I think the Kassells were taken with Raeford after hearing the stories — some

I know the people of Raeford have left a good taste in the mouths of my aunt and uncle. Uncertain whether the move would be for a week or a year, they came here in September from Washington to help care for my uncle's 100-year-old mother whom they retrieved from Georgia. They sort of moved to the middle so that she could live out her last days in a community of family, and as it turned out, friends.

(See OTHER STUFF, page 12A)



Arson suspected

Hoke firefighters extinguished flames at a vacant mobile home yesterday off Doc Brown Road. See the story on page 10A.