

Honored

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wall, Pinehill, West Hoke, Rockfish, Hillcrest and Crestline fire departments were recognized. Wagram-North Scotland firefighters, who serve a district in Hoke, were recognized but were not present. Employees of the North Carolina Forestry Service were also recognized as was Hoke Fire Marshal Freddy Johnson.

Among his firefighting activities Baker, 65, is credited with playing a major role in the merger between North Raeford and the financially struggling Tylertown fire department. On receiving his plaque, Baker gave credit to his firefighters: "This is for us all. What do I say all the time? 'This is us. We.'"

John Joseph, investigator with the District Attorney's Office, volunteer assistant chief of the Puppy Creek Fire Department, was the guest speaker. He said he is proud to be a volunteer firefighter.

Joseph pointed out that volunteer firefighters are required to have the same training, as paid, full-time firefighters. "You have to be ready for any type of emergency and have to have a cool mind," he said.

If you do not operate cool under pressure, you or somebody else can get hurt."

Firefighters also need "courage, dedication and a willingness to lead and a desire to get out of a warm bed

on a cold rainy night," Joseph said. "It's hot, nasty work and all you get out of it is feeling good about yourself."

Joseph noted the courage it takes to drag a fire hose into a door with fire rolling out. "Sometimes it takes a person who is a little crazy," Joseph said, after which a firefighter shouted out, "That's more like it."

Baker has been a firefighter since 1967. In 1972 he went on the road as a fire training instructor for the N.C. Fire Training Division. Two years ago he was named N.C. State Fire Rescue Training director, a position he still holds.

Baker has been chief at North Raeford since 1978. He has also served as president and vice president of the Hoke Fire Rescue Association and was instrumental in starting the annual firefighting competition in Hoke. He established firefighting certification classes in 1987.

Baker was responsible for obtaining the most up-to-date firefighting equipment possible for North Raeford. He also helped garner a grant for the department and his efforts help lower insurance rates for his and other districts.

Baker and his wife of 45 years, Mary, have five children, five grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. His son Tater is assistant chief at North Raeford.

Superintendent

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ber two does not even come close.

"The superintendent's is a very important job. I think we need to see which direction we will go," he said.

"We could attempt to find a superintendent by February when Mr. Strickland retires, or look at an interim arrangement in February and change over at the end of July."

Strickland, 53, announced his intentions to retire last week after four years of service as assistant school superintendent and superintendent. He was the successor of former school superintendent Mitch Tyler, who died almost three years ago. Tina Miller is currently the assistant school superintendent reporting to Strickland.

Smith polled the board to discover the consensus on the status of how it would proceed in hiring a future superintendent. Most of the board was reluctant to hire a substitute for Strickland midway through the school year. The majority indicated they preferred an interim role by someone they would appoint when Strickland departs.

"I have been involved in three of these searches," Nick Sojka, school board attorney, said. "I think you need to allow a couple of months for applications to come in."

"Then, you would allow at least another month to go through those applications."

Sojka said the board could indicate its preference without voting on the process right away. He said the process could be expedited for hiring if they called special meetings. Otherwise, he recommended, the board should have a permanent person in place by July 1.

"It looks like an interim is the way to go," school board member Hank Richards said. "It is not something we need to rush."

Smith echoed Richards: "My sense is it would be better at the changeover of the school year and to put feelers out (now)."

School board member Tom Pilkington agreed, saying, "We need to find a superintendent before the new school year. We do not need to look for a superintendent in the middle of the year."

School board members William Hollingsworth and Rosa McAllister McRae also concurred with the informal inquiry by Smith.

Sojka estimated the search could take up to four months from advertising the position to the final interviews before a selection would be completed.

During a break, Hollingsworth said it is the board's plan, in his opinion, to also insist the superintendent would reside on a full-time, permanent basis in Hoke County when selected. N.C. state statutes indicate a person must reside within the county where they are employed as a school superintendent.

Sandy Grove expansion
In other business, the board unanimously approved a bid to move for-

ward with construction of an addition at Sandy Grove Elementary School. Out of two bids submitted to architects Shuller Ferris & Lindstrom of Fayetteville, the low single-prime bid of Southern Builders was approved for \$1.5 million. Although the bid was almost \$2,000 higher than a multi-prime bid turned in, the board decided it would be more advantageous to choose Southern Builders because the contractor would directly supervise and build the project.

Hoke Schools facilities director Brown Hendrix said otherwise the multi-contractor would have been subcontracting out some of the work, raising the possibility there might have been less control over the project.

"It is better to have one contractor looking after the project," Hendrix said.

Hendrix told the board the project would be earmarked for completion by next July because Sandy Grove is a year-round school. He said the time element and availability of building materials would play a factor in the final completion date. A lot of materials have been shipped to the Gulf coast for rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina. The local project was bid within the amount budgeted by the school system, he added.

Prior to the board's decision, Sojka confirmed there is no legal problem in accepting a bid slightly higher.

Mustang blazes

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Columbus Day turned out to not be a day of celebration for N.C. Correctional Officer Lou Shipman. The mint 1987 Mustang convertible he had restored caught fire after he stopped for mail at the Raeford Post Office on Monday.

Plumes of smoke and flames drew a crowd on West Elwood Avenue to watch Raeford Fire Department firemen extinguish the blaze in the unoccupied car.

Raeford assistant fire chief Terry Tapp, also the fire marshal, said it was fortunate Shipman was not in the vehicle at the time of the blaze. Shipman reported the blaze under the hood of his car to 9-1-1 Communications at 11:49 a.m. Tapp said it took the firefighters only three minutes to arrive on the scene and put out the fire, but the Mustang appeared to be destroyed.

Shipman, a Fayetteville resident, told Tapp he had experienced no mechanical problems with the bright yellow convertible with a black canopy. Firefighters successfully hosed it down, and one fireman flipped open the hood to help cool down the heated metal.

"Since the fire was so intense in the engine, we may never know if it overheated or what happened," Tapp said. "Mr. Shipman indicated that there was nothing unusual when he got out of the vehicle and went to the post office."

Tapp said fighting a vehicle fire could be hazardous. "It is not as simple as some people think. We have to be careful about shock absorbers filled with gas not exploding and a lot of other things that could happen."

"We are just glad nobody was injured."

Raeford police assisted the city fire department.

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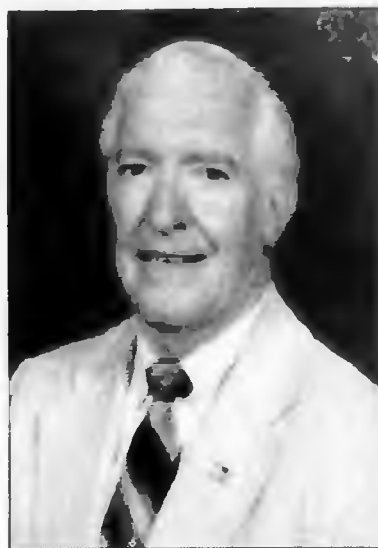
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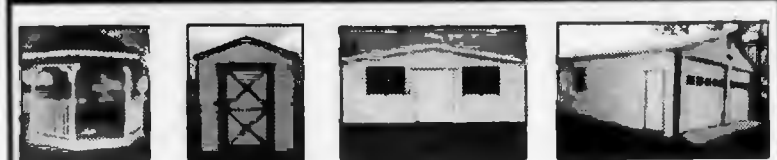
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