

The News-Journal

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75¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

Fire leaves DSS building unusable for months

Staff moved to senior services room in old armory until old health center available

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke Interim Social Services Director Barbara Brooks and County Commission Chairman Bobby Wright were in a crisis mode yesterday, "allaying the apprehensions" of county DSS employees and any potential fears of clients of the human services agency.

A Saturday night fire caused severe smoke damage to the DSS building on Magnolia Street, temporarily shutting it down.

Wright said some of the DSS staff would be accommodated in alternative offices until Health staff vacates the old Health Building to relocate to the new facility on West Palmer Street. The former health facility will reopen in approximately one month as the

DSS's temporary building.

"None of our staff will go without pay," Brooks said. "We will work on a rotating system as of today, with some people put on a temporary administrative leave with pay."

"Other counties have also offered us assistance so none of our new or existing clients will suffer from this accidental fire that burned the DSS building."

DSS department heads met in an emergency meeting on

Monday. An insurance adjuster from the N.C. Association of County Commissioners' risk management insurance pool also assessed the damage yesterday, with Hoke buildings director Dennis Baxley accompanying the

appraiser. Damage is estimated at more than \$400,000, according to County Manager Mike Wood and Wright.

"The Department of Social Services is not shut down," (See DSS FIRE, page 7A)

School evacuated



West Hoke Middle School students were evacuated Tuesday afternoon after a fire was suspected in a ceiling. The alarm was triggered by a broken heating belt and there was no fire. Students made the best of the disruption (top) while Raeford firemen suited up (above) and Principal James McLaughlin coordinated the evacuation (right). (Story, page 5A)



Cleanup work was underway Tuesday at the Hoke DSS building.

Passerby saves day

Spots smoke, calls 911 in time

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

A man who saw smoke in the vicinity of the Hoke County Dept. of Social Services building and called 9-1-1 saved the day for

DSS operations.

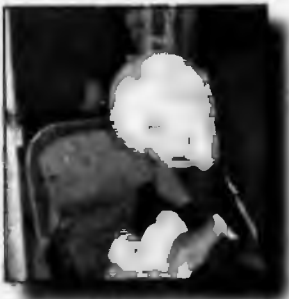
The unidentified man said there was smoke near the DSS building and a parking area for school buses. The call went in at 6:06 Saturday evening, and firefighters were dispatched to the building.

"If (the fire) had another 30-minute or hour jump on us, it could have been a different situation, a whole 'nother world," said Raeford Fire Marshal Terry Tapp. "It was fortunate somebody did see it at that time."

What firefighters found when they arrived was some "pretty heavy smoke" coming out of the north end of the building, according to Tapp.

(See SAVES DAY, page 7A)

This Week



Congressman strolls Raeford page 6A



Two crashes kill two page 3A

Marie Lowery retires page 1B

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Software glitch delays eight-year property revaluation

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Property owners will have to wait a little longer for word on whether their property value will increase. Because of software glitches, an eight-year property revaluation is being delayed.

Values on real estate property

are estimated to increase by as much as 20 to 25 percent since the last valuation eight years ago and could generate \$1.6 million more in tax revenue for the county.

However, Tax Assessor Ginny Gibson indicated tax revaluation notices normally sent to property owners, advising them of increases, would be later than

planned.

"We had some problems with our software system that caused some delay in finishing the revaluation across the county," Gibson said. "We have teams going out from our office, completing the appraisals. We are in compliance with the state, but it is taking longer because we are saving

the county money by doing the process in house.

"We want to make sure everyone is treated fairly and that our revaluations are accurate."

Gibson anticipates taxpayers will not likely receive revaluation notices until the end of February. Even then, people will not be aware of what their tax bill will

be for 2006 until commissioners decide on whether to revise the tax rate. Tax bills will be mailed out in September 2006.

"The revaluation rates will be effective for 2006, starting from January 1," Gibson said. "Traditionally, the tax rate is lowered when there is a revaluation, but (See REVALUATION, page 7A)

King's memory honored at Hoke County Civic League banquet

By SONIA JACKSON
Intern to The News-Journal

The tables were set with white tablecloths and matching white roses for centerpieces. At the tables were people of different

backgrounds and experiences who had come together to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and honor his memory at the Cape Fear Conference B Headquarters at 6 p.m. on Jan. 16.

The room rang loud with the sound of music as audience members stood to sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the National Black Anthem.

Minister Shirley Jones of the Juniper Level Missionary Baptist

Church presented a lively imitation of Rosa Parks, another person whose deeds helped changed society for people of color.

The guests were treated to Mount Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church choir's music followed

by a banquet consisting of rice, chicken, sweet potatoes, dessert and drinks.

Afterward, the Rev. Dr. Lafayette Maxwell, pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church, spoke about King. (See BANQUET, page 4A)

Child rapist sentenced to 30 years

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hardin, lead prosecutor for the case.

Hardin said at the time Black had sexual intercourse with the victim in 2004, he was 22, but she was only 12 years old. Hardin said the Department of Social Services investigated the incident initially as a case of neglect, removing the girl from the custody of her mother. An aunt has been raising the victim, now 15, and is credited with reporting the crime to the Hoke Sheriff's Office when she found out the girl was pregnant.

Black was convicted of statutory (See RAPIST, page 7A)

A Hoke mother who allegedly accepted drugs in exchange for allowing a male friend to have sexual favors with her 12-year-old daughter was not charged with any criminal offense. However, child rapist Martin Black was sentenced yesterday in Hoke Superior Court for up to 36 years in state prison for his crimes.

Hoke resident Black, 25, fathered a baby with the child, according to Hoke senior assistant district attorney Mike



By KEN MACDONALD
Publisher

if you dress warmly (you will).

We kick back and read, and watch a movie, and listen to music and concentrate a month's worth of dysfunction into one weekend.

"Who wants to play Taboo?" someone asked this weekend.

Heads remained facing forward, I noticed, but eyes looked to the right and left as everyone asked himself the same question:

(See OTHER STUFF, page 6A)

Most families go to the beach in the summer. Something about sun-tanning and swimming.

Our family goes to the beach in the winter, because the rates are cheaper.

We tell ourselves it's less crowded (and it is), that you can swim in a hot tub or indoor pool (you can) and that you won't freeze