

Groundbreaking set for middle school Paperwork nearly ready for solar-powered facility at Sandy Grove

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

County and school officials will break ground July 19 on Hoke's third middle school, the school system announced last week.

Plans for Sandy Grove Middle School are now in the hands of several attorneys

working as go-betweens for the county, school system and developer. The Hoke County Board of Education voted at its meeting last week to sign off on some of the last paperwork between the developer and the school system. The Board of Education and the Board of Commissioners will likely sign the final agreement with the developer later this week, officials said.

Brenton Jeffcoat, attorney with the Pope Zeigler law firm in Charlotte, told the county commissioners at their meeting Monday that the qualified school construction bonds to fund the project will go up for sale Thursday. The bond sale will close a week later, and the proceedings should be on schedule for construction to begin later this summer, Jeffcoat said.

The bond sale process has been long and complicated, with a 146-item checklist before the bond issue could happen, but the way it has worked out has been "the best anybody could hope for at the outset," Jeffcoat said.

Technically, the county will not own the building itself until after the full amount is (See MIDDLE SCHOOL, page 3A)



Brown Campbell Graham Hobson Virgil

Officers charge 8 with break-in

Authorities arrested eight people last week including five adults and three juveniles on charges related to a break-in and entering investigation at the 200 block of Proclamation Drive.

A witness called for help June 14 after spotting several individuals entering a residence and leaving with items from the home in the McDougal Downs area. Deputies responded to the scene and encountered three people matching the descrip-

tion provided by the witness. Two of the individuals were found with property in their possession later determined to be stolen. Following up on information, officers arrived at a house on the 2400 block of O'Hara Drive and arrested five additional suspects on various charges.

Shiheem O. Brown, 17, of the 100 block of Robin Place in Raeford, Robert J. Campbell, 18, of the 100 block of Robin Place in Raeford, and (See BREAK-IN, page 4A)



Summer fun

Kids at the Gang Resistance Education And Training summer camp play in a sprinkler at Hoke County High School. The program, funded by donations and sponsored by the Hoke County Sheriff's Office, offered free activities, food and an anti-gang message for dozens of children. (Catharin Shepard photos)



Balloon sent nearly to space, crash-lands in Hoke

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer



The team with a similar balloon two years ago.



A photo from the balloon as it flew toward Raeford from Raleigh shows the curvature of the earth.

A weather balloon that crash-landed Saturday in Hoke County traveled a long way to get here and brought back some impressive photos of space on its return trip to Earth.

North Carolina Near Space Research released the homemade weather balloon setup at the 2012 Maker Faire in Raleigh to perform science experiments in "near space," the sub-orbital part of Earth's atmosphere that's about 75,000 feet to 62.5 miles up. This marked the seventh time the six-person amateur space exploration team and its group of about 20 online supporters was able to launch one of

the balloons, all in the name of discovery.

It's also a lot of fun, team member Rodney Radford said.

"This is our way of getting up and seeing space on a reasonable budget," he said.

North Carolina Near Space Research formed when Triangle-based TechShop RDU competed in a 2010 Hackerspaces in Space competition that challenged amateurs to design and build inexpensive devices to take photos of space. The team members were so intrigued by the possibilities that they continued their work even after the competition was over. Not counting the recoverable equipment, each balloon setup costs only about \$150 but is still

(See BALLOON, page 3A)

County plans for workers to get 2.5 percent raise

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

Hoke County employees will get a 2.5 percent cost of living pay increase this year if the commissioners sign off on the final proposed budget ordinance, the board discussed at its meeting Monday.

"We have balanced the budget. It reflects a cost of living according to what the board had recommended, and at the present time like I said, barring any unforeseen changes, we are balanced in all funds," County Finance Officer Conrad Ferguson said.

The final version of the proposed budget ordinance does not have any tax increase for residents,

he said. However, the county will receive about \$700,000 in lottery funds this year, about \$300,000 less than the state originally promised, Ferguson said.

"Not what they promised to begin with, is it?" Commissioner Bobby Wright said.

"The state is taking funds from that," Commissioner Jean Powell said.

Ferguson confirmed the state initially promised the county a minimum of \$1 million in lottery funds each year but said the state has never actually paid out that much to Hoke.

The commissioners planned a budget workshop for Tuesday morning but changed the date to June 26 at 9 a.m. The board may approve the final budget

ordinance at that meeting.

The commission held public hearings on the budget and the Hoke Area Transit System 2012-13 grant application for assisting elderly and disabled citizens in rural areas. No citizens spoke at either of the hearings.

In other financial developments for the county, the credit rating company Moody's recently gave Hoke County an A1 rating, while Standard & Poor's listed the county at A rating status, County Manager Tim Johnson said. The A1 rating is an "excellent rating for a county our size," Johnson said.

"That should save us a significant amount of money on the bonds we're about to sell for the new (See COMMISSION, page 3A)

OTHER STUFF

BY KEN MACDONALD

Sitting around the table at my friend's lake house, I let it slip to a group of guys that I was thinking about buying a scooter to ride around town. Gas is high; electric vehicles are too expensive; I live only a mile from the job. One of the men had the decency to ask exactly what sort of vehicle I was referring to when I used the term "scooter" before deriding me. The others just went straight to derision. You see, I pictured riding an Italian bike, one (See OTHER STUFF, page 4A)

Litter bugging Hoke residents

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

Burger wrappers on the roadsides. Bottles in the drainage ditches. Stephanie York got fed up with it one day, grabbed a garbage bag and went to work picking up outside of a Hoke County subdivision where she owns a

rental property.

"I stopped my car to clean up the trash at the entrance of a subdivision that I have a rental property in," she said in an email. "A neighbor actually got an attitude because she had to wait at the entrance for a minute. I stopped my car and had a garbage bag. She saw me picking up trash. Instead

of getting out and helping to speed up the process she threw her hands up, shaking her head and swearing at me!"

The litter situation doesn't seem to have improved since February of this year when Adopt-A-Highway volunteer Jackie Hargrove reported picking up more trash than she (See LITTER, page 6A)

This Week

Groups to give away 12,000 pounds of food page 4A

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