

The News-Journal

75¢

Hoke County's newspaper since 1905

No. 17 Vol. 110

RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, July 1, 2015

County settles on 2¢ tax increase

'This time next year we're going to be celebrating' — Leach

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

Hoke County citizens will pay a higher tax rate in the coming fiscal year as part of a plan to ad-

dress multiple issues with county finances.

A two-cent tax increase will bring the ad valorem tax rate to 75 cents per \$100 valuation. This marks the first time in about 15

years that the county has raised property taxes for the sake of paying for county operations. The commissioners raised the property tax by three cents in 2011 to pay for building Sandy Grove Middle

School.

The tax increase was included in the 2015-16 budget ordinance that the Hoke County Board of Commissioners passed 4-1 Monday morning. The total budget

came out to \$49 million, down from the \$51.2 million 2014-15 budget.

Commissioner Bobby Wright made the motion to approve the (See *INCREASE*, page 7)



Happy Independence Day!

Fireworks Nearby

Aberdeen—US 1 Aberdeen Lake Park, games at 5; music at 6; fireworks at dark
Ft. Bragg—Main Post Field, opens at 1 p.m.; Easton Corbin concert at 5; flag ceremony at 8:10; 1812 Overture with cannons at 9; fireworks at 10
Pinehurst—Harness Track, Beulah Hill Rd., games, 6 p.m.; fireworks at dark

Special

Third Winner! Oh Snap!



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Some commissioners blame Johnson for mess

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

Several Hoke County commissioners blamed former County Manager Tim Johnson for finan-

cial problems that have landed the county in hot water. The board fired Johnson in a 3-2 vote in January and at that time refused to say why they fired him.

Besides drawing up a budget for

the 2015-16 fiscal year, Hoke County officials have been busy working to clean up the 2014-15 fiscal year budget and address "serious operational problems" with its financial management procedures.

Earlier this year, the Local Government Finance Division and the Local Government Commission (LGC) with the North Carolina Department of State Treasurer cited (See *BLAME*, page 6)



April King holds up the keys that she hope will unlock new possibilities for her family. (Catharin Shepard photo)

King gets keys to Habitat house

Hoke's ninth house finished by mom, 3 boys, volunteers

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

April King held up the glittering keys and shook them, smiling, at her friends and sister as her sons Zechariah, Jeremiah and Isaiah looked on.

The keys would open the door to her brand-new home on North Jackson Street in Raeford, and, King hopes, open new possibilities for her family.

"More like a final destination,

something that we worked towards, something that we actually prayed for this was like a goal that we really wanted to conquer. It's good for me, as a single mother of three boys, to actually have this," she said.

This weekend King became the ninth person in Hoke County to receive a house through Habitat for Humanity. The nonprofit organization relies on donations to help build a house, with the new homeowner required to put in hours of "sweat

equity" helping with the construction. The homeowner pays back the cost of the house, which then supports future Habitat for Humanity projects.

"You appreciate it a lot more to see that this is something you helped come here every Saturday and build," King said. Construction started in August of last year and wrapped up just recently.

King has been a Hoke resident for (See *HABITAT HOUSE*, page 11)

Johnson defends himself

'They were afraid their folks wouldn't get hired'

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

"If anyone thinks I've done anything wrong at all, they should call the SBI and have it investigated," former Hoke County Manager Tim Johnson said after accusations from some county commissioners that he caused the county's financial problems.

In January, the board voted 3-2 to fire Johnson and would not give a reason for firing him, but last week Commission Chairman James Leach said now that the county's financial issues have been made public, citizens may "see the reason for it." Commissioner Harry Southerland commented that the financial issues were "why we had to do it."

Johnson, who is now (See *JOHNSON*, page 6)



Johnson

Sheriff: Churches can't assume they're safe

Post someone at open doors, lock others, report suspicious people, Peterkin tells crowd

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

Churches can't assume their congregations are safe while attending worship services, Hoke County Sheriff Hubert Peterkin said.

"Should we pray with one eye open and one eye closed? Some of us do. Some of us better," he said. "I'm being serious. Some of us better be paying attention at all times."

Weeks after a 21-year-old man walked into a Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston and

shot and killed nine men and women, including a South Carolina state senator, Peterkin met with faith leaders in the local community to talk about keeping places of worship safe.

More than 100 people from Hoke, Cumberland, Robeson and Scotland counties attended the meeting Saturday at East Hoke Middle School, where Peterkin and some of his staff members talked with churchgoers and their pastors about how to keep worship services and church grounds safe.

"I wish I could stand here and tell you that

everyone who walks into a place of worship is there

for peace, for worship and helping people and love and

tranquility. That is not what (See *CHURCHES*, page 7)



Peterkin talks to a crowd of church leaders about security. (Catharin Shepard photo)