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Sheriff seeks more deputies in 2016

Work with gang awareness, church safety will continue

By CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

Last year was a big one for the Hoke County Sheriff's Office, and Sheriff Hubert Peterkin said he hopes to build on the work his department has done by adding more deputies to the roster in

2016 to help keep Hoke residents safe. "We had a good year, we really had a good year, and we didn't have as many problems as we did in the past," the sheriff said. "We worked a lot of cases, we're working a lot of break-ins, lot of drug (cases)."

One drug in particular has reemerged

as one of the biggest concerns in Hoke County, after those traffickers went quiet for a number of years.

"Heroin has crept back up in our community. We're working a lot of cases with that plus illegal prescription meds. People are selling those a lot," Peterkin said.

As in previous years, the additional

growth in the county continues to pose new challenges for the sheriff's office staff in terms of the sheer number of calls that the officers receive each day. The deputies are doing their best to respond to each and every one as quickly as possible, Peterkin said.

"The deputies are going call to call.

We had over 70,000 calls for service last year," he said.

Turnover at the sheriff's office and the jail has gone down. However, with the high call volume and the growing number of subdivisions in the county, the sheriff's office needs more staff members (See DEPUTIES, page 5)



Officers with the Raeford Police Department shopped for Christmas presents with local children through the Shop With a Cop program, and also donated toys to local families.

Man charged with opium trafficking

The husband of a local doctor was arrested last year for trafficking in prescription pills, according to the Hoke County Sheriff's Office.



Hendricks

Authorities arrested Michael Anthony Hendricks, 55, of the 5600 block of Philippi Church Road on one count of trafficking opiates. Hendricks is married to local family physician Dr. Karen Smith, according to Hoke County Sheriff Hubert Peterkin.

Hendricks was arrested November 23, 2015. The sheriff's office did not immediately release (See TRAFFICKING, page 5)

Bicyclist killed on 401

A man riding a bicycle on Highway 401 Business was hit by a car and killed Saturday, according to the North Carolina Highway Patrol.

Tony McEachrin, 55, of the 200 block of Rebecca Lane in Red Springs was fatally struck while riding his bicycle on Highway 401 Business about a mile north of Raeford, Trooper D. Clark of the Highway Patrol reported. The accident happened about 4:30 p.m.

McEachrin was reportedly riding in the northbound traffic lane when driver James T. Wright of Dragoon Road in Fayetteville, who was driving a Suzuki in the same lane and direction of travel, apparently ran into McEachrin. McEachrin was thrown off the bicycle and landed on the right (See BICYCLIST, page 5)

Police department looks forward to 2016

By CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

The Raeford Police Department worked to build a strong relationship with citizens last year and hopes to keep building on that foundation in the coming year, Assistant Chief Maj. Marc Godwin said.

"Last year, we tried to be a little bit more involved with the community, have more of an outreach with them," he said.

With the support of a neighborhood watch group, the department started a Coffee With a Cop initiative, which lets anyone interested get to know local law enforcement over a cup of coffee. The program, which got its start a

number of years ago in California, has been part of the local department for the last several months.

Coffee With a Cop is the first Tuesday of every month at 4 p.m. at Hardee's on Highway 401 Bypass in Raeford. "We've been having about 20 people on average, (See POLICE, page 8) which is pretty good," Godwin said.

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Infrastructure plan in the works, manager says

By CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

Just when it looked like industry in Raeford was set to take a major hit, a new company came on the scene to save the day in 2015, Raeford City Manager Dennis Baxley said.

Butterball buying and reopening the former House of Raeford cook plant was a huge deal for the city, bringing hundreds of jobs back to the area that were lost when the plant closed in 2014. That was the biggest local development for the city over the last year, Baxley said, and the growth continued

even after the initial announcement.

The company originally planned to invest about \$26 million and bring over 300 jobs to the city, but once the business started moving into the facility, officials decided to expand on those numbers.

"(Butterball) made a substantial investment they hadn't planned on. That's good for us. We love Butterball," Baxley said.

However, the House of Raeford poultry slaughterhouse sitting empty on East Central Avenue is another story. The city just cut off water service to the slaughterhouse last week, the city manager said, as the company was housing some of its office

staff at the location until recently. Now what happens to the old plant?

"This may be the end of the House of Raeford era in Raeford," Baxley said.

The company is trying to market the building, but the prospects aren't promising due to the age of the building and the work needed to bring it up to code, he said. One part of the old facility could be of benefit to the city, however.

"I actually talked to the House of Raeford about purchasing the old parking lot," Baxley said. That space could potentially be used for city parking or other purposes. In 2015, the city's well-known blue and

red water bill postcards went away for good when the city hired a third party company to handle its utility billing. The city breaks even on the cost, but the real benefit is convenience for customers, Baxley said. Now, water customers can pay their bill online as well as in person and by mail.

In 2016, the city will start taking a closer look at its utility lines and other infrastructure. The city council approved McGougan Brothers to create a capital improvement plan and asset management plan.

"That will kind of set the course for how we proceed with infrastructure repair and (See INFRASTRUCTURE, page 8)

Commissioners approve 200-acre solar farm

By CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

The Hoke County Board of Commissioners approved what would be the county's largest solar farm to date at the board's first regularly scheduled meeting of the new year.

The commissioners unanimously approved a conditional use permit requested by Innovative Solar Systems and the Maynor family of Shoehel Farms for a 201-acre solar farm to be located at 2262 Edinburgh Road.

If plans go through to build the solar farm, it will become the largest of its kind in Hoke County. The existing solar farm on Palmer Street near the intersection with St. Pauls Road is about 32 acres. The new farm will be over six times as large.

The Maynor family came to Innova-

tive Solar Systems seeking a good use for their land, according to spokesperson Lance Reilly.

"The Manors looked at a way to create reliable income on their property without adversely affecting the community they live and work in," he said.

Reilly described solar farms as a good solution for the family and a plus for the community.

"Solar creates clean, quiet, green, safe, secure, odor-free electricity," he said. "There will be no engines revving at 3 a.m., no law enforcement, EMS or fire trucks all hours of the night, no increased traffic and no added children to the school system. A solar farm will increase the county revenue without increasing the county's responsibility."

The solar farm will be enclosed in a fence and there will be a single-road access

to it off of Edinburgh Road. The county required additional conditions before approving the conditional use permit to address issues of abandonment, removal and nuisance factors.

The property is in the Allendale Township and is considered a Red Springs address although it is technically in Hoke County.

The property is zoned RA-20 Residential-Agricultural, as is most of the surrounding property. It is located near the intersection of Dan Campbell Road and Edinburgh Road.

No one else spoke at the solar farm public hearing.

Innovative Solar Systems is based out of Asheville.

New subdivision planned

The commissioners also unanimously

approved the development of an 18-lot subdivision off of South Parker Church Road, but also asked county staff to look into concerns of local residents regarding drainage problems from a nearby wetlands area.

Southeast Construction of Rockfish LLC submitted a plan for adding 18 new lots called the Ridge at Puppy Creek, which will be located on an unaddressed parcel of property. Several residents of nearby subdivisions addressed the board to bring up issues they have with flooding due to drainage issues from when their older subdivisions were built in the 2000s, before Hoke County's new subdivision ordinance was put into place.

One resident showed photos of his flooded yard.

One department reported that the new (See SOLAR FARM, page 8)



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