

County Service Could Cost \$180,000

Committee Urges County To Keep Private Ambulance Firm

By Warren Johnston

As long as the current level of service is maintained, Hoke County should continue to use a private contractor to provide ambulance assistance here, a study committee decided last week.

Despite its current financial troubles, county taxpayers are getting a "good deal" from the present contractor Hoke Ambulance Service and its owner Jim Henley, some of the six-member study panel also said.

The committee was recently appointed by the Hoke County Commission to look into Henley's present financial woes and to make recommendations about future ambulance service here.

Although the county is presently paying Henley over \$64,000 per year to subsidize his operation, Hoke Ambulance Service is over

\$20,000 in the hole and may go out of business unless additional funds are provided.

It could cost the taxpayers as much as \$180,000 per year to operate a publicly owned ambulance service here, County Manager James Martin told the committee.

In comparison with the level of service and the cost, Hoke County is also now paying less than most other North Carolina counties, Martin said.

Although collecting fees from customers is one of Henley's main problems, Hoke Ambulance also has a comparable or higher percentage of paying riders than most other counties surveyed, Martin said.

"I think that we have him around the neck and are choking him," committee Chairman and

Commissioner Wyatt Upchurch said.

A recent audit of the Hoke Service's books showed that during the first 11 months of 1982, the firm spent about \$110,000 to maintain its operation, and took in approximately \$90,000, including the county subsidy.

About 32% of those using the service did not pay for it. Efforts to collect the bills through legal channels have proved fruitless.

In other counties, non-payments run as high as 50%.

The public should be informed about the cost of operating ambulances here, committee member Mabel Riley said.

"What I hear a lot of people asking, is 'if the county is going to subsidize the service, why do I have to pay for it?'" Mrs. Riley said.

"People don't understand what they are paying for. They should be informed," committee member Barbara Buie added.

Because of Henley's policy not to refuse anyone who wants an ambulance, many riders are abusing the service.

People are using the ambulances like a taxi service, Riley said.

"The more they abuse the service, the more it is going to cost the taxpayers," she added.

In addition to recommending that the commission continue contracting with a private service, the committee voted to suggest:

• That county Manager Martin work with Henley to maintain proper money management and to help cut the costs of the service.

• That the same level of service be maintained, and that the ambulance service not go to a higher

certification.

Although committee member Mike Tardiff noted that Hoke County needs paramedic trained ambulance service technicians here, other members of the group voted that the cost of providing the increased level of service would be prohibitive.

Henley now provides Intermediate Life Support service and has considered going to the Paramedic certification.

In order to provide the service, it would cost approximately \$14,000 more per ambulance.

Because there is no hospital here, Tardiff, who is the director of the county owned Scotland ambulance service, said paramedic service would save lives.

However other committee members felt the expense would be too costly.

Henley has said that it will take an annual subsidy of approximately \$90,000 to keep the Hoke Ambulance Service in operation.

When the commission put the ambulance contract up for grabs in 1978, most of the bids ranged over \$100,000.

A low bid was accepted from the Spring Lake Ambulance, who operated here for almost a year until the owners noted that in order for the firm to survive, the subsidy needed to be increased from \$45,000 to \$70,000.

Henley, who had managed the Spring Lake operation here, was the 1979 low bidder and got the contract for \$50,000 plus increases pegged to the Consumer Price Index.

Although he is receiving

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Around Town

by Sam Morris

The weather over the weekend was not one for going outside and enjoying an outdoor sport. It was cold and damp most of the time, but we were more fortunate than other parts of the state because we didn't have any ice. The roads were bad in many of the western counties and many people were without lights over the weekend.

So maybe we should look on the bright side and be content with what nature brings forth for us.

I did get in a round of golf Monday and from the forecast ahead it should mean that the golf course will be busy this week.

A phone call came to the house Monday from Mrs. Kate Covington telling me she had an item for this column. She had received a letter from her niece, Mrs. Joe Hoffman, nee Patsy Blue, a native of Raeford, who now lives at Nags Head. The item Mrs. Covington had for me had come in the letter.

The item is as follows: "New York - Dallas Townsend, who has anchored the Peabody Award - winning CBA World News Roundup for 25 years, is giving up the spot to CBS news correspondent Reid Collins.

"The radio news broadcast originated on the eve of World War II and the program is the longest continually running news broadcast of its kind.

"Townsend will anchor three weekend News-on-the-Hour broadcasts. Collins has covered the U.S. manned space flights, political campaigns and election night returns."

The above item appeared in the Norfolk Virginia Pilot. According to Mrs. Covington, Dallas Townsend at one time lived in Raeford. His father was a Methodist minister and the Townsends lived in a house, now destroyed by fire, on the lot across from Bernard Bray. They must have lived here in the early 1920s.

There were two other children in the family, Langdon and Kathleen. I can remember a lady stopped by my home when I was a small boy and my mother said she was a Townsend that had married one of the Firestones. The lady was on her way to Florida. So if this is the Raeford Dallas Townsend, he must be along in years.

Thanks Mrs. Kate and Patsy for the item.

Can you ever remember when weather forecasters have missed a prediction as bad as they did for this area last Friday morning? They convinced everyone that we were in for from two to four inches of snow. Many schools closed down for the day and the food stores did a brisk business as people stocked up for the snow days ahead.

This brings back memories of cold days when you would go to bed at night and awake the next morning with snow on the ground. Of course this was before the radio

(See AROUND TOWN, page 9)



NEW HOUSING -- Raeford Mayor John K. McNeill, Jr., broke ground formally Tuesday morning for construction of The Meadows, on North Fulton Street near U.S. 401 North. The Meadows will consist of 15 one-story brick veneer buildings containing two apartment units each, for low- and moderate-income families. L-R are Raeford Housing Authority Chairman J.H. (Buddy) Blue, Jr., McNeill, Authority Vice Chairman J.D. McAllister, and Authority member Leonard Miller. Other Authority members who attended were Betty H. Morgan, Harold E. Stone, Prince Black, and James Attaway. Other Hoke County and Raeford city officials, State Human Resources Department representative Donald Huffman, Avery Connell, who sold the property to the builder and developer -- Brown, Loving Co. of High Point -- and T.A. Loving of the firm. Loving said the project is expected to be ready for the tenants by August and excavation of the 4.5 acre site probably would start this week if the weather is favorable. The building cost will be about \$1 million. Of the apartments, 16 will contain two bedrooms and the others three bedrooms. The Housing Authority will be the manager of the residences. Help from Section 8 of the U.S. Rental Assistance Program will be available to eligible tenants.

Coop Action Group Still Howls For Board Scalps

Efforts last week by members of the Lumbee River Electric Corporation Board of Directors to shave their operating budget by more than \$500,000 fell on deaf ears Monday, as a group of membership customers called for the resignation of all 12 directors.

The board members refused the request later Monday.

Coop Action Group members also called on the directors to return a portion of their daily expenses to the membership, however, that request was also denied.

Carl Branch, spokesman for the Action Group, told *The News-Journal* Tuesday afternoon that he learned earlier Tuesday that the coop's board of directors spent a total \$140,294.10 in 1982 on per diem and other expenses, \$35,000 more than the board spent the previous year.

Last week, the directors cut the board's budget by \$500,000 and issued an explanation of the firing of LREMC general manager Derl Hinson.

The removal of the members of the board had been requested by the LREMC Action Group for alleged refusal to give a reason for Hinson's release and for the amount of money the board members had been spending on travel and other expenses.

A statement issued January 18 to the area news media by the

LREMC office in Red Springs says the full board has cut the proposed 1983 budget of the cooperative by \$500,000.

The adjustments in the budget include a reduction of more than \$50,000 for board meetings, travel, expenses and school tuition. Also, the statement adds, employee salary raises during 1983 were cut one half and limited to a maximum of 3 1/2 percent.

The statement says, however, "We believe that the cuts we have made in the operating budget of the cooperative will not jeopardize the services and programs of LREMC, but will assume they are carried out in the most cost-conscious manner."

The cuts won't have an immediate impact on consumer rates, the statement continues. "We believe, however, that continued close monitoring of those costs which are within our direct control can have a long-run stabilizing effect," the statement says.

"We realize the administrative staff brought us a tight budget in November, but with the members being hard-pressed to pay their bills in these hard times, it was necessary that we set an example and make adjustments in areas where current services would not be hindered."

The board will complete policy changes which reduce the members' per diem expenses from

\$100 to \$75 a day and regulate the number of meetings to be attended and the number of directors who attend, the statement says.

The statement on the release of Hinson follows.

"We recognize the excellent qualities of leadership Mr. Hinson brought to Lumbee River EMC. However, an organization can function effectively only when there is mutual confidence between the general manager and the Board of Directors. When, over a period of time, this confidence became eroded, the Board felt that it was in the best interests of the cooperative and its members to terminate his contract.

"We believe no useful purpose would be served by an attempt to itemize the reasons for this erosion of confidence. Not only would this violate personal Board-employee relationships, but it could result in unintended disparagement of those involved."

"As officials elected by the membership to guide the operation of the rural electric cooperative, the Board believes they have fulfilled the purpose of Bylaw Article 6.03 which states they should act to remove an employee whenever in its judgment the best interests of the Cooperative will thereby be served."

"We believe we have acted in those best interests of 20,000 plus member-consumers."

Courtroom Erupts After Rape Verdict

A "not guilty" verdict in Hoke County Superior Court last week sparked an angry reaction from spectators who attacked two defendants acquitted of rape charges.

Hoke County Sheriff's deputies moved in quickly and quelled the outbreak before either Weldon "Moosey" McKenzie, 29, or Raymond Wallace, 32, were seriously injured by pocketbook swinging spectators.

No charges were filed as a result of the incident in the courtroom, however, the prosecuting witness in the case and her sister were later charged for allegedly threatening the life of McKenzie, Sheriff Dave Barrington said.

McKenzie told investigating officers that Linda Faye Allen, 25, of the Raeford Hotel and her sister Marie Ross, 30, came to his Bowmore residence Thursday night following the three-day trial and threatened to kill him, Barrington said.

Warrants were issued Thursday at McKenzie's request by Raeford Magistrate Brian Thornberg and served on the women Saturday, Barrington said.

The women were released from custody Saturday after signing promises to appear in Hoke County District Court on February 4, court records show.

According to the records in the magistrate court files, the women

were not required to pledge to stay away from McKenzie.

After almost three days of testimony, a 10-man two-woman jury found McKenzie and Wallace not guilty of the October 21 rape of Allen.

Allen had told the court that she spent a portion of the day with the two men, and had gone with them to McKenzie's mother's house for a fish dinner.

Following the meal, Allen said she went across the road from Mrs. McKenzie's Bowmore residence with Wallace to a house where he and "Moosey" were staying.

The house had no electricity, heat or plumbing, and the two men shared the same bed, Wallace testified.

Upon arriving at the dwelling, Wallace pushed her inside the door and raped her while McKenzie held her on the bed, Allen testified.

Wallace testified that Allen had sex with him voluntarily and that McKenzie had remained at his mother's home.

"We got in bed, and everything was lovely," Wallace said, adding that following the act, Allen reacted violently and said she was tired of men using her.

McKenzie's mother, Angie, testified that her son had not gone to the other house, and had remained to take a bath at her residence.

The jury deliberated about four hours before reaching the verdict.

Ex-SBI Agent Arraigned Here

A former SBI agent was arraigned Thursday in Hoke County District Court on charges he altered evidence and obstructed justice in four Hoke County drug cases.

The ex-agent, Arnett Andrew Dove, 25, of Elizabeth City, was indicted by a Hoke County Grand Jury on the charges January 17.

He is charged with changing an SBI laboratory report in the case against Julius Locklear and of obstructing justice for falsifying lab reports in the cases against Clarence Bratcher, Elwood McNair and Ervin Benny Ross. The four were among 18 Hoke County people arrested the week of June 20, 1982, on drug charges.

The probable-cause hearings were held in September, and the charges against Dove who testified then, grew out of the hearings.

Dove was fired from the SBI January 10 for "gross misconduct," according to State Senior Deputy Atty. Gen. Andrew Vanore. Dove had been an agent three years.

Vanore reported the investigation made by the attorney general's office found no evidence that Dove's alleged actions were done for money or any corrupt purpose.

The results of the state investigation were turned over to District Attorney Ed Grannis of Fayette-

ville, whose district includes Hoke County.

Although Grannis declined to

(See DOVE, page 9)

Inside Today



Being a member of a top ambulance team takes hard work, long hours and lengthy training, as well as a dedication to duty. Associate Editor Bill Lindau takes a look at the Hoke Ambulance Service on page 1-B of today's News-Journal.