

LREMC Fray Continues

Group Drops Action

By Sherry Matthews

A law suit filed against members of the Lumbee River Electric Membership Cooperative (LREMC) board of directors has been dropped, a spokesman for a customer action group said Monday.

The move comes on the heels of a board decision last week to reject a second recall petition effort by the group and puts an end to a restraining order slated for hearing in Robeson County District Court on Thursday.

In a prepared statement, action group members said Monday that they did not have the financial resources to continue future legal battles.

At last week's press conference, coop attorney Steven A. Benholz hinted that a compromise might be reached between the membership group's attorney Horace Stacy and attorney's for the LREMC.

Apparently no such compromise was met, but the action group decided to terminate the lawsuit anyway.

According to the statement, the termination of the suit does not mean that the action group has given up.

The group apparently will try to obtain their goals through other "alternatives" that are at present being considered by the members.

"This whole mess, in my opinion, is corruption at its peak," action group spokesman Carl Branch said.

Branch, who intends to now resign as spokesman for the group, said he would continue with his own personal battle against the directors.

"If necessary, I will pursue this thing on my own. I will not settle for anything less than 12 members being ousted from this board," Branch said in an earlier interview and re-confirmed on Monday.

"It behooves us all to keep fighting for what we believe is right," Branch said.

In the news release, action group members have called on the board to tighten their spending, vary the location of annual meetings to pro-

mote the "democratic process for the election of the coop directors", and hire a competent, experienced General Manager.

"If we have accomplished nothing more than moving people out of complacency, I think the battle was worth it, and the cost was money well spent," Branch said.

The battle that has been brewing for over three months started when coop directors fired general manager Derl Hinson in January.

At that time, Branch and other consumer members of the action group filed a petition with over 3,000 names, requesting a recall meeting be held.

The grounds for the first petition dealt with the dismissal of Hinson.

Board members refused to call a special meeting saying that the grounds listed on the petition were not sufficient reasons for allowing the meeting.

A second petition was filed two weeks ago listing three new charges (See SUIT, page 12A)



Whispered discussion

Interim general manager Ronnie Hunt offers coop attorney Steve Bernholz a little advice during last week's press conference in Red Springs.

Around Town

by Sam Morris

It seems as if the rain will never stop. I haven't heard how much we received over the weekend, but it is too wet to plow.

The forecast is for sunny weather the remainder of the week and if the wind keeps blowing this should dry out the land.

Someone said on television the other day that if this stream that is now causing the flow of air out of the North continues, that we could continue to have cold and rainy weather into May and June. He also said that there could be a possibility of snow. Now this seems far out to me!

In talking to a farmer Monday about the wet conditions he had the following to say. If the weather stays as is the tractors should be in the fields by Wednesday. Farmers are now preparing tobacco land and hope to plant right away. Tobacco plants are not hurt so far and the cold weather has kept their size down and they should be alright for planting. He stated that cotton could wait until a week or two into May, but not any longer.

So maybe the farmers will be able to plant and still make a crop this year.

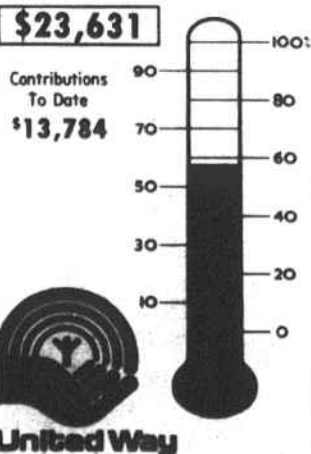
Corn that was up could be hurt, but most folks are waiting, before plowing up and replanting.

Yes, farming is a big gamble every year.

An article in a daily paper Sunday announced the election of Eugene Smith, publisher of the *Havelock Progress*, as the new president of the Eastern North Carolina Press Association. Smith is a native of Hoke County and finished high school here. He worked at *The News-Journal* after finishing college from ECU in Greenville.

Congratulations Smith, and we (See AROUND TOWN, page 12A)

OUR GOAL



Designs on improvements

The map showing the target area, proposed for Raeford community block grant funds, will be improved if the city is successful in its application attempt. Shown on the map are the improvements that will be made with \$662,500 in federal funds. The proposals include housing rehabilitation, street improvements and the addition of a new road that will give residents better access to Main Street.

Raeford, Hoke Co. Seek HUD Bucks

By Sherry Matthews

Hoke County and the City of Raeford will be competing against each other this year for Community Block Grant Funds.

Both the city and the county have unanimously voted to apply for the funds which are sponsored by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

"We will be one of over 200 applicants hoping to get funded," Matthews said, adding that the city's chances were about one in five.

Skip Green, spokesman for the Lumberton engineering firm Koonce, Noble, and Associates, who represent both the city and the county, said that last year 41 of about 250 applicants were funded.

For the city, applying for these funds could mean housing rehabilitation for approximately 27 homes in the South Wooley Street area.

This area has been identified as the "target area" in the application and would be where a lot of the grant monies would be spent, Matthews said.

The city is applying for \$662,500 that will go toward housing rehabilitation, street improvements, and corrective drainage, Matthews said.

According to Matthews, these improvements will affect more than the South Wooley Street area.

Other areas that will benefit from the grant are South Magnolia Street and Maxwell Street, Matthews said.

Rehabilitating the homes does not mean beautifying them, Green said.

Funds will allow these homes to be brought up to present housing

standards, Green told the councilmen at Monday nights public hearing.

According to Matthews, bringing these homes up to minimum standards would include repairs on plumbing, electricity, heating and allow for restructuring of some roofs.

In addition, street improvements can also be made with the grant monies.

"We want to widen the streets in these areas and correct the drainage problems," Matthews said.

Support has been exceptional in the Wooley Street neighborhood, Matthews said.

"They want to see something done," Matthews added.

Matthews also believes that improving those areas will benefit the entire city of Raeford.

"Any neighborhood the city works on to bring housing up to standards, will affect the entire town," Matthews said.

"By improving the decaying homes, we are improving the quality of life for those people and of course, it improves the total community," Matthews added.

According to Matthews, one of the reasons the Wooley Street area was chosen dealt with its "high visibility".

"Improving that area will enhance the whole city," Matthews said.

"I hope that the city will be successful in their application, so that in coming years we can go into other areas and make improvements," Matthews added.

The county, too, is hoping they (See FUND, page 12A)

Local Doctors Unimpressed By Paramedic Unit Proposal

By Sherry Matthews

Although ambulance service owner Jim Henley believes that having his employees trained as paramedics will save lives in Hoke County, some area doctors disagree.

"Paramedic care is an ideal thing, but I'm not sure we (Hoke County) would have enough call for it to be cost effective," Dr. Robert Townsend said.

"In 20 years, I have had one patient that could have used that sort of care," Townsend added.

"I don't think we need people who are that highly trained or the expensive equipment that would be used when there are three hospitals near by," Dr. Ramnik Zota said.

"Ambulance prices would have to go up to allow for that level of care, and I don't think the people of Hoke County can afford that," Dr. Townsend said.

According to both doctors, people who go into "full cardiac arrest" don't have a good chance of survival regardless of what is done. Henley does not agree.

"A full cardiac arrest patient

needs attention within eight minutes, and we cannot transport him in that length of time," Henley said.

"I think Hoke County residents deserve and need the paramedic care more than the surrounding counties because we don't have a hospital," Henley added.

"Paramedics can do a lot of things we can't do," Henley said. One thing paramedics can do that intermediate level Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's) can't do is aid a cardiac arrest patient, Henley said.

"If we get into this program, that would be our main concern," Henley said.

"Right now in Hoke County, if a patient has a full cardiac arrest their chances of survival are slim to none," Henley said.

"We have not been able to save one patient who has gone into full cardiac arrest in this county," Henley added.

With paramedic training, a patient's chances of surviving increase a great deal, Henley said.

At the April 18 county commission meeting, Henley requested

that the commissioners support the paramedic program which would upgrade his service from an intermediate level to a paramedic level of care.

The commissioners unanimously turned down the request because of the further commitment that might have to be made even after the Hoke Ambulance Service contract expires in December.

"The element of cost (some \$50,000) in getting into the paramedic program was a major factor in the board's decision," County Manager James Martin said.

"I appreciate Jim's concern and need to further his abilities, but I'm not sure Hoke County, at this point, is ready for that skill level," Martin said.

Despite opposition and a flat refusal by the county commissioners, Henley intends to continue his efforts to "educate the people and the commissioners as to the difference a paramedic program will make to the area."

"If we save one life, then I think the training was well worth it," Henley said.

Spring Rains Change Local Farm Outlook

By Sherry Matthews

Bad weather conditions that have plagued Hoke County and the rest of the state for over a month have taken its toll on some area crops.

According to Agricultural Extension Agent Willie Featherstone, farm production is about a month behind schedule because of rain and frost.

The peach crop was hurt most by the frost, Featherstone said.

"That crop has been virtually destroyed by all the bad weather," Featherstone said.

For peach growers, this is the second year that their crops have not yielded.

Corn production, too, has been slowed down.

Over 100 acres of corn has been killed because of the freezing temperatures that have hit Hoke County.

"Because the weather has prevented a lot of area growers from planting corn, I would anticipate more soy beans being planted," Featherstone said.

Tobacco seems to be the only crop that still has a decent chance of surviving the unpredictable weather situation, and according to Featherstone it is also behind schedule.

"There have been some water (See FARMS, page 11A)



Inside Today

150 Years
Antioch Presbyterian Church is celebrating its 150th birthday, and we take a look at the church's long Hoke County history on page 1 of today's Section B.

Ft. Bragg Man Charged With Hoke Rape

By Sherry Matthews

A Fort Bragg man remained in jail Tuesday after being charged two weeks earlier with the April 10 rape of a Hoke County woman.

Fort Bragg soldier Gary Joseph Mayron, 19, is in the Hoke County Jail under a \$50,000 bond in connection with the rape of a 24-year-old Hoke County woman, Sheriff Dave Barrington said.

According to reports filed by the arresting officers, Osie Finin and Ralph Tindall, the victim called the sheriff's office and reported the

alleged crime around 3:30 a.m. following the incident.

The suspect was found in the victim's trailer, apparently passed out on the bed, reports show.

The victim sustained several injuries during the alleged assault, Sheriff Barrington said, noting that she was taken to Cape Fear Valley Hospital. She was treated and released.

The suspect allegedly assisted the victim by giving her a ride home from a Fayetteville night spot, the report shows.

When he went into the

bathroom of the Hoke County mobile home, the victim apparently became nervous, the report shows.

Mayron allegedly broke out the window in the bathroom and re-entered the trailer by the front door, the report shows.

Arresting officers reported that a sawed off 12-gauge shotgun and one 12-gauge shell were found on the floor of the trailer.

Citing the need to avoid too much pre-trial publicity, Barrington deferred comment on further details of the investigation.