

Legislative Committee Seals McCain Fate

By Sherry Matthews

A joint Legislative Base Budget Subcommittee on Human Resources voted Tuesday to close McCain Hospital and requested that it be reopened as a prison medical facility.

After months of debate, this vote shuts the door to the last remaining tuberculosis (TB) treatment center in North Carolina and provides leadway for a request to reopen the facility as a 300-bed prison hospital.

The request will be forwarded to the Expansion Budget Subcommittee, District 16 Rep. Daniel H. DeVane said, adding that he was optimistic about the prison unit becoming a reality.

In a last ditch effort Tuesday, District 30 Sen. David R. Parnell made a motion to retain half the hospital for use as a TB facility and convert the other half for the prisoner care unit, however, the appeal failed.

According to DeVane, around 20 votes were cast in favor of Parnell's proposal, but there "just wasn't enough to make the difference."

McCain's future has been balancing on the edge for nearly four years.

A great deal of effort has been put forth to keep McCain open, DeVane said.

Last month, a Hoke County committee renewed its efforts to keep McCain operating as a TB

sanitorium and succeeded in delaying the final vote.

"I feel like their minds (members of the subcommittee) were made up a long time ago and nothing was going to make them re-consider," DeVane said.

"I think the vote was more for the prison hospital than it was against McCain," DeVane said.

Even with McCain's closing, the present employees of the facility will not be fired.

According to DeVane, all of the present employees have been provided for by state Director of the Budget John A. Williams.

Employees will either be allowed

to retire or given other state jobs, DeVane said.

A letter from Williams backs up DeVane's statements.

According to the letter, the employees of McCain will not have to "bear the brunt of the conversion."

About 215 employees will be needed in the prison hospital following the conversion, and qualified McCain employees will have first option, the letter says.

Others will get first crack at vacancies that may become available at other state agencies in the area.

For those who wish to relocate, Williams is giving them (McCain staff) "priority status" for any

positions open in state government.

Williams also said that he would help seek legislation that would provide early retirement benefits for those who are approaching eligibility for retirement.

Although DeVane feels the McCain staff's jobs won't be in jeopardy, he still remains skeptical.

"I know they won't be left out in the cold, but I don't feel that they will be looked after as well as they were at McCain," DeVane said.

The TB patients, also, remain a concern.

Although Department of

Human Resources Chief Sarah T. Morrow has allocated \$950,000 of her budget for the care of TB patients, many feel they will not receive the care given to them at McCain.

Morrow has provided \$432,000 to local health departments for treatment of the disease with the remaining monies going to Cherry Hospital in Goldsboro for care of 42 patients.

"This whole thing was done to save money. It has been nothing more than a shuffling and transferring of budget," DeVane said.

In DeVane's opinion, the vote will probably end up costing more than can be saved.

"Closing McCain is a real shame," DeVane said.



Cooling it

Even ducks need a break from all the nice sunny weather we have been experiencing the past couple of weeks. These ducks have decided that an afternoon stroll across the pond will be nice.

Around Town

by Sam Morris

The weather for the past week has been perfect. The days have been hot and no rain. This is supposed to continue for a few more days. It seems as if the winter turned to summer and just skipped spring.

The tractor, disk and planters have been in the fields for the past few days and if things remain the same, most farmers should have their land in good shape. A few places are still too wet to plow but, this is in the heavier land of the county.

Maybe we will be able to have home-grown vegetables after all this year.

From all reports the Hoke County Democratic convention was very quiet. About 100 people were in attendance and everything went smooth. Harold Gillis was reelected chairman and we think that he deserved another term. He has done a very good job and has kept peace in the party.

It was not the same way in every county in the state as delegates were split on candidates and on issues.

The convention in Lumberton lasted for four hours and from reports everyone was not on the best of terms when they left the convention.

We hope that the in-fighting will be over after the primary and all will join forces to get the Democrats back in office.

I understand that the new superintendent of the Hoke County schools was at work Monday morning. He might have been by the newspaper office, but as of this time I haven't had the pleasure of meeting him.

(See AROUND TOWN, page 11A)



Hoke County Democratic Party Chairman Harold Gillis stressed unity in his address to members of the Democratic Convention held here Saturday. Gillis was re-elected to the chairmanship by acclamation.

Demos Show United Front

Despite earlier rumors of disunity, members of the Hoke County Democratic Party voted Saturday to re-elect Chairman Harold Gillis and four other officers by acclamation.

Only two of the seven offices up for grabs this year were contested. Prior to the convention, it was rumored that at least two hopefuls were seeking Gillis's party chairmanship.

Speculation had been fueled by the change in precinct leadership during the March 3 meetings in which 10 of 13 chairman lost their jobs and numerous new convention delegates were elected.

However, fences were apparently mended prior to Saturday, and no evidence of disunity surfaced during the convention.

After his re-election, Gillis vowed to work during the two-year term for unity and for countywide involvement by all party members.

(See UNITY, page 11A)

County OK's Bonds

By Sherry Matthews

Hoke County Commissioners gave the nod Monday to the sale of the first industrial revenue bonds in the county.

The sale opens the door for JRA Industries, an elastic yarn firm from Asheboro, to buy the Tex-Elastic plant in Raeford for \$3.2 million.

Although JRA Industries President Edward R. Askew would not confirm it Monday, the sale will apparently save the local plant from shutting its doors.

If the plant had closed, some 170 people would have been out of work, County Attorney Duncan McFayden said.

The approval of the bonds, the first since the Industrial Pollution Control and Financing Authority was formed four years ago, will allow JRA Industries to purchase the area plant at low interest rates.

According to Askew, it will also allow the Asheboro based firm to double its size.

Askew hopes to run the Raeford plant at "full capacity" and anticipates keeping most of the plants present employees.

At present, only eight employees have been laid off since JRA took over the operation of the facility in April.

County Commissioners also agreed to exempt JRA from paying the county's average manufacturing wages to its employees.

JRA intends to maintain the wage scale that was being paid by the Tex-Elastic company, Askew said.

According to Askew the average machine operator's wage will be about \$4.80 an hour with more skilled workers receiving higher wages.

Those salaries will be somewhat lower than the average hourly wages for other Hoke manufacturing which is somewhere in the vicinity of \$5.75 an hour.

Under the bond plan, taxpayers will not suffer, and the county will benefit from the continual employment that the industry will produce.

The bonds will also cover the purchase cost of the 65,000 square foot facility and the 6.2 acre site located on North Bethel Street in Raeford.

According to Askew, purchasing the plant was a good move.

"It was here, and we needed it," Askew said.

In other business, the commissioners accepted a resolution asking that the paperwork requirements placed on the Department of Social Services (DSS) by the Federal and State governments be decreased.

At present, food stamp recipients must fill out a five-page form before receiving their benefits.

Hoke DSS Director Ken Witherspoon said that the increased paperwork is demanding more staff than the department presently employees.

Chairman John Balfour not only supported the resolution, but said that writing to the officials in Washington might help.

Balfour said that most of the commissioners in the 100 North Carolina counties were opposed to the increased workload.

If all the county commissioners opposed to this paperwork increase wrote to Washington officials, the pressure might be on to change the requirements, Balfour said.

Even if the pressure is put on, Witherspoon anticipates six months to a year before a change in the workload will even be noticed.

At present, Witherspoon has requested that the food stamp budget include the hiring of five more employees to meet the demand of the increased paperwork.

City Council Votes To Move Jump Site

By Sherry Matthews

Members of the Raeford City Council unanimously voted Monday night to accept recommendations designed to "better" the existing municipal airport.

A Blue Ribbon Study Committee, appointed over a year ago to study the Raeford Airport, handed its final recommendations at a regular council meeting Monday in hopes that "something will soon be done to make the facility more attractive to future industry which might come into this area."

"The recommendations are based on our desire to serve industry and commerce in the town and the county," committee Chairman Tom Cameron said.

Immediate goals approved Monday were:

--Moving the present parachute jumping target area a half mile east

of the airport 12 months after the regulations become effective.

--Sharing the cost of the "total operation" with the county on a 50-50 basis, if the county agrees.

--Appointing a commission with full authority to control the airport operation.

--Continuing management of the airport by the city.

--Requiring all landing and departing aircraft use a right handed pattern on runway 22 and left handed pattern on runway 4.

Another recommendation, requiring that a radio be monitored while parachute jumping is in progress, was approved at the March council meeting.

That decision caused some verbal fireworks and re-opened a long standing disagreement between parachute jump school operator Gene Thacker and the city.

Thacker has said that he would fight any effort to relocate the parachute landing zone.

"Moving the jump site is a necessity," Cameron said.

"We need to separate parachutists from airplane traffic, and moving the landing site is the answer," Cameron added.

Parachutists landing a half mile away from the airport is safer for everyone, than the present landing site which is only 100 yards away, Cameron said.

"This is something we feel is absolutely necessary for safely operating this airport," Cameron said.

"The airport is the front door to our community, and we need to do everything possible to make it a positive reflection on our town," Cameron said.

(See POUND, page 11A)

Vote Sparks Angry React

By Sherry Matthews

Although recommendations approved by the city council Monday require that a parachute jump site at the municipal airport be moved, jump school owner Gene Thacker says he will not re-locate.

According to the approved recommendations, the jump site must be moved one-half mile east within 12 months after the regulations take effect.

"The jump site is on my land, and I'm not moving," Thacker said.

Thacker, who owns 16 acres for the jumping school alone, says that his parachuting is not effecting the operation of the airport.

"There's no hazard out here, and there never has been," Thacker said.

The closest jump target is about 1,300 ft. from the airport and according to Thacker that is a safe distance.

"Some federally funded airports have parachuting closer to their facilities than I do," Thacker added.

What it boils down to, says Thacker, is some people in Hoke County don't want to see parachuting activity in the area.

"It's there to serve the community, not harm them," Thacker said.

When the regulations become effective, Thacker says he will be ready to deal with the problem.

"Nobody wants to fight City Hall, but I will, if they back me in a corner," Thacker said.

"If I'm pushed, then I will take it to court," Thacker said, adding that he hoped it would not come to a court battle.

"But, if that's the way they are going to want to play, I'm ready," he said.



Inside Today

The last sign

With the closing of McCain, a lot of things will change. The state will be losing their last TB hospital and the staff will be losing many years of dedicated service. We take a look at McCain's employees and "last glimmers of hope" for the future of the hospital on page one of Section B in today's News-Journal.

Hoke Retail Sales Almost \$900,000

In the first three months following the opening of a new shopping center in Raeford, retail sales jumped almost \$900,000 in Hoke County over figures recorded during the same period a year earlier.

During December, January and February, retail sales here increased \$892,354 over the previous year.

The Raeford-Hoke Village Shopping Center opened in November and got into full swing during December.

In December, sales were the highest during the period, reaching \$4.26 million. Sales during that month were up over \$450,000 from \$3.8 million the year before.

According to the State Department of Revenue, January sales here were up \$253,093, and February increased \$188,894.

March and April sales figures have not been compiled.