

Food Stamp Reporting Raises Ire

By Sherry Matthews

A momentary disagreement erupted Monday night between Hoke County Commissioners and the Department of Social Services (DSS) director during a public hearing on the county's 1983-84 budget.

DSS Director Ken Witherspoon, who helped field questions from the public on the food stamp "monthly reporting" dilemma, admitted Monday night that the Hoke DSS got into the monthly reporting program "voluntarily."

Witherspoon had requested that the county provide funds to hire five new employees to administer the new early reporting program.

The budget recommended by County Manager James Martin has trimmed the DSS request to one new employee.

Since early reporting began here

in February, about one-third of the county's food stamp caseload is behind schedule.

"We've been wrestling with this situation for a long time, but we can't seem to come up with a solution," County Commission Chairman John Balfour said.

"I'm interested in why we were chosen as a pilot county," Balfour added.

Commissioner Wyatt Upchurch told the board that DSS had gotten into the program voluntarily. Witherspoon verified it was true.

According to Upchurch, the food stamp situation has "embarrassed" the county and caused chaos among county residents.

"Our effort was to reduce fraud not make it a hardship on our clients," Witherspoon said, adding that he never intended to embarrass the county or the commission.

"Our soul purpose was to improve the program. We were misled," Witherspoon said.

According to Upchurch, the commissioners were never made aware that Witherspoon had volunteered for the program.

"I think we jumped the gun on this particular program," Upchurch said.

The program, which is federally regulated, demands that all food stamp recipients fill out a five-page monthly report form before they can receive their benefits.

Due to the lack of manpower at DSS, Witherspoon has said that more and more clients are being caught in the federal web and having to "do without their food stamps."

"The monthly reporting will probably reduce fraud, but the people are paying an extreme price

because of the failure to staff enough employees to take care of the demand," Witherspoon said.

"There have been extreme administrative costs in implementing this program," Witherspoon added.

Staff members, who have at times worked 60 hours a week, are receiving verbal and mental abuse from clients who are angry and hungry, Witherspoon said.

"There are close to 250 households who 'probably' won't receive their benefits in June," Witherspoon added, emphasizing that additional staff would decrease this problem.

The commissioners listened to Witherspoon and others about the food stamp situation, but no further action was taken during the hearing.

Shelter asked

In other action, Grace Andrews appealed to the commissioners to "set aside" some money for the building of a new animal shelter.

Andrews and other members of the Hoke County Humane Society were present Monday night to support efforts to see that a new shelter was built before the winter.

"We have more than 13 paying members of the Humane Society, and we are all interested in seeing the shelter completed," Andrews said.

Balfour told Andrews that \$25,000 had been recommended in the coming year's budget.

"We have not determined where it will be moved, but it will be moved and improved," Balfour said.

"The wheels grind slowly at times," Balfour added.

Following the public hearing, the commissioners held their regular mid-month meeting.

Expansion aired

During the meeting Hoke County Sheriff Dave Barrington came before the board to discuss moving the sheriff's department staff into the annex building.

Sheriff Barrington presented a plan for how he "wanted" the building to be used.

The plan included an interview room, detectives' offices and a breathalyzer room.

Plans are for the sheriff and his staff to move into the Courthouse annex now that the county employees have settled into their new offices.

The move will allow more space (See TEMPER, page 2A)

Around Town

by Sam Morris

It seems that summer came in about a week in advance of the calendar date. The past few days have been hot and muggy and it hasn't cooled off too much at night.

Since most of us now have central air conditioning in our homes and also work in buildings that are air conditioned, we have become accustomed to being cool all the time. So when we go outside for a few minutes, it really gets to us. Anyway it is not like the "good old days" when you would sit on the porch until the house cooled off enough to get some sleep.

The forecast is for this weather to continue for the remainder of the week. Thunder showers have been forecast but so far they have missed Raeford.

Earl McDuffie, chairman of the American Legion Golf Tournament Committee, asked that I inform all golfers of the upcoming event on July 4th at the Arabia Golf Course.

According to McDuffie, breakfast will be served at the pond house and then golfers will start a shotgun tee off from all holes of the course after breakfast.

There will be prizes for the winners and I believe that handicaps will be used. To verify this, please check with Earl at his restaurant.

Also refreshments will be served on the course during play. So sign up now for a day of fun.

Most of the folks in Hoke County several years ago used to look forward every month to the mobile office of Congressman Charlie Rose parking in the post office parking lot. The late Rip Collins of Wilmington would listen to all beefs that local people had, to be forwarded on to Washington. The mobile office ceased operations after the death of Rip and then we were moved out of Congressman Rose's district.

This week I received a letter informing me that a member of the staff for our new Congressman Bill Hefner would come to Raeford to be available to citizens of Hoke County who have problems which they feel the man in Washington can help them with at this time.

The staff member will be at the Raeford City Hall on Friday, June 24 from one until three-thirty o'clock. This announcement was made by Elvin Jackson, administrator for the Congressman in the district.

To my knowledge this is the first time Hoke County people have had a chance to communicate with the Washington man since the election in November. To my way of thinking this is too long a time.

So if you have a gripe about the way things are going in Washington, now is the time to let it be known. Maybe it will get past Richmond.

Anyway take a chance, it doesn't have a chance just being discussed over the coffee tables at the local restaurants.

Louis Fogleman, publisher of (See AROUND, page 2A)



A squirrel's hide-a-way

Ninety degree temperatures and boiling humidity are taking their toll on Hoke County's wildlife. This young squirrel seems to be attempting to sneak away from the scorching sun and to head up the tree where a little shade can be found.

Ambulance Bills Mounting

By Sherry Matthews

Despite a recent subsidy increase of more than 63.3%, it appears that the Hoke County Ambulance Service is plunging deeper into a financial rut.

According to Hoke County Court records, ambulance service owner Jim Henley owes more than \$4,700 to area businesses.

The court records show that these debts have been mounting up since March 22, over a month after the county commissioners increased the ambulance service subsidy.

"We went into the new contract because we could not get ahead of the game," Henley said.

The county bailed Henley out in February by approving a new con-

tract, which allowed for a \$40,883 increase over last year's taxpayer subsidy and gave the ambulance service \$105,436 to cover expenses.

At a county board meeting two months ago, Henley informed the commissioners that he did not intend to renew his ambulance contract when it expires December 31.

At the March meeting, Henley cited financial reasons for his decision not to renew the county contract.

Since the March 21 meeting, the ambulance service has compiled at least seven judgements against them totaling \$4,751.36.

"We are in a financial bind," Henley said.

"I am hoping that by the time

our contract expires we will have paid off everyone we owe," Henley added.

"I'm not sure the county has any legal way of making him pay his bills," County Manager James Martin said.

According to Martin, Henley is his "own businessman."

Martin said he hoped Henley would take care of his bills.

"We are honestly trying to get this mess straightened out, but it takes time," Henley said.

"We are trying to plan around the budget, so we can get everything paid out by the time our contract expires," Henley added.

According to the court records (See BILLS, page 2A)

Hoke Farmers Reap Early Harvests

Although bitter cold and heavy rains prevented area crops from being planted on time, harvesting has begun and yields are good, Hoke County Extension Agent Willie Featherstone said.

According to Featherstone, most farmers started harvesting wheat, barley and oats over 10 days ago and are nearly 85% completed.

"These farmers are coming right behind these crops and planting soy beans," Featherstone said, adding that he anticipated soy bean planting to be complete by July 1.

Tobacco, another important Hoke County crop, is showing some "heat related" damage.

"The tobacco leaves that are just coming out, are being burned by the heat," Featherstone said.

Temperatures peaked last week at around 90°, leaving "sun scold" on some tobacco plant, Featherstone said.

"There is really no significant damage from the sun yet," Featherstone added.

"I don't believe we will lose anything," Featherstone said.

Corn, too, is behind schedule, but "looking pretty good",

according to Featherstone.

"Everything is showing a little stress from the recent drought, but overall it looks good," Featherstone said.

"Everything is about two or three weeks behind what is normal for this area. Things are beginning to look about the same as last year," Featherstone said.

"The yield is good, we are just running a little behind," Featherstone added.

In other farm matters, Soil and Water Conservation Supervisor Sam Warren is upset over the (See FARM, page 10A)

City Grants Reprieve On Merchant Licenses

Members of the Raeford City Council voted unanimously Monday night to reverse an earlier decision and not to increase fees charged for business "privilege" licenses.

Although higher bills have already been mailed, city businesses and industries will pay the same rate as they did last year as a result of Monday's vote.

The "inequitable" fees will be studied during the coming fiscal year and consideration will be given to doing away with the charges.

In other action, the council also voted to approve the city budget for the 1983-84 fiscal year.

As a result of the vote, the city will no longer collect garbage from county, state and federal buildings inside the Raeford corporate limits.

The elimination of the practice is expected to save municipal taxpayers approximately \$7,200 per year.

In the past city trucks had been collecting garbage from dumpsters at county schools, the court house, county offices, the post office and the National Guard Armory.

Before approving the budget, council members decided in a three-two vote not to purchase blazers which could be worn at special out-of-town meetings.

The council "uniforms" would have cost the city \$1,000. Council members Vardell Hedgepeth, Benny McLeod and Graham Clark voted against the purchase of the blazers.

SBI Continuing Shooting Probe

By Sherry Matthews

State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) agents are continuing an investigation into a recent shooting involving a Raeford Police officer, a spokesman said this week.

Frank Johnson, senior SBI agent for the Fayetteville Division said Monday that there were a "few" more witnesses that needed to be interviewed before the case could be turned over to District Attorney Edward Grannis.

"We've got to complete our interviews and finish the paper work before it can be turned over to the district attorney," Johnson said.

"I don't anticipate any sudden turn of events in our investigation," Johnson added.

The June 10 shooting and free-for-all left a local man and two Raeford police officers injured. Raeford patrolman Richard McNeill and Sergeant Jack Martino both received minor injuries during an alleyway struggle and a chase up a flight of stairs.

Steven LeGrande of Raeford was shot during the struggle by Sgt. Martino who had been carrying a gun during the chase. (See SHOOTING, page 2A)

In still further action, a grant application to the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) for a \$100,000 was OK'd.

The city hopes to use the money coupled with a like amount taken from city Powell Bill funds to improve drainage and street curbs in the residential area located behind the Wagon Wheel Restaurant.

Prior to vote to revert the business fees, Hedgepeth had moved to do away with the charges.

Complaints had been received from merchants after bills were sent out, Hedgepeth said, noting that he was unsure why the city charged the fees.

"If we are charging merchants just for the privilege of doing business in Raeford, then I think we should do away with the fees."

"The merchants are gauged enough. I think we should thank them for being in Raeford," Hedgepeth said.

The fees have been at the same level for the past 19 years. In February, the council voted to increase fees for the upcoming fiscal year. That vote was nullified Monday.

Under the present system, some merchants are exempt from the fees by state law because "they have a better lobby than others."

"I don't think that's fair," McLeod said.

The system of charging should be made equal for all businesses, he added.



Inside Today

Potter: hobby and profession

Working with your hands to create is a fulfilling experience especially for Hoke County's resident potter Jim Moses. We take a look at Moses, his profession and his step by step account of how it is done in this week's B-section of The News-Journal.