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College OK's downtown Raeford site

By Sherry Matthews

A college satellite in Hoke County came one step closer to becoming reality Monday night after members of the Sandhills Community College Board of Trustees OK'd a downtown Raeford site to house the proposed facility.

Board members gave the green light to pursuing architectural surveys to determine if the old United Carolina Bank (UCB) building on Main Street is suitable as the satellite branch, a Sandhills spokesman said Tuesday.

"The board agreed for us to get architects to take a look at the

UCB building," Assistant to the President George Lewis said.

"We will be checking to see if the building meets all the fire and safety codes," he added.

If the building meets architectural approval, Lewis believes chances for a satellite college in Raeford "could be strong."

"I think we are steadily moving toward a final decision on the satellite," Lewis said.

"If we determine that the building is safe, and we decide to take it...we are pretty much saying that there will be a college," he added.

The UCB building became vacant Friday, after the bank con-

solidated its operations in the main branch on South Main Street.

"I think this is just one more positive step," Hoke-Raeford Chamber of Commerce Director Earl Fowler said.

"The fact that their board gave approval is a good indication of things to come," he added.

"I really think everyone wants to see a college here," Fowler said.

Despite optimism and some 300 "positive industrial surveys" that were completed this week, Fowler says there are "still some unanswered questions."

"There are some things that have not been addressed - yet," Fowler said.

"Once the architects have completed their study, we will have to see what type of renovations are needed at the UCB building and how much those renovations are going to cost," he added.

"Those things figure into the final decision," Fowler said.

"There are still a lot of unknowns," Hoke Chamber of Commerce President Steve Parker said.

"Everything looks favorable at this point, but we still have some things that need to be looked at," he added.

In addition to the Monday night decision, Sandhills officials are in the "final stages" of compiling

feasibility surveys taken within the Hoke County school system.

"We are running them through our computers right now," Lewis said.

"I would anticipate having the results within a week or so," he added.

Although Lewis was unsure of the results, he was quick to admit that he "anticipated positive results" from the surveys.

"I think there is a great desire for a college in Hoke County," Lewis said.

"We will be able to tell more about that once the surveys are tallied," he added.

Fowler, who spearheaded the

drive to get the satellite branch here, is "full of optimism" about the college extension's chances.

"I think everything is definitely on the upswing," Fowler said.

"We have not hit a negative point yet. I would say that is a good sign," he added.

"To know that Sandhills is looking at the building and helping with the surveys is a positive sign. It lets us know that they are still very much interested," Parker said.

"Everything is going according to schedule and looking good," Fowler said.

"I am pleased...we all are pleased," he added.

Storm blasts county

Four people were injured and one trailer was demolished following a tornado that touched down in the western part of Hoke County Tuesday night.

Linda Gillespie and three juveniles were slightly injured during the wind storm that also damaged several other trailers on Rural Paved Road 1225 in the Cameron Village area of the county.

Gillespie and the youths were transported to Moore Memorial Hospital for treatment.

The tornado reportedly touched down around 11:40 p.m. causing power failure in western Hoke County.

Around Town

By Sam Morris

All anyone could write about the weather on Monday was that it was great. I just hope that spring is here to stay.

The primary election is still scheduled for May 8 as far as I can find out. I don't believe the lawsuits will affect this county or district. So there are a couple of things you should remember. They are as follows:

The last day to register or change your precinct registration for the May 8 primary is April 6. You can do this by going by the Hoke County Library, any day, or by the Board of Elections office on Monday, Wednesday or Friday. Just remember if you are not registered, you can't vote.

The other thing is, if you are planning to be out of town on Tuesday, May 8, then go by the Board of Elections office and file for an absentee ballot. This will not take much of your time, but your vote could decide the outcome of the election.

Also if you have a child that is a student in college, be sure to apply for an absentee ballot for them, or have them go by and get one before the primary date.

Be a good citizen. Be sure you vote.

It always makes the staff of *The News-Journal* feel good when a letter is enclosed with a person's check for their subscription. We like to keep folks on the mailing list, but most times the letters are positive and not negative. We received one last week from a subscriber in Charlotte. It follows:

"The delivery of *The News-Journal* is one event I look forward to each week. I enjoy reading about my friends.

"Have recently bought a condo. Having fun fixing it up. I'm very

(See AROUND, page 4A)



Studying the accident scene

Highway Patrolman John Glidwell studies a Friday morning accident scene where an 18-wheeler turned over on the Highway 401 by-pass near Raeford. According to Glidwell, the truck "slammed on brakes" to avoid hitting another vehicle and skidd-

ed off the right side of the road. Highway Patrolman and Hoke Rescue Squad members spent nearly three hours clearing the scene, Glidwell said. No one was injured in the accident. (Photo by Pam Frederick)

Man charged with scalding child

By Sherry Matthews

A three-year-old Hoke County youth remained in stable condition this week after being hospitalized with second to third degree burns allegedly inflicted by her babysitter.

An investigation into the incident, which was reported to the Hoke Sheriff's Department by Department of Social Services (DSS) personnel, shows that James Alton Watkins, 24, of Hoke County, was apparently babysitting the youth when the incident occurred.

The child's mother was reportedly at work.

The investigation further shows that Watkins allegedly "submerged both of the child's hands, up to the wrists, in extremely hot

water," causing second to third degree burns.

Hoke County Detective C.E. Harris arrested Watkins last Friday, "just as he was pulling into a local trailer park."

In addition to the felony child abuse charge, Watkins was taken into custody for a third driving while license revoked offense, reports show.

Watkins was released Monday morning under a \$5,500 secured bond and is scheduled to appear in Hoke District Court Friday.

Reliable sources say that the youth, who remains in Cape Fear Valley Hospital after two weeks of treatment, will be placed in the custody of DSS staff members.

This is the second child abuse

case in less than three weeks that has been reported to law enforcement authorities.

In District Court last week, a Hoke County couple were sentenced to one year suspended after the completion of seven days in jail for abusing a three-year-old boy.

Testimony showed that the couple tied the youth to a fence and allowed a rifle to be discharged near the child.

Joseph Glover, 33, and Margaret Glover, 40, of Harmony Heights Trailer Park, were also placed on a two-year probation and instructed to seek mental health counseling by District Court Judge Warren Pate.

The child was not the natural son of the Glovers and has been placed in a Hoke County foster home, DSS sources say.

Police investigating slim leads in Raeford store armed robbery

Raeford Police were working with few leads this week in an effort to solve Saturday's armed robbery of a local convenience store, Police Chief Leonard Wiggins said.

There was "no one else in the store except the owner" when a "black man armed with a blue steel revolver" robbed the F&R Grocery at 201 Stewart Street, Wiggins said Tuesday.

The owner of the store, Fred W. Evans, was forced at gunpoint into a back room by the intruder.

The proprietor was locked in the room during the robbery, Wiggins said.

An undetermined amount of money was taken from the store, and Wiggins said the stolen cash included Lumbee River Electric Membership Cooperation (LREMC) collections.

F&R Grocery "was a collection

point" for LREMC customers' who deposited their bills at the store, the chief said.

A co-op spokesman declined to comment on how much money was taken during the incident.

"We are still working on the case," Wiggins said.

In an unrelated incident, a Raeford woman remained hospitalized Tuesday after suffering a knife wound to the head that was apparently inflicted during a fight with her sister, Wiggins said.

Shirley Thomas McQueen, 25, was transported to Cape Fear Valley Hospital Saturday after her sister allegedly stabbed her in the head with a knife.

Police, who were investigating a "disturbance," at the McQueen residence on Saunders Street, arrested Karen Delores Thomas, 22, and charged her with assault with a

deadly weapon inflicting serious injury.

"We are not sure how the fight started," Wiggins said.

According to Wiggins, McQueen was "not critically injured" during the incident.

In further unrelated action last week, a 23-year-old Hoke County man was arrested for "kicking down the front door" of a Raeford apartment belonging to Rita Alford.

Wayne Bese was arrested and charged with breaking and entering after he attempted to break Alford's door around 5:45 a.m. last Wednesday, Wiggins said.

Ronnie Branch of East Edinborough Avenue reported that over \$400 in jewelry had been taken from his home between March 2 and March 13.

(See ROBBERY, page 5A)

City manager hunt narrowed to four, April choice eyed

By Sherry Matthews

Raeford City Council members are interviewing four hopefuls vying for the city manager's position and expect to fill the vacancy by mid-April.

"The councilmen have already reviewed two applicants. They are supposed to talk with the others March 26," Raeford Mayor John K. McNeill said.

"I can't speak for the board, but I believe they will have made a decision in April," he added.

"They have been taking their time on this decision. It is a very important job," McNeill said.

Councilmen have reviewed 15 applications since the January 31 cutoff deadline.

"I think we will have made a decision by the first of April," Councilman Vardell Hedgpeth said.

"It may take until May before we get a city manager here and settled," he added.

"Whoever we chose will have to give notice and move. It will take some time," Hedgpeth said.

"I think we have chosen the ones with the most experience and best credentials. We have been pleased with our interviews so far," Hedgpeth said.

The manager's position has been vacant since mid-December when Manager Ron Matthews resigned to take a position with the Elizabeth City government.

Bill Sellers, who heads the city's zoning and public works divisions, has been acting city manager since Matthews' departure.

Of the four remaining applicants, none are presently residing in the Hoke County area, but according to Hedgpeth, all are from North Carolina.

"Once we talk to the other two applicants, I don't think it will take long to make a final decision," Hedgpeth said.

"The ones we have already interviewed look sharp," he added.

"We have not been in any hurry. We wanted to get the best qualified person for the job. It is a very important position," he said.

PCB's deemed safe at Hoke dump sites

By Sherry Matthews

Although high lead levels remain in concentrated areas of one Ashley Heights dump site, only "traces" of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCB) can be found in other once contaminated soil, a state Department of Natural Resources and Community Development (NRCD) spokesman said.

"We submitted a report to our Raleigh office recommending that no further action be taken at these sites," NRCD Environmental Engineer Tommy Stevens said.

The tests, conducted by NRCD in early December, show "extremely low PCB readings," he added.

A site where a transformer dismantling operation was apparently conducted was the area where the most PCB concentrations were discovered, according to Stevens.

Although before the cleanup readings of 30 parts per million were found in that area, tests now show readings of 5.2 parts per million.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers 50 parts per million or less safe, Stevens said.

"We did not find any real problems out there," he added.

Samples taken at one other Ashley Heights site, along U.S. Highway 211 just west of Raeford, showed .085 parts per million.

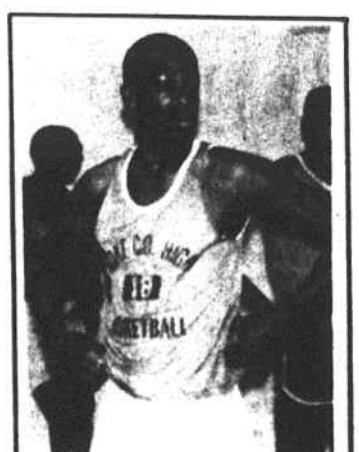
NRCD has agreed that Goldsboro businessman Woody Wilson Jr., who operated the dismantling operation on and near the sites, will not have to do any further clean-up.

Although NRCD officials are

not requiring any clean-up activity, Department of Human Resources (DHR) authorities have required Wilson to add an additional 15 tons of lime and to haul some of the heavily lead contaminated soil from another site to an incinerator.

DHR personnel will conduct further tests once the clean-up is completed, DHR spokesman Terry Dover said.

"We are not seeking any regulatory action. As far as I can tell, we are through with our investigation," Stevens said.



Inside Today

This Hoke High varsity basketball player appears ready for action during a recent practice. We take a look at the 4-A Conference champs and their season in this week's B-section of *The News-Journal*.