

The News-Journal

The Hoke County News - Established 1928

The Hoke County Journal - Established 1905

Volume LXXV Number 49

RAEFORD, HOKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

\$10 PER YEAR

25 CENTS

Thursday, March 29, 1984

Child abuse is a recurring problem

Air Force sergeant charged for abusing minor step-daughter

By Sherry Matthews

An Air Force Sergeant was out on bond this week following his arrest last Wednesday on felony child abuse charges.

Pope Air Force Sergeant Clarence E. Bennett, 40, of Rt. 4, Raeford was charged with felony incest against his 16-year-old step-daughter, sheriff's reports show.

Bennett was "picked up" last Wednesday by Cumberland County authorities and taken to the Hoke County Jail where he remained confined for one day.

Bennett was released under a \$5,000 unsecured bond Thursday, Hoke County Sheriff Dave Barrington said.

Wednesday's arrest followed reports from Department of Social Services (DSS) personnel that Bennett had "sexually assaulted" his stepdaughter.

The actual assault apparently took place nearly a year ago, but was only reported to DSS social workers in January.

According to statements, Bennett had been "sexually abusing" the 16-year-old since the child was six years old.

This is the third child abuse case that has been reported to Hoke County authorities in less than three weeks.



By Sherry Matthews

In the last 15 months, 63 Hoke County children have been the victims of child abuse, Department of Social Services (DSS) records show.

In March alone, charges have been brought against adults in three cases involving children who were victims of incest, scalding and beating.

"Those are pretty unusual," DSS Director Ken Witherspoon said.

"We don't normally have that many severe cases at once," he added.

Records show that since 1983, there have been 141 reported child abuse cases in the county involving 135 families and 223 children.

Of those cases, 94 were "unsubstantiated" accounts and 63 were verified child abuse cases.

"We are working to prevent these cases, but there are some shortcomings in our system," Witherspoon said.

"We are trying to look at other preventive measures that can be used," he added.

At present, social workers ad-

dress cases that are reported to their office by school officials, doctors, health department employees or family members.

"There is a great community awareness here," Witherspoon said.

"We get relatively good reports," he added.

However the figures show and Witherspoon admits that some "frivolous calls do come in."

"There are some that are not substantiated, but we have to check every call out," he said.

When reports come in, Witherspoon and his staff "take over the investigation."

"Every call must be investigated within 24 hours," Witherspoon said.

"We are usually there within a matter of minutes if it is an extreme case. If not we usually get there within a few hours after the report comes in," he added.

"We take no chances," Witherspoon said.

Despite the situation, Witherspoon said his staff "rarely remove the children from the home."

"Our ultimate philosophy is to

take no children," Witherspoon said.

"We are really just an investigative agency," he added.

"If there is life threatening situation, we do have the authority to take a child and hold that child for 72 hours," Witherspoon said.

"It is very rare that we do that," he added.

Although DSS does not have the authority to remove a child from the home, a district court judge can make that decision, according to the DSS director.

"If we find that a report is a justified child abuse case, we petition the court," Witherspoon said.

"A district court judge has the power to remove the child and place that child in our custody," he added.

Although children can be removed from the home through the judiciary process, Witherspoon and his staff prefer keeping the child in "his family setting."

"We had much rather work with the child and the family than to remove that child from his environment," Witherspoon said.

Around Town

By Sam Morris

The storm Sunday afternoon didn't cause any damage in Hoke County as far as I can determine. There was rain and hail, but the wind was not as strong here as in many places in the state.

Steve Parker of Southern National Bank said that he was at his sister's home and that hail was falling as large as golf balls and that it almost covered the ground. He said the rain was so heavy that you couldn't see but a few feet in front of where you were standing. I believe this was in Cumberland County. He also said that an employee of the bank stated that the hail was as large as tennis balls in Wayside.

According to Dr. John Ropp hail fell in Raeford around 6:30 p.m. on Sunday afternoon. I haven't been able to get in touch with Robert Gatlin to find out the size of the hail in the city. Maybe he will report it to the editor and it will appear elsewhere in the paper.

I haven't heard how much rain we had during the storm, but Julian Johnson told me Sunday morning that at his home near the Fort Bragg reservation that he had recorded over 20 inches so far this year. Now the normal rainfall for Hoke County for a year is just over 50 inches. Now if this keeps up it will be a few weeks before farmers can get into the fields to prepare for this year's crops.

Mrs. Hubert Cameron was by the office last week and left a note on my desk. The note wanted to inform me of the death of Ruth Robinson Harkins. Mrs. Harkins was the daughter of the late Rev. and Mrs. B.P. Robinson who was pastor of the Raeford Methodist Church in the 1920s.

Ruth was the youngest in the family and lived here also after her father retired from the ministry. This was before World War II and the Robinsons lived on the old Fayetteville Highway in the home now occupied by Mrs. E.E. Smith.

She died in Tremont, Ill. on March 17 and was buried there on Monday, March 19. She married an officer stationed at Fort Bragg during the war and he had retired and they moved to Illinois to live.

There were either five or six children in the family and Ruth was the last of that family. I know many in the county will remember her and will want to know of her death.

On the weekend of March 17 a group from Raeford went down to Chanticleer Golf Course at Holly Ridge to play golf. The course, I have been informed, belongs to Marvin Johnson of The House of Raeford.

(See AROUND TOWN, page 2A)



First signs of spring

The weather has taken a turn for the better as the sun grows warmer and the first evidences that spring has finally arrived have started showing their

colors. These pear blossoms are perfect examples that better weather has begun in Hoke County.

Hoke officials defend non-residence policies

Officials defended a policy requiring some employees to reside inside county boundaries last week, and noted that nearly two-thirds of non-residential personnel are employed by the Hoke County School system.

Of the 231 county employees who live outside the county only 17 are under the direct control of the Hoke County Commission, county officials say.

"We are not responsible for the school system," Commission Chairman John Balfour said.

"The only control we have over the school system is through their budget," he added.

"It is not fair to link the two because they are individual entities," Balfour said.

Of the 590 employees currently on the county government payroll, 463 are employed with the school

system and 127 are directly under the commissioner's jurisdiction.

Only 17 commission-controlled personnel live beyond the county line, records show.

Eight of those living outside the county boundaries make \$15,000 or more per year.

Despite the figures, a county commission order, passed last October, singles out only "department heads" drawing salaries of

more than \$15,000 and requires them to be residing inside Hoke County by September 1.

Tax Supervisor Larry Holt and Hoke Health Director Lloyd Horne are the only two department heads presently affected by the regulation.

"We have required them to move here and that is what we are hoping they will do," Balfour said.

"If they don't, I think their

employment would have to be terminated... if we are legally able to do so," he added.

Records indicate that Holt was hired in 1982 with the agreement that he move into the Hoke area by November 1, 1983.

There apparently was no written agreement when Horne was hired that required him to re-locate.

"I think the agreement with Lloyd was verbal," Balfour said.

Turlington closing, Upchurch rehab asked

By Sherry Matthews

A 20-member committee, appointed to study the condition of the seven Hoke County schools, approved a "tentative concept" Tuesday night that calls for the eventual re-grouping of students and the elimination of one facility.

Under the proposal, Upchurch Junior High School would be gradually replaced with new buildings while the J.W. Turlington school would be eliminated.

The estimated cost of the proposed construction would run between \$3 and \$5 million.

"That is, if we build on land we already have," Committee member Eddie McNeill said.

"It will cost more if we have to get a new site," School Superintendent Bob Nelson added.

The proposal, which is being reviewed by the total committee, shows a re-grouping system that will divide the schools into three classes, with schools of kindergarten through fifth-grade, a "middle school" and a high school.

At present, four county schools house K-4 grades, while Turlington is overflowing with all the fifth and sixth-grade population.

By re-grouping students, the committee hopes to eliminate Turlington's use within the next two years.

"The idea is to replace Turlington as soon as it is feasible," Committee Chairman Bobby Gibson said.

"It will not happen overnight. We have to be realistic," Nelson said.

"No matter what plan is used, it is going to take some time," he added.

The plan, which was one of three considered by the group, shows Upchurch as a middle school which would handle 1,200 sixth through eighth-graders, while South Hoke, West Hoke and Scurlock would house kindergarten through fifth grades.

McLaughlin would continue ser-

ving kindergarten through the fourth grade, Committee member Bill Archer said.

"By doing this, we are hoping to have all students out of Turlington within the next two years," Archer added.

Along with the student re-grouping, plans show a step by step replacement of Upchurch with new buildings and with additions at the other schools.

The recommendations call for building 14 additional classrooms at Upchurch to accommodate the newly acquired sixth-grade students, 13 new rooms at Scurlock, two at South Hoke, six (See COMMITTEE, page 8A)

Suspects sought for rape, robbery

By Sherry Matthews

Local and state law enforcement authorities are looking for at least one black man believed to have been involved with a Monday night rape and armed robbery of a local convenience store employee, Hoke County Sheriff Dave Barrington said.

Authorities also have reason to believe that at least one other black male and one woman were involved in the late-night incident that moved from Hoke into Robeson County.

Reports show that a Davis Bridge resident alerted sheriff's deputies around 11:51 p.m. Monday that the local Short Stop had been abandoned, but the door was open and lights were on inside.

While deputies were investigating and over an hour later, at approximately 1:15 a.m., Robeson County authorities reported that they had a Hoke County woman in custody who had been abandoned on a dirt road.

The victim, who was not identified, told authorities that she had been robbed at gunpoint and then abducted and raped, Barrington said.

According to the sheriff, the victim was in the Short Stop around

10:50 p.m. when at least one black man, wearing gloves and a stocking mask entered the store.

"The victim believes that she saw another man and one woman enter the store just before she was blindfolded," Barrington said.

After the robbery, the victim was forced into her own car and taken to another area, the sheriff said, noting that he was not sure if the location was in Hoke or Robeson County.

"That is where the sexual assault took place," he added.

Following the assault, the man apparently released the victim on a deserted dirt road.

Robeson County authorities were called by the woman from a residence near the area where she was released, Barrington said.

The victim was taken to Cape Fear Valley Hospital in Fayetteville for treatment and later released.

Hoke County Detectives found the victim's car abandoned near Highway 71 in Robeson County.

Only a "small amount of money" was taken during the robbery, Barrington said.

"We have called in the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) for assistance with this case," he added.



Inside Today

These six women worked their way through the mud toward the final hill and a \$50 first prize during Sunday's Mud Marathon. We take a look at the marathon and the other Sunday mud events in this week's B-section of The News-Journal. (Photos by Pam Frederick)