

The News-Journal

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RAEFORD, NORTH CAROLINA

25 CENTS

Wednesday, August 7, 1991

Judge takes Alex Norton out of sheriff's post



Sheriff Alex Norton outside the courthouse before the hearing.

Sheriff acted wrongly in two of seven counts

Alex Norton is no longer sheriff of Hoke County. Calling Norton's testimony "unworthy of belief," Judge Donald W. Stephens removed Norton from office as a result of a petition by the district and county attorneys. Stephens denied a request to hold off the removal pending an appeal of his decision.

Norton's attorney Randy Gregory told Stephens that Norton probably would appeal and the judge gave attorneys 10 days to file motions.

Stephens' decision would be appealed to the Court of Appeals.

The petition to remove Norton was brought before the court on May 7 by District Attorney Jean Powell and County Attorney Duncan McFadyen.

Stephens, a Superior Court judge from Raleigh assigned to hear the trial, said the sheriff's ouster was required by state law if he found Norton had shown even one instance of willful neglect or failure to perform his duties.

"I have no discretion in the matter," Stephens said. "If I find...support in my conclusions...the statute says that I shall remove him."

"The court finds Sheriff Norton's testimony to be unworthy of belief"—Judge Stephens

Stephens found Norton had shown "willful failure, neglect and refusal to perform the duties of his office" when he failed to charge Lillie Ann Locklear, a felon on probation working under Norton as a jail cook, with illegal possession of a handgun.

Stephens also found Norton had acted wrongly and had caused a felony to be committed when he ordered Sgt. Josh Brown to add his name to court papers to cover up the fact they had been served by an underage deputy.

"Each standing alone is sufficient," Stephens said. (See TRIAL, page 3)

Commissioners swear in coroner as new sheriff

By Pat Wilson
News-Journal Staff Writer

Effective 12:30 p.m. Monday, County Coroner and acting medical examiner Frank Crumpler became sheriff. Two hours later he took the oath of office from Clerk of Courts Juanita Edmund in front of county commissioners, who filed by with handshakes and congratulations.

"The court has entered certain findings of fact finding Sheriff Norton violated the general statutes under provisions of Chapter 128 and that he has engaged in activities amounting to misconduct in office and refusal to perform the duties of his office."

Thus county attorney Duncan McFadyen informed Hoke commissioners that Alex Norton was no longer in charge of the sheriff's department. Commissioners had cleared a crowded agenda Monday morning while court proceedings took place across the street then waited through their lunch hour for Superior Court Judge Donald W. Stephens' decision.



Frank Crumpler takes the oath.

McFadyen said he had been made aware of the judge's findings prior to Monday but he and Norton's attorneys were "directed not to tell." If the petition had been dismissed or if Norton had chosen resignation, "the findings would be sealed," he said.

Following an hour-long session to discuss legal matters concerning the sheriff's office, commissioners announced the county will be taking (See CRUMPLER, page 9)

Rivals sign up for city race Friday

Three challengers threw their hats in the ring in the last two days of the sign-up period for Raeford city elections.

Keith Ryan, who ran unsuccessfully against John K. McNeill in 1989, will take on incumbent Bob Gentry in the race for mayor.

Ryan entered the race 11 a.m. Friday, paying his \$20 entry fee at the Board of Elections office an hour before the deadline.

Another challenger, Steve Phillips, came in the office with only minutes to spare and signed to seek one of three four-year seats on the city council.

Phillips ran a close fourth in the race for three Hoke County School Board seats last November.

Ken Booker, who recently completed a

stint on the Raeford-Hoke Planning and Development Commission, signed up for a council seat on Thursday.

Booker and Phillips will take on incumbents Vardell Hedgpeath, Earl McDuffie and Joe Upchurch.

Eddie McNeill, whom councilmen appointed to fill out Bob Gentry's term when Gentry took the mayor's post, will run without opposition for a two-year term on the council. That will fill out Gentry's original term, then the seat will open for a four-year term.

Ryan, Gentry fight for mayor's seat

Ryan and Gentry are fighting to fill out the last two years of the late John K. McNeill's

term as Mayor.

Gentry was out of town and could not be reached for comment, but Ryan, who ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1989, said he plans to make a strong bid for election this year.

"I intend to be well organized this time," Ryan said Friday. "I ran sort of loosely (last time) not realizing that I was sort of bucking a legend."

Ryan said he wants Raeford to wake up and start moving forward.

"I intend to set this city on a course of progressive growth," he said.

"The city has missed the Eighties; we're not going to miss the Nineties."

"I feel like if we can get some good (See ELECTION, page 4)



Keith Ryan tells Elections Supervisor Caroline Shook why he is running for mayor of Raeford.

Operation Eagle swoops down on 18

State troopers arrested 18 people Friday night at two checkpoints on the outskirts of Raeford.

The numbers aren't as impressive for Raeford as for Charlotte, Raleigh or even Fayetteville.

But Operation Eagle is more than a numbers game, said Joe Dean, secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety.

"The whole idea of a good drunk driving program is to prevent drunk driving and to spread the information wide enough," Dean said at a press conference Friday afternoon at the National Guard Armory on Teal Drive.

The press conference preceded a joint effort by the state Highway Patrol, Raeford Police, Hoke County Sheriff's Department and Rescue Squad to crack down on drunk drivers Friday night.

Two checkpoints—at the intersections of Main Street and Vass Road and of Prospect Avenue and U.S. 401 Business—stopped traffic and checked for drunk drivers and other moving violators.

Despite nearly constant rain, troopers alone arrested 18 drunk drivers, 12 people driving without a license, five people driving while their licenses were revoked and wrote tickets for one seat belt violation, one child restraint violation, one liquor violation and arrested one man for carrying a concealed weapon.

One was overheard complaining he had been drinking but he wasn't actually impaired; another said he had to drive because his passenger, who owned the car, was too drunk to drive.

But state troopers aren't famous for their sympathetic ears.

The most excited the normally impassive troopers on Main Street got was when they bagged what they called a CDL—a commercial driver's license. They had arrested the driver of an 18-wheel truck for drunk driving.

(see EAGLE, page 10)

Sandhills wants Turlington for new campus

By Pat Wilson
News-Journal Staff Writer

Sandhills Community College has requested the use of Turlington School as its Hoke County campus.

Mary Archie McNeill, director of the Hoke County Center of Sandhills, made the request at Monday's meeting of commissioners.

But SCC may have to stand in line for the use of the soon-to-be vacant middle school on Prospect Avenue in Raeford.

Hoke's School Board has promised to give the school to the county once East and West Hoke Middle Schools are completed.

The School Board has requested rights to use Turlington's auditorium—the only one in the county—until a new one is built.

Commissioners voted earlier this year to give the schools priority use of the auditorium "regardless of the use for Turlington."

The School Board has put on hold plans to rebuild the Upchurch Auditorium which burned in 1989.

Also in line for the use of Turlington School is the Department of Social Services, whose offices on S. Magnolia Street have been crowded for well over a year.

McNeill outlined potential uses

the college would have for Turlington: literacy programs, a computer lab, Department of Corrections training, occupational extension classes, a small business resource center and training area, college courses, vocational programs, testing, gym events, a library/media center, a student union/dining area and offices.

The auditorium would be used for events such as theater, music, dance, civic and cultural activities, lectures and forums, McNeill said.

"It would certainly promote our quality of life and is important for attracting new industry and support-

ing existing industry," she said.

The Raeford-Hoke Planning and Development office could also be housed in Turlington, she said.

The college has a campus near Pinehurst, "but we need one here," McNeill said.

Chairman Wyatt Upchurch said the board would "be glad to do as much as we can do to support you and Sandhills College."

In other business, commissioners:

• listened to concerns from trailer park owners about the \$69 per lot they have been assessed for garbage (see COUNTY, page 9)

Hoke man shot to death in Harmony Heights trailer

A Hoke County man was shot to death in his Harmony Heights home Wednesday night.

His girlfriend has been charged with his murder.

Charles Edward McKenzie, 19, of 106 Utah Street, was found "balled up" but conscious on the floor by deputies who responded to a report of a shooting at the home. He had suffered a gunshot wound in the chest.

As McKenzie was taken to Cape Fear Valley Medical Center, Michelle Mack,

23, of the same address, was charged with first degree murder.

Mack admitted shooting McKenzie, Hoke County Sheriff's Det. Mike Underwood said. Deputies recovered a .25 caliber automatic pistol—which they say was used in the murder—from Mack, along with one spent shell.

Two of Mack's nieces also witnessed the shooting.

According to witnesses, Underwood said, McKenzie stopped by the house to (see MURDER, page 10)

Around Town

By Sam C. Morris

The rain finally stopped and it has been fair for a couple of days. I haven't heard how much rain fell in the county recently, but it must have been between 5 to 7 inches. Water was standing in most of the fields by the weekend. The rainy weather did cool things off for a few days.

The forecast calls for the temperatures during the day to be in the 80s Wednesday through Saturday and the lows at night will be in the 60s. There is a chance of rain in the afternoon hours.

The rain has brought some problems

to the farmers of the county. In talking with Eddie Baker, he said that he was having to get a backhoe to cut ditches in his tobacco fields to drain the water off. Eddie hopes that he can save most of his crop with this operation. It is uncertain how wet tobacco will cure.

In talking with Shirley Gibson Monday morning, she stated that her husband, Bobby and son, Andy, were having trouble with the rain on their cotton crops. The insects like the hot damp weather and when the cotton is sprayed, along will come the rain and wash off the poison.

(See AROUND, page 8)