

The News-Journal

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Wednesday, November 26, 1997

In A

Jenny Walters
fighting for life
with fail

6A

Business
of the week

7A

In B



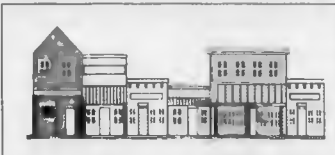
'Lucky' tom turkey
from Hoke gone
to Washington

1B

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Around Town



By SAM MORRIS
Contributing Editor

The rain has finally stopped, but it left leaves all over my yard. It was cleaned last Friday, but it doesn't look like it today. There was a big frost Monday morning and if the wind ceases to blow there should be another frost Tuesday morning. The temperature could get down into the 20s Monday night.

The forecast calls for warmer weather for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday. The highs will be in the 60s and the lows in the 40s. There isn't any rain in the forecast.

I was talking to some cotton farmers Sunday at church and I was telling them about seeing many fields where cotton hadn't been picked. They said that the rains had caused the picking of cotton to be way behind schedule. I can remember many years ago when I was a boy that wagons were lined up on the Laurinburg highway near the Edenborough Shopping Center in September and October (See AROUND, page 11A)

Jury to decide on life or death

Ferguson convicted

KNIGHT CHAMBERLAIN
Interim editor

Family members and friends of the victims maintained their composure as the verdicts were read, after being cautioned to do so by Judge D. Jack Hooks. Some dabbed their eyes with tissue. Others raised their eyes upward and mouthed the words "thank you."

ELIZABETHTOWN — Despite considerable eyewitness testimony and a signed confession, it took a Bladen County jury six-and-a-half hours over two days to find Rodriguez Ferguson guilty of first-degree murder last Thursday in the shooting deaths of five Hoke County residents, and the wounding of a sixth almost three years ago.

Seated between his attorneys Henderson Hill and Lisa Dubs, Ferguson, 20, appeared unaffected as the verdicts were read. Dubs grimaced at one point and patted Ferguson's arm.

The same jury is now deciding whether to sentence Ferguson either to death or to life without parole.

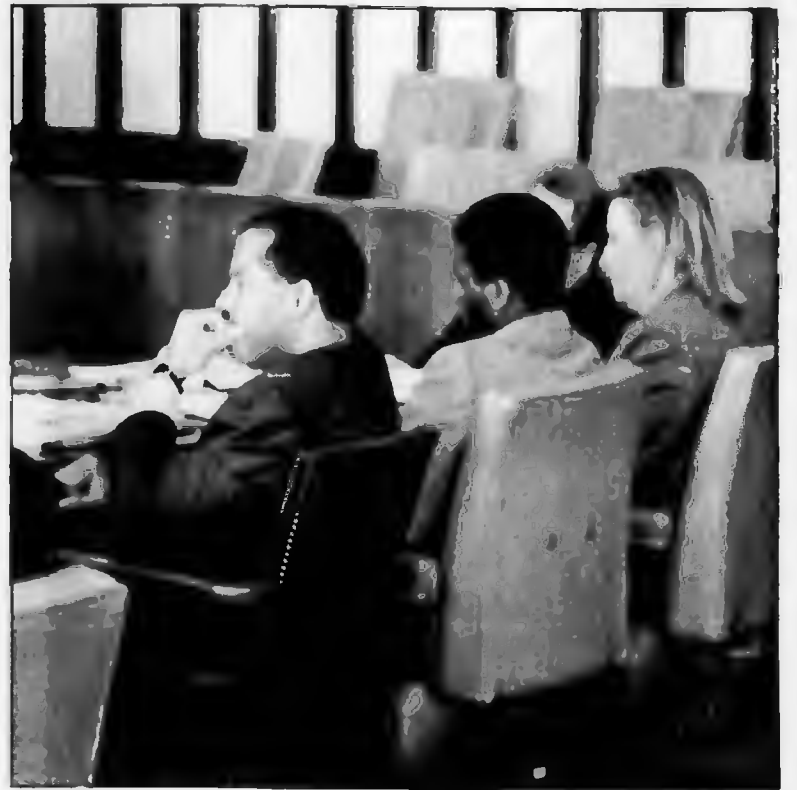
"I know this sounds terrible, but I want them to 'let loose the juice' and kill that man for what he did to this family." — Kevin Hunter, Jamie Hunter's brother, referring to lethal injection if Ferguson is given a death sentence.

composure as the verdicts were read, after being cautioned to do so by Judge D. Jack Hooks. Some dabbed their eyes with tissue. Others raised their eyes upward and mouthed the words "thank you."

An unidentified woman sitting with Ferguson's family hurried out of the courtroom with her hand to her mouth.

the deaths of Jamie Hunter, 38, his wife, Debbie, 37, Tim Powell, 20, and Steve Locklear, 18, at the Puppy Creek Family Fun Center in Hoke County on New Year's Eve 1994, and that several hours later he shot and killed James Morrison Jr., 31, at the now-closed Zodiac Lounge just north of Raeford.

Ferguson was also found



Rodriguez Ferguson, seated between his attorneys Henderson Hill and Lisa Dubs, appears unaffected as the verdicts are read.

guilty of assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill inflicting serious injury on their Hunters' daughter, Mary Ann Hunter, now 18, who was paralyzed from the chest down by a bullet that struck her neck as her mother

attempted to shield her from gunfire.

Outside the courtroom family members and friends hugged and cheered.

Jamie Hunter's brother, (See FERGUSON, page 11A)

Davis to challenge Byrd for sheriff

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Staff Writer

James "Jim" Davis announced Saturday that he will file Jan. 5 to run for Hoke County sheriff.

"I was approached by a number of citizens in the county who knew of my background and experience but did not decide to run until recently," Davis said when he made his announcement at a community-wide benefit bazaar held on the grounds of WMFA radio station in Raeford. His decision to run was prompted by an Aug. 29 incident in which 31-year-old Michael Sivak was shot

in the back by Deputy Frank Hicks following a chase. The deputy said Sivak was trying to run him down with a van. On Oct. 21 a Hoke County grand jury found probable cause to believe the deputy committed voluntary manslaughter. The action, called a presentment, asks the district attorney to investigate the case further and to submit bills of indictment if investigators find them appropriate.

"After the Sivak shooting incident I became more concerned and alarmed that the sheriff's dept. was not concerned with the residents of Hoke County. The



James "Jim" Davis

shooting itself demonstrated a lack of training on behalf of the officer and a lack of sensitivity by the way it was handled by the department," Davis said.

"I had a conversation with the sheriff (Wayne Byrd) unrelated (See DAVIS, page 10A)

RPD fires McNeill

By KRISTIN GUTHRIE
Staff writer

After 17 years with the Raeford Police Department, Raeford native J.R. "Dick" McNeill said his final goodbyes to co-workers as City Manager Mike McNeill approved Police Chief Mack High's recommendation that McNeill be fired.

Mike McNeill said he reviewed the paperwork from Thursday until Monday before supporting High's decision. Dick McNeill learned of the decision on Tuesday.

Manager McNeill and Chief High made no comment on the decision, citing state privacy laws.

"I don't want to make any

comment. It's a personnel matter," High said Tuesday morning.

While serving on the police force, McNeill worked as interim chief, major, captain, patrol officer and, most recently, sergeant, after being demoted from interim chief in April this year.

When asked to comment about leaving the police force after such a long time, Dick McNeill said, "No comment."

McNeill said he plans to look for work elsewhere. "I'm just looking around... Anything right now. We'll see what comes up."



McNeill

'Roundup' nets big catch

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Staff Writer

When Hoke County Sheriff's Dept. Chief of Deputies David Newton briefed deputies on Operation Round-up, he referred to "prisoners I hope you get."

Before the night was over, there were enough prisoners to fill the Hoke County Jail plus some had to be transported to Robeson County Jail.

The operation is held about twice annually to "round up" those persons the department has outstanding warrants on who have proven hard to catch up with.

But last Friday was a "day of reckoning" for 21 people who had 38 felony and misdemeanor charges filed against them.

At the briefing at the public library, Newton told officers to do things by the book. "Be nice to the people at the door. Tell them the law says we can (make the arrests). If they get belligerent they can visit us down here." He reminded officers to "look around for drugs" once they were inside an arrestee's house. Be "extra careful with chapter 90s" (drug involvement), he said. He also said priority or "hot" calls were to supersede Round-Up activities.

Newton advised deputies to "stop and introduce yourselves

to people hanging out" when they were in high drug areas. This paid off later that night with cocaine confiscation and two arrests.

"We got all night. Take your time," said Newton, and the last bit of advice came from Chief Deputy Wayne Gardner, "Make sure everybody comes back safe tonight."

Divided into teams, 21 officers began the round-up shortly after 5 p.m. A team consisting of team leader Sgt. Chris Fee and deputies Micheal Corcoran, Berney Duron and Robert Caughey hit two houses east of town on Rockfish Rd. under a pouring rain. No luck, it seemed. Then on to west of town and down a muddy John Russell Rd. Again, no luck. Harris Ln. was the next unsuccessful stop and officers were getting discouraged.

At a trailer behind South Hoke Convenience Store, officers were greeted by barking dogs and they, like the 27-year-old woman who was charged with possession with intent to sell and deliver cocaine, offered no resistance.

The mother of two, wearing a T-shirt which read, "I may be a crude, heartless b— but I'm good at it," was taken away in handcuffs.

There was another stop on Lantern Ln. before heading to



Deputy Robert Caughey reads a warrant for arrest to one of 21 people picked up during Operation Round-Up.

the sheriff's dept. where the officers found that their first stop on Rockfish Rd. had netted them a catch. The mom there had told her daughter officers were looking for her so she was driven to the sheriff's office to be served a warrant for three misdemeanor charges.

The blotter showed about a half a dozen people brought in. Three of those were juveniles with some serious charges: assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill inflicting serious injury, robbery with a dangerous weapon and shooting into an occupied vehicle and conspiracy. That trio would go to a juvenile

detention center.

The woman from Rockfish Rd. complained to the woman who was facing drug charges, "This is just messin' up my time."

"Excuse me," she called to a deputy, "Could I get a note to go back to work?"

"Just show your pink slip," he said, but wrote out the note, while the reporter wondered if she'd still have a job after she turned in an excuse that she was late because she'd been arrested on three charges.

The team headed out again but was detoured by a "hot" call when a woman wanted some (See ROUNDUP, page 11A)

Gas line ruptured

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Staff Writer

A gas line belonging to North Carolina Natural Gas was ruptured Thursday morning, and authorities evacuated Raeford residents within a surrounding block area until emergency repairs could be made.

The gas leak was reported at 8:18 a.m. at 101 Reaves St. at the intersection of Highway 20. A 4-inch line was damaged by a backhoe while a workman was digging to replace a sewer line.

A resident of the home said she heard the accident. Another described it as the "sound of gas spewing."

The smell of gas was strong as Raeford police detoured traffic from the area. Firefighters and emergency medical service personnel also responded.

It took personnel an hour and 45 minutes to cut off the gas, according to Raeford Fire Marshal Terry Tapp. NCNG employees repaired the damage.

Call first

"If they had located the lines, the problem would have been alleviated," Tapp said, reminding residents that there is a toll (See GAS LINE, page 10A)