

The News-Journal

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Wednesday, February 9, 2000



Wednesday morning collision

The only human injury reported was to the driver of the pickup who complained of back and leg pain after this two-vehicle accident at the intersection of Old Maxton and Walter Gibson roads in South Hoke this morning at about 7:30. Inside the tractor-trailer are 500 frightened, injured and squealing pigs who didn't go to market. (Photo by Pat Allen Wilson)

Sheriff Davis demands investigation

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Sheriff Jim Davis announced last week the Federal Bureau of

This week

Dr. Randy Bridges
honored as UNCP
alumnus
page 8A

NAACP
apparently
plans march
page 10A

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Around Town



By SAM C. MORRIS
Contributing Editor

The temperatures have risen, but many places on the north side of buildings and the large piles that were formed by clearing driveways still have a reminder of the snow. Of course, if we could get a warm rain this would do away with it.

My feelings are that we have had enough snow and cold weather for the year. If my memory is correct, most of the snows over the years have come in March. Let's hope this is not true this year.

The forecast for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday, calls for the highs to be in the 50 or low 60s and the lows to be in the 30s or 40s. There is a chance of rain (See AROUND, page 5A)

Investigation and the State Bureau of Investigation are scrutinizing allegations of public corruption, at his requests. The probe regards "high-ranking" elected officials, county administrators, certain deputies and former deputies, Davis added.

"The SBI confirmed it's conducting a criminal investigation. However, the FBI denied involvement in any investigation. Davis said he contacted the FBI on January 14, which was prior to four of his deputy-supervisors resigning on January 19.

"The FBI is not investigating any political corruption in Hoke County," said Larry Bonney, a regional supervisor with the FBI in Wilmington.

"We have received a lot of communications from Sheriff Davis before, and after, he was elected," Bonney said. "But, we are not investigating anything for Sheriff Davis."

Davis declined mentioning names of any people being investigated by the SBI. Davis confided in *The News-Journal* on January 18, saying he was examining facts to see if a criminal conspiracy had been committed among some deputies and county officials.

According to Davis' request to investigate, he referred to a detective and chief deputy under scrutiny concerning their integrity. SBI Assistant Director Larry Smith of the Special Investiga-

tions' division in Raleigh began interviewing deputies last Wednesday in Raeford, accompanied by a team of SBI agents. Smith said the SBI is "required by law" to investigate any criminal allegations they receive from a law enforcement officer.

"The Sheriff has asked us to look at some things and we met with the Sheriff," Smith said. "I can't confirm anything else. Our procedure is: We turn over our findings to the District Attorney, who determines if a crime has been committed," he said.

"The majority of our requests for all assistance across the state come from sheriffs, police chiefs and district attorneys." (See INVESTIGATION, page 9A)

Sheriff wants \$25,000 for lawyer

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke County Board of Commissioners found a belated letter, dated January 19, from Hoke's Sheriff Jim Davis, included in their February 7 meeting packets. Davis requested \$25,000—above and beyond his budget—for personal, legal aid to protect himself from some County officials who allegedly discussed removing him from office. Davis wants to hire independent legal counsel with the money he is requesting.

Davis also said he's conducting an internal investigation by the Sheriff's Department, focusing on "events surrounding meetings of January 13" among these same County officials. Davis also placed a gag order request on

county officials, asking them not to meet with any member of the Sheriff's Department staff without his own presence or approval.

Davis sent his letter to County Manager Bernice McPhatter with copies reportedly mailed to the SBI, District Attorney Jean

McLaughlin Jr. wondered why Commission Chairman James A. Leach, who compiles agenda information, didn't advise them about Davis' letter sooner.

In his request, Davis asked extra money be approved as a

"It's plain garbage as far as I'm concerned. If this is ever put on the Board of Commissioners' agenda to discuss as a budget amendment like Sheriff Davis requested, it's going to raise a lot of eyebrows. He's already way over his budget."

— Commissioner L.E. McLaughlin Jr.

Powell and County Commissioners. However, Commissioners didn't immediately receive copies from Davis, obtaining the information, instead, on February 4 through the County adminis-

tration. Commissioner L.E. McLaughlin Jr. wondered why Commission Chairman James A. Leach, who compiles agenda information, didn't advise them about Davis' letter sooner.

Davis appeared at the Mon- (See \$25,000, page 9A)

Austin named Kiwanis Citizen of the Year

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor



Jake Austin

A retired businessman, Austin opened J.H. Austin Insurance Agency in 1950. The business is now in the hands of his son Tony Austin.

The elder Austin's community service is extensive, according to Harold Gillis, who made the award. Austin has served on boards of the Hoke County

Library, Hoke Planning Commission and Bank of Raeford. He has chaired the United Fund and served as president of the Raeford-Hoke Chamber of Commerce twice. He also served on school committees and was a Little League Baseball coach. He joined Raeford Kiwanis in 1949, served as a director in 1951 and was president in 1959. He has been recognized for perfect attendance in Kiwanis.

Austin also served on the committee that was instrumental in the construction of the Robbins Heights section of Raeford.

Austin is a life-long member of First Baptist Church, where he served as a deacon, Sunday school teacher. He also served on the church's Centennial committee last year.

A Raeford resident his entire life, Austin was (See CITIZEN, page 6A)

Elections chair tries to oust employee

Also puts squeeze on director

Illegal meeting held

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke County Board of Elections met behind closed doors Tuesday afternoon in an illegal executive session called by BOE Chairman Willie McCaskill. BOE member Delbert Minshew said McCaskill urged the removal of part-time employee Pam

Lewis because Lewis is the aunt of District Attorney candidate Kristy McMillan. According to Minshew, McCaskill also tried to sway the board to conduct a performance evaluation on BOE Director Caroline Shook every six months, insuring she's doing her job properly.

"I told Mr. McCaskill I was adamantly opposed to what he was trying to do and I wouldn't (See ELECTIONS, page 10A)

First republican primary on tap

Ten vie for commissioner seats

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

For the first time in Hoke County's history, Republicans will have a primary in the race for a local office. Filing for election ended at noon Monday with three Republicans and seven Democrats vying for two available commissioner seats.

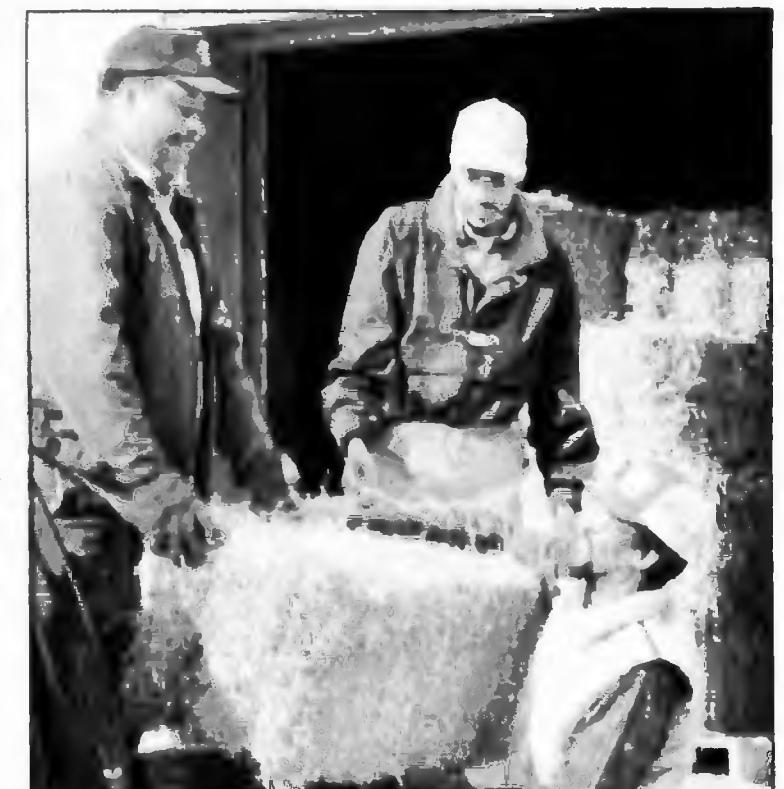
Filing as Republicans are (in the order in which they filed) Jim Knott, Kevin E. Epps and Buddy Blue. Democrat candidates are (in the order in which they filed) James A. Leach (incumbent), Perika K. Hardaway, Cleo Bratcher (incumbent), Julius

Vanner, Gene Paul Thacker, Robert A. "Bobby" Wright and Eric D. Pender.

The number of Republican registered voters has grown steadily in Hoke County over the years. In 1970 there were 272 Republicans and 5,230 Democrats registered. By 1990, that number had almost tripled for Republicans, while Democrats increased by about one third.

In 1996, this country's last Presidential election, there were 1,986 Republicans and 9,315 Democrats.

The Hoke County voter count, as of January 12, 2000, showed (See PRIMARY, page 9A)



From left, Wilson Graham, Joe Moore and Jessie Dobbins unload sweet-smelling alfalfa hay at Home Foods feed and fertilizer store. Economic Developer Don Porter sees benefits to Hoke in the need for more goods, such as hay, created by the Five Points Horse Park.

Economic Developer seeks grant for Five Points Horse Park

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

Like ripples that flow outward when a pebble is dropped into a pool—that's how Raeford-Hoke Economic Developer Don Porter thinks the Five Points Horse Park will benefit Hoke County.

The world class equestrian facility planned for 230 acres in western Hoke is a dream of Moore County horse enthusiasts who chose nearby Hoke for their facility because land for sale was cheaper and more available than in their own home county.

Porter sees spin-off benefits for Raeford and Hoke in the need

for more goods and services. "Food, fuel, truck repair, hay, overnight accommodations, eating establishments, veterinarians, farriers... the list goes on," he says.

Porter is working on a grant to help the Five Points Horse Park with its financing. The grant requires matching funds. Although he does not want to release details just yet, a confident Porter says, "We should get the grant."

The park falls under a non-profit organization called Sandhills Equestrian Conservancy (SEC), which was formed in the spring of 1998 for the (See ECONOMIC, page 10A)