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Settlement no cure for tobacco farmers

Quota holders profit

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke County, traditionally a tobacco-growing stronghold, yielded a \$7 million crop from its growers in 1998, despite sagging export demands, foreign import competition and more federal regulations imposed on American farmers. However, an early supplement paid to some North Carolina farmers didn't equal what many quota holders, who lease out allotments instead of farming their land, were paid.

Farmers' fund

During the last three years, said Keith Walters, Hoke's assistant agricultural agent, revenue generated from tobacco has been reduced almost 50 percent due to increased government controls on allotment quotas.

To compensate for grow (See TOBACCO, page 11A)



A labor of love... Hoke County farmer Louise Love won't give up growing tobacco.

Hoke's only female tobacco farmer keeps plowing along despite woes

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Louise Love, the only known female tobacco farmer in Hoke County, said times are terrible for tobacco growers but she won't quit.

"It used to be just the plow and mule and now everything is all high-tech equipment," Love said.

"Even worse, the federal government has taken almost 50 percent of our tobacco quota in the last three years. When you take half of a farmer's allotment, you have ruined him," she said.

Love has been farming since her husband, Julian Love, died eight years ago. (See LOVE, page 11A)

Unilever's future?

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

In announcing what it calls plans for faster growth, the corporate headquarters of Unilever,

based in The Netherlands and England, is looking into cutting 10 percent of its work force over the next five years.

Unilever spokespersons said it is too early to tell how the Raeford plant will be affected.

Unilever announced the cuts

yesterday as part of a reorganization that would leave 100 sites closed in this country and in Europe and eliminate 25,000 jobs.

No one at Unilever Home & Personal Care USA, Raeford's manufacturing plant that employs (See UNILEVER, page 12A)

Rush to head finances

Takes double duty from McPhatter

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

It took 25 years of County service and 30 minutes in executive session for Shirley Rush, Hoke County personnel director, to be appointed Hoke's new finance director.

A smiling Rush, already serving as assistant finance officer,

accepted the post after County Commissioner Cleo Bratcher Jr. nominated her and Commission Chairman James A. Leach seconded the motion. Rush is distinguished as one of several longest-employed staff in County government.

"I appreciate the board for approving me," Rush said. "I will (See FINANCE, page 12A)



Shirley Rush

Hoke High student attacked on campus in gang initiation

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

It was dark... it was quick... it was brutal when a fifteen-year-old freshman boy at Hoke County High School, alone in the campus bathroom, was bashed in the back of his head and knocked to the floor almost unconscious, his head smashed into a pipe. The victim was struck in an unprovoked attack on February 9 by another 16-year-old student who was involved in a gang-ritual initiation for "The Hot Boys."

"I was not singled out," the young student told his mother later. "I heard from other kids I was just unlucky to be in the bathroom and turned out to be the one that was struck," he said.

According to the young victim, somebody suddenly turned off the bathroom lights around 7:45 a.m. and he was hit almost

"What's next? Will this gang stab the next child? Will they kill a student just for an initiation? Every time I hear the phone ring, I'm afraid something else terrible has happened to my son."

— Mother of teenage assault victim

immediately, never seeing his assailant. When he pulled himself off the floor, the lights were turned back on and the bathroom was empty. The victim, still recovering, was treated at Moore Regional Hospital and recently returned back to school. The attacker, who reportedly confessed, was suspended indefinitely from Hoke High by administrators.

Following closely on the heels of the first incident, a dance at the school on Feb. 11 was cancelled early when a known gang member showed up on campus.

"This is the first time in the

history of Hoke County High School that gangs have existed on the campus," said Don Steed, Hoke County School Superintendent. "It's also the first time I've heard of a gang initiation. One of this gang's initiation requirements is to hit another student," he said.

A Hoke High gym teacher noticed the injured student after the attack and assisted him to the principal's office. The student was driven by his mother to the hospital just 20 minutes after he was injured, receiving 10 stitches (See GANG, page 12A)

Sheriff's office hiring freeze thaws

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke Sheriff Jim Davis announced on a Fayetteville radio station over the weekend that a hiring freeze imposed on his department had been lifted. Hoke County Manager Bernice

McPhatter confirmed Monday the hiring freeze is over, enabling Davis to re-hire deputies for four vacant positions left empty since December.

A total of nine deputy slots are currently open, including the position for resigning supervisor, Sgt. Chris Sanderson. His last day is slated for February 29; he is accepting a post with the City of Raeford Police Department.

A freeze was levied on Davis' department on January 6, which was lifted on February 10.

According to County officials, after budget amendments requested by Davis for Y2k computer equipment updates and salary overtime soared over \$41,000 in January, it forced money to be withdrawn from the County's general fund to cover the shortfalls. McPhatter curtailed more spending by imposing the hiring freeze.

"I would say since the hiring freeze was placed that Sheriff Davis has saved several thousand dollars that was gained back to make up for money used from the general fund," County Personnel Director Shirley Rush said. "In his letter to us on January 13 to justify lifting the personnel freeze, Sheriff Davis said it was for the protection of the County," she said.

In the interim, three deputy supervisors and the former chief

deputy, Hubert Peterkin, resigned on January 19, complaining about the hiring freeze and mistreatment by Davis. These positions were never frozen, allowing Davis to conduct interviews. In spite of Davis promoting personnel internally to sergeant's status, it still left him in need of four more deputies, plus the former four posts left open since December. Sanderson's departure on Feb. 29 is the most recent resignation added to the tally.

Davis is currently seeking nine replacements for deputies who either resigned or were terminated. He has no immediate plans to hire a major to replace Peterkin, appointing Captain Thomas Carlton to serve as interim chief deputy and still remain as chief detective.

"I have plenty of excellent candidates," Davis said. "I already have over 35 qualified applicants on file," he said. "I'm conducting interviews."

Rush said Davis is trying to assess his department's needs, making certain the candidates are well qualified before he hires them.

"The hiring freeze was lifted because Mrs. McPhatter noticed an improvement and positive changes in the way the sheriff was handling his budget," Rush said. "He's taking his time now to go through the applications to pick and choose."

This week

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'Don't buy the images' says Owens page 2A

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Around Town



By SAM C. MORRIS
Contributing Editor

The weather seems to change from day to day. Saturday the thermometer registered over 70 degrees and on Monday the day started with the temperature near freezing. We can be thankful that we haven't had the damaging weather like was in Georgia last week. We did have a small amount of rain and some wind, but not enough to cause any damage. With the high fuel prices we don't need any freezing days.

The forecast for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday, calls for the highs on Wednesday and Thursday to be in the 60s and the lows in the 40s. Friday and Saturday the highs will be in (See AROUND, page 4A)

Antioch man shot to death in argument

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A perfect record with no homicides reported since Hoke Sheriff Jim Davis took office in December 1998 was marred by tragedy early Sunday morning after an Antioch man was shot, allegedly by his brother-in-law during an argument.

The victim, Dannie Leach Lowry, 25, of 209 Windlock Drive, was killed by a gunshot wound to the chest from a 380-caliber automatic weapon. According to Sheriff's records, Lowry was transported to Cape Fear Valley Hospital, succumbing in the ambulance but successfully revived by emergency medical technicians. However, he could not be revived at the hospital, a detective added.

Suspect Joshua Neill Cooper, 17, also of 209 Windlock Drive,

was arrested on February 20, still waiting at the scene of the crime when deputies responded to a 911 call. Cooper is charged with first-degree murder, which carries a penalty up to life-in-prison, including the death sentence. Cooper wasn't allowed bond due to the severity of the charge; he's incarcerated at Hoke County Jail still awaiting an arraignment.

According to Hoke's chief detective and interim chief deputy, Captain Thomas Carlton, two witnesses said an argument erupted between Lowry and Cooper, with the two men ending up outside their home in a field around 4:20 a.m. on February 20.

"It was dark and witnesses said Mr. Lowry had been consuming alcohol," Carlton said. "They continued to argue and as the suspect turned around to walk away from the victim, a witness (See SHOOTING, page 11A)



Narrow escape

Rescue and fire personnel work to free Patrick Gaddy from his car Monday afternoon. Gaddy escaped with no apparent injuries after his car left the road and struck two trees after he attempted to avoid an oncoming car. See the story on page 5A.

Photo by Pat Allen Wilson