The News-Journal

if it happened, it's news to us

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This week

Storytelling program back this spring page 3B

Hoke Tennis team victory is first in 10 years page 7A

Hip Hop artist raps about truth page 1B



Births	3B
Calendar	2B
Classifieds 11-1	2B
Deaths	3A
Editorials	2A
Legals6-	8B
Public Record	4A
Social News	3B
Sports	7 A
TV Listings 4-	

Around Town



By SAM C. MORRIS Contributing Editor

The weather for the past week has followed the same pattern as in previous weeks. We have warm days and then we will have cold days. One day last week the wind was like the "Lion of March." We still can't get the rain that is needed. I guess we should be thankful that we haven't had the heavy snow and tornadoes that have been in other parts of the nation. Monday morning the weather reports said there were hailstorms in some of the southern states. As I write this Monday morning it is cloudy and we could get some

The forecast for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday calls for the highs Wednesday and Thursday to be in the 60s and the lows in the 40s or 50s. Friday and Saturday the highs will be in the 70s or 60s and the lows in the 40s. There is a chance of rain on Thursday and Friday.

I received the following letter last week and I thought it would be of interest to many readers of this column.

"Dear Sam, my mother and sisters join me in sending appreciation for your column in The News-Journal. Through it we keep up with the people we knew when we lived in

Raeford. "Mother (Sadie McLean) is now living at Sardis Nursing Home, 5151 Sardis Road, (See AROUND, page 8A)

50 cents

Budget crisis forces county cutbacks

Hiring freeze, overtime ban blamed partly on loss of \$254,000 from state

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS Staff writer

after County Manager Bernice McPhatter presented commissioners with a plan on Monday night paring Hoke's budget by at least \$250,000 to avoid a

estimated the county could expe-The economic squeeze is on rience almost a half-million dollar shortfall because of "erodstate level.

McPhatter says local cutbacks will compensate for the state

"domino-affect" of diminished "holding money back because of from the fund balance to be apservices. Otherwise, McPhatter deficits." For Hoke, that totaled \$254,000. The lost revenue resulted from declining retail and manufacturing firms' sales, and ing" financial resources on the a Hoke school supplement required of \$193,000, she added.

"Our only other solution is to amend the budget with money

board.

However, dipping into the fund balance was not a favorable alternative, said Commission Vice Chairman Bobby Wright and Commissioner James A.

McPhatter's emergency plan propriated," McPhatter told the imposed a hiring freeze, eliminated overtime, established a moratorium on capital outlay purchases and abolished authorizing any purchase orders from all departments as of yesterday.

However, Al Schwarchher, (See CUTBACKS, page 8A)



Students in action

Top: West Hoke Middle School's Winterguard captured first place in competition recently and is shown performing for the school's PTO last week.

Bottom: 6th grade students Tiffany Purcell (left to right), Carmen Locklear, and Chris Graham see a helicopter from the inside after it landed at West Hoke Middle last week.

Stories about the events and others are on pages 4-6A.

School board eyes new district lines

Names McLauchlin School principal

By Kristin Guthrie Staff writer

Anticipating continued growth in the eastern part of the county, Hoke County Board of Education members last night discussed the possibilities of redistricting a portion of the county's middle and elementary aged students.

The board also made Ginger Johnson principal of McLauchlin Elementary School. She had been interim principal following the death of Dr. Jack Burgess in November. Prior to November, Johnson was assistant principal.

At the outset of the redistricting conversation, Superintendent Mitch Tyler said, "This is one of those topics you really don't want to talk about." He commented that no one really likes to talk about changes in their personal schedule, but growth mandates a change in this case.

According to current district lines, the predicted 2001-02 enrollment would place 956 students at East Hoke Middle and 557 at West Middle. In addition to these students, Tyler said they are expecting an extra 100 students to pop up as a result of the current growth taking part in the eastern part of the county.

Because of the growth, Tyler said, "We are maxing out of that school (East Hoke Middle)." Tyler proposed that the Board take action to alleviate the overcrowding with the least amount of interruption. The Board discussed making the new boundary for East Hoke Middle Rockfish Creek, running from the Cumberland County line to the Moore County line. Those students to the north and east of Rockfish Creek would attend East Middle, while those to the south and west would be in the West Middle district. This change would affect approximately 244 students currently districted for East Middle.

If the Board decides at its next meeting to go forth with this redistricting plan, 712 students would attend East and 801 would go to West Hoke Middle. Capacity at East is 884, and 812 at West based on current utilization of space.

Tyler said these lines would still allow some further growth at East, which he said he believes is inevitable based on growth over the last several years.

Since the Board was already investigating the possibilities of redistricting for the middle schools, it also glanced at the possibilities for the elementary schools. Board members discussed taking some 97 students from the Sandy Grove Elementary district and placing them back in the South Hoke Elementary district, where they were before the new school was opened. They also discussed adding (See SCHOOL DISTRICTS, page 7A)

Sandhills Mental Health faces consolidation despite accolades

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS Staff writer

center that serves Hoke County is pondering a proposed state plan to lump 350,000 clients under one county-operated program rather than keeping the mental health services independent. Receiving recent national accreditation by the Council of

Services, Sandhills Center for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and An area director for the mental health Substance Abuse Services was found to be 98.5 percent compliant in more than 26 of its different programs, and it was assessed on 1,100 standards.

> Michael Watson, area director for Sandhills told Hoke commissioners last month his organization opposed state leg-

Accreditation for Children and Family islation that would take management away from health professionals and place it in the hands of one county administration. He said Hoke would likely not be the headquarters selected in its region due to its smaller population. The Sandhills Center covers 210,000 clients in Moore, Hoke, Montgomery, Anson and Richmond counties, employs 325 people and operates on a \$25 million annual budget.

On Monday, commissioners supported Watson's concerns by signing a resolution seeking that supporters, consumers and families not be "disenfranchised" in the decision-making process. However, the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners favors the proposal that would control how local mental health, developmental disability and substance (See MENTAL HEALTH, page 7A)

Five Points Horse Park hosts 'Horse Trials'

BY VICTORIANA SUMMERS Staff writer

St. Patrick's Day weekend equestrian enthusiasts from as far away as Canada and England will view riders galloping cross country, fording streams from "high ground," plunging into water jumps on "low ground," and leaping over massive obstacles at the 11th annual Southern Pines Horse Trials. Coordinator Lafreda Williams, a Sandhills Conservancy board member, said the event will be staged at the new Five Points Horse Park in western Hoke for the first time.

Befitting this Irish holiday, 280 equestrian entrants unrivaled as "the best in the world" will be running in the rye on emerald green race courses March 16, 17 and 18 at Horace Walters and Montrose Roads.

(See HORSE TRIALS, page 8A)



Left to right: Credit Union Board members Kemp Crumpler and Betty Joyce Hasty, County Manager Bernice McPhatter, City Executive Sherry Lucas, Mayor Bob Gentry, and board members Kay McMillan, Darrin NcNeill and Dr. Bob Nelson.

Credit Union breaks ground

The North Carolina State Employees' Credit Union broke ground Tuesday for a 4,800 square foot building in Raeford.

The Raeford branch will move to Fulton Street and US 401 from its rented Teal Drive location where it's been in operation since

Sherry Lucas, vice-president and city executive, said the decision to build conformed to the Credit Union's policy, which is to rent a building until a branch's assets reaches \$30 million.

Lucas told a crowd gathered for the ground-breaking she hoped the building would be open in late fall.