

The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

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On vacation?
Hoke's top stories
are on the web
www.thenews-journal.com

This week

Couple's love
establishes
Chapel of Christ
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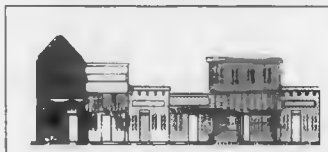
Our readers
speak out
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Woman wants
her rabbit back
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Around Town



By SAM C. MORRIS
Contributing Editor

The hot summer weather came to Raeford last week. A couple of days last week my thermometer showed a reading of 100 degrees. It was in the high 90s most of the other days. The heat index for most of three days was scored between 105 and 110 degrees.

In my younger days we had hot summer days and I can't remember feeling as hot as it was last week. Maybe it is because we have gotten used to air conditioning. Our bodies haven't become accustomed to hot weather. We did receive about 1/2 inch of rain last week, but other sections of the state were flooded with over five to six inches. Maybe our time will come; the land is very dry in the city and county.

The forecast for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday, calls for the highs to be in the high 80s or low 90s. The lows for the period will be in the 70s. We could get rain on Friday and Saturday.

I was sorry to hear of the death of Bill Kennedy. He was a veteran of World War II and then became a member of the local National Guard unit for many years. Maybe some of you will remember when he worked with Clarence Willis at his garage. Recently he had been attending church at The Raeford Presbyterian Church with Betty McDuffie. We of (See AROUND, page 6A)

Officials: Silver City grant not stalled

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

County officials are hoping to move forward with the \$1.4 million Silver City Sewer project, satisfying some Silver City residents who are circulating a written message around the county that criticized delays in installing the sewer system. In

the latest grant award, the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center announced yesterday it will provide a \$400,000 supplemental grant to help connect the sewer system in Silver City. This grant will be combined with a \$850,000 Community Development Block Grant that was awarded last year for infrastructure in Silver City, said engineer Stephanie

Closson of Hobbs, Upchurch & Associates, designers of the project.

"The Hoke County-Silver City Sewer Improvement Project is proceeding on schedule," Closson said. "The engineering design for the sewer extension is completed and will be submitted for final permitting this month.

"We anticipate being able to establish

a bid date for September. Some of these people in Silver City actually have raw sewage in their yards, and there is a severe need in the area."

Closson said Hobbs, Upchurch applied for the CDBG grant for Hoke County — without charging a fee — because the funding could not be obtained as originally (See SILVER CITY, page 11A)



A summer visitor (barely visible on the blossom) basks in the warm welcome of a sunflower.

East Hoke families fear for life living near Davis Bridge curve



Aggie Hales, left, and her sister Brenda Hardin protect their children from a hazardous curve on Davis Bridge Road near the Robeson County line.

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

For Aggie Hales and her sister Brenda Hardin the 20-year "nightmare" of residing on Davis Bridge Road next to a dangerous curve has never ended. Hales and Hardin said the crashing sounds of wrecks next to their rural home, and the constant "zoom-zoom-zoom" of speeding vehicles is unbearable. They are pleading for help from the N.C.

Department of Transportation to make the sloping curve close to the Robeson County line safer, but she said so far their requests have gone unanswered.

"We have experienced damage to fences, our yard, parked cars, trees, mailboxes, and our garage," Hales said. "We even had our water pump taken out by a vehicle that missed the curve, and they had no insurance. We had to hook onto county water just so we could have water to use."

Even the N.C. Highway Patrol rates the Rockfish/Davis Bridge roads among the most hazardous in Hoke County, estimating traffic has almost doubled during recent years. Speed limits are set at 45 miles per hour on the curve of the state road, and posted signs indicate an increase to 55 after the curve.

"The Highway Patrol would make a killing if they came down here to give out tickets for just one day," Hales said. "One day somebody is not going to walk away from one of these accidents, and it will be a real tragedy."

Limited visibility because of trees on adjoining property, angled pavement, and no warning arrow signs to indicate a curve, are factors that make it more treacherous, said Hales.

"So far, no one has died in the wrecks we have witnessed," said Hales, a doting grandmother who is afraid for her grandbabies to play outdoors. "There have been at least five wrecks in front of my home during the past two years—not counting others about a mile down near the county line where someone did die last year."

According to Hales, a drunk Raeford driver struck her son while he was riding his bicycle on Davis Bridge Road about 20 years ago.

(See DANGEROUS CURVE, page 11A)

School system gets grant for center

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

The Hoke Board of Education is the recipient of a \$125,000 grant to establish a Community Technology Learning Center (TLC) at West Hoke Middle School. Melynda Lamb is administering the program to create a family learning center in the school's computer lab and media center on week nights and Saturdays.

The TLC program will target at-risk students, says Lamb. Students will be invited to participate who may not have computers in their homes or who have no one to help them hone their computer skills. "Bridging the gap" is the way she describes the opportunities provided by the grant. "If they don't have the resources at home, we are going to give them every opportunity to use them."

The WHMS computer lab and the media center will each accommodate 30 people. "We hope to have both utilized," Lamb says.

At the beginning of the program, the learning center will be open two nights during the week and on Saturday mornings, Lamb says. The schedule can be adjusted if demand calls for it, she adds.

A certified teacher and teacher's assistant will staff the family learning center plus a security guard will open and close the center each night, Lamb says.

The funding for TLC comes from the U.S. Technology Literacy Challenge Fund and is distributed through the N.C. Dept. of Public Instruction. Goals of TLC grants are defined:

- to create a safe haven for families;
- to help families reach their full academic (See SCHOOL GRANT, page 8A)

Ultimatum given to utilities director, 'resign or be fired'

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke's new utilities director, hired to supervise water usage and billing and to maintain the regional water systems, was suspended last week. After further evaluation on Monday, George Hughes was told by County Manager Bernice McPhatter he has a choice of "resigning" or his employment will be terminated immediately, said County Attorney Neil Yarborough.

According to Commissioner Charles V. Daniels, Hughes was initially told he could remain on the job until August 13 while commissioners debated his continued employment. He was granted an administrative leave with pay, but when more problems occurred in the utilities department that offer was withdrawn, Daniels said.

Hughes' suspension came as complaints from citizens flooded county administration.

"Bernice McPhatter said she had no idea he estimated customers' water bills and did not have their meters read one month and then charged them the next month," Daniels said of massive mix-ups. "Mr. Hughes is not even a certified engineer, and we just found out he had never worked in a supervisory capacity before — only in administration.

"Apparently, he must have mis-read the meters."

In a special commissioners meeting held on Monday morning to discuss Hughes' status, no action was taken during a closed personnel session. When *The News-Journal* sought further details about (See ULTIMATUM, page 11A)

NCACC elects Leach to serve at state level

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer



James A. Leach

Commissioner James A. Leach was elected as a state representative at the annual N. C. Association of County Commissioners' state convention held in Fayetteville last weekend. Leach, elected from among 1,000 of his peers, will represent Hoke, Robeson, Bladen, and Scotland counties, members of District Five. He will lead the four counties during a two-year term, serving as a liaison for promoting the counties' well-being and economic growth at the state level.

"I believe this is a golden opportunity to represent these counties for the statewide association," Leach said. "It is a great honor that my board and the other county commissioners had the trust and confidence in me to accept this task.

"I hope I can live up to their expectations."

Since 1911, Leach is one of only three Hoke elected officials to serve as a representative for the state association. His predecessors included the late commissioners L.E. McLaughlin Jr. and John (See LEACH ELECTED, page 12A)

Woman arrested in death

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

An arrest has been made in the slaying of a Vass man Aug. 8. Freda L. Slocomb was arrested Friday in the death of Thomas Lamont Shields Jr. and was charged with voluntary manslaughter, a felony, Sheriff Jim Davis said.

Shields' death in Hoke's Harmony Heights Mobile Home Park followed a brawl. A history of violence between the couple and mitigating circumstances ruled out a stiffer charge for first or second degree murder, said Major Thomas Carlton, chief deputy at the Hoke Sheriff's Office.

Slocomb, 29, of 127 Dakota Drive, appeared before a Hoke magistrate, and was placed on a \$10,000 unsecured bond. Carlton said her first court appearance was held on Monday in District Court. "She was not surprised," said Carlton. "She expected to be charged, and she did not deny she did anything. When she came home to her trailer and found Mr. Shields inside, she was accompanied by a girlfriend who left. Ms. Slocomb had other options available to her such as leaving, or calling 911, but she did not."

According to 911 reports, one of Slocomb's relatives later called in the report of Shield's death to law officers after Slocomb left her (See ARRESTED, page 12A)