

The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

No. 21 Vol. 94

50 cents

Wednesday, August 22, 2001

On vacation?
Hoke's top stories
are on the web
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This week



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Around Town



By SAM C. MORRIS
Contributing Editor

The much needed rain finally came to Raeford over the weekend. Saturday and Sunday we received from one and three-quarters to two inches of rain. Maybe we were lucky but we didn't have high winds and hail with the storm. Many places had power out because of downed trees or tree limbs. The temperature also dropped from the 90s to the 80s. There were smiles on many faces on Sunday morning at church because of the rain.

The forecast for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday, calls for the highs to be in the 90s and the lows in the 70s. As I write this column Monday morning there isn't any rain in the forecast for these dates.

Last week I wrote about the upcoming revival or lay revival at The Raeford Presbyterian Church in September. The date and time for these services are September 16 through 19. There will be a service each evening beginning at 7 p.m. Dr. Cortez Cooper, a former pastor of the church, will be the speaker for these services. Everyone is invited to attend, so mark your calendar for these dates.

In this column of June 20, I wrote about the closing of the recycling place at the shopping center. This recycling (See AROUND, page 6A)

Commissioners ask for outside audit

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

Two commissioners chose not to vote after Commissioner Charles Daniels motioned to request an outside agency audit of Hoke County's financial records. The lack of votes by Tony Hunt and James Leach were recorded as "yeas"

after Commissioner Bobby Wright seconded Daniels' motion and they and Chairman Cleo Bratcher voted in favor. Daniels' motion was not on the agenda and came at the end of a lengthy meeting, part of which was a closed session to discuss "personnel and legal matters." He said he made the motion in a written form so there would be "no misunderstanding."

Daniels' motion directed County Attorney Neil Yarborough request District Attorney or the N.C. Local Government Commission perform an outside audit of the financial records. "I am requesting that a full and complete audit be performed of Hoke County's financial records," Daniels statement read.

Daniels referred to "criticism" in the news media. "It's time to get everything out in the open. Let the chips fall where they may," he said yesterday.

Commenting that "everybody is unhappy," Wright stated, "We need to bring the county back together. I think this is the way to do it."

Hunt pointed out that the county books (See AUDIT, page 9A)



Bike safety day

Raeford Police Officer Shelly King gives Tabitha Tyler, 3, an assist after she won a new bike at the 3rd annual helmet safety fun day sponsored by the Hoke Health Center and Raeford police Saturday. Participants learned about bike safety, took part in a bike rodeo and were treated to games and food; six bikes and 18 helmets were given away. Tabitha's sister Donna won a helmet. They are the daughters of Maria Wilson and Don Tyler.

Sheriff writes President about Hoke 'corruption'

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

Sheriff Jim Davis has written President George W. Bush asking for federal intervention regarding what he calls public corruption by county management officials in Hoke County.

Davis began his three-page correspondence to the White House, dated August 14, "It is with great trepidation that I write you today."

Davis referred to an "inspiring message" the President delivered in Washington D.C. to a conference of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives. He noted the President recognized the New Orleans police chief and that officer's efforts in successfully addressing "the corruption and criminal activities imbedded in that city's law enforcement operations and other governmental structures."

The sheriff wrote, "Like the former city of New Orleans, Louisiana; Hoke County, North Carolina abounds with public corruption and other criminal activity; mostly drug related."

Davis referred to his election in 1998 as a "very violent, volatile and tumultuous campaign." He said he secured federal grants for law enforcement operations that would have established a drug task force consisting of four new deputies, the

upgrade of computer technology for the sheriff's office and a rural collaboration project between the sheriff's office and community-based organizations.

"However, the grants were compromised by Hoke County officials in an effort to suppress the law enforcement operations of the Hoke County Sheriff's Office and prevent the investigations of

illegal narcotic activity as well as other criminal enterprises," the sheriff wrote. "A conspiracy was launched to misuse and mismanage federal grant money,

undermined my agency and remove me from the office of sheriff in the process."

The sheriff said he had sought help from the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Community Relations Service, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of N.C. and the Office of the Inspector General for the Dept. of Justice.

With the exception of the Inspector General's Office, "no one will assist this sheriff in addressing the root cause of this criminal conduct," Davis said. The Inspector General's Office assisted with the audit of two federal grants for the sheriff's office, found the county had misused and mismanaged the money and required the county to repay more than \$93,000 in grant money plus interest. "No evidence of intentional fraud" was found, (See SHERIFF'S LETTER, page 7A)

Lightning strikes Antioch shelter, injures farm workers

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

"It actually picked us up like we were rag dolls," Danny Walters says about the lightning strike that sent him and two other employees to area hospitals.

The lightning hit occurred shortly before 3 p.m. Monday as Walters and about ten others were putting tobacco in boxes in a packing shed just off the Old Wire Road side of Walter Gibson Road in the Antioch community.

A thunderstorm moved through the area, and it had stopped raining, Walters said, when the lightning hit in the vicinity of the shelter. Those who came in contact

with the lightning were thrown about 15 feet by the electricity, he said.

Walters, who is 51, was taken by ambulance to Cape Fear Valley Medical Center, where he was treated and released. Complaining that he was "still sore," Walters, who has farmed in Hoke County all his life, was back at work Tuesday.

However, Steve Locklear, 30, who was also taken to Cape Fear Valley, and Glenn Hunt, 57, who was taken to FirstHealth Moore Regional Hospital, had not returned to work yesterday. Neither was admitted to the hospital.

Walters said the lightning strike split an 8" x 8" pole. He said he felt very lucky. (See LIGHTNING, page 9A)



Workers were under this shelter when lightning struck. The bolt cracked an 8 X 8 timber (left) supporting the roof of the shelter in its upper left corner (right).



Michelle Nolte looks on as daughter Michelle prepares to sign the Gear Up pledge.

Basketball's Gil McGregor urges students on to excellence

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

"Here are the roots that I came from and I tell it everywhere I go," Hoke County native Gilbert McGregor told parents, teachers and students at a Gear Up NC kickoff meeting at West Hoke Middle School last week. He said Gear Up might help other students achieve goals that will take them, too, around the world.

A former Wake Forest Demon Deacon basketball star who played professionally in the U.S. and Europe, McGregor was at WHMS to encourage students to achieve academic excellence. McGregor is currently a NBA broadcaster with the Charlotte Hornets and is known as the "stay in school" ambassador, speaking

at schools and addressing the importance of students' completing their education and staying away from drugs and violence.

It was standing room only in the WHMS gym when McGregor made his pitch. He said the top 10 percent and the bottom 10 percent of students in classrooms get attention, and Gear Up will reach the remaining 80 percent. "Gear Up will not let students be left behind," he said.

Under Gear Up, students sign pledges to stay on a track of scholastic achievements that will qualify them for college. The program also requires parental involvement.

McGregor urged parents to support their children. "You support your children (See GEAR UP, page 7A)

Contract's aim is 3-year economic action plan

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

The Raeford-Hoke Economic Development Commission has entered into an agreement with a Raleigh economic development group to develop a three-year action plan.

The economic development commission voted at their July meeting to sign an agreement with the Sanford Holshouser Business Development Group.

The action plan will build on the Hoke County Strategic Plan report released in 1994 that was drawn up (See CONTRACT, page 9A)