

The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

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50 cents

Wednesday, December 19, 2001

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

This week



Hoke has tree farm
page 1B

Horse runs
into moving car
page 7A

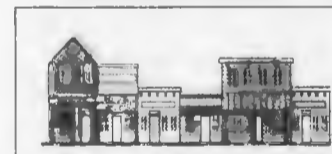
Athlete excels
up north
6A

The News-Journal
will be closed
Dec. 24-25!

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Around Town



By SAM C. MORRIS
Contributing Editor

It doesn't feel like winter will come in this week. It is cool in the early morning but it warms up during the day. My wife punched off the reading on my rain gauge and it registered .37 of an inch. This is the amount of rain that fell in the past week. As I write this Monday morning, the forecast calls for rain Monday night. It would be nice if it rained all day Tuesday.

The forecast for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday, calls for the high Wednesday to be in the 50s and the low in the 40s. Thursday the high will be in the 60s and the low in the 30s. Friday and Saturday the highs will be in the low 60s or high 50s and the lows in the low 30s or high 20s. There isn't any rain in the forecast.

Each year we'll send Christmas cards to our friends and relatives. This is the time of year we expect joy and peace. This year two cards sent to a friend of Mary Alice and her uncle, were returned, as both had died in the past year.

A card that was sent to an old Army buddy brought back a card from his wife, with an obituary from a newspaper.

The Army buddy was Wade Taylor of Kannapolis. The death notice stated that Wade had died on October 30, 2001. (See AROUND, page 6A)

Land purchase angers local leaders

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke leaders are protesting that the endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers have secured a place to nest in Hoke while Hoke loses \$5,000 of annual taxes

plus the potential loss of developing a residential or golf community that would have generated more revenue. The N.C. Department of Transportation purchased 2,400 acres of prime long leaf pine acreage in Hoke on November 14 for \$5.3 million without telling county commis-

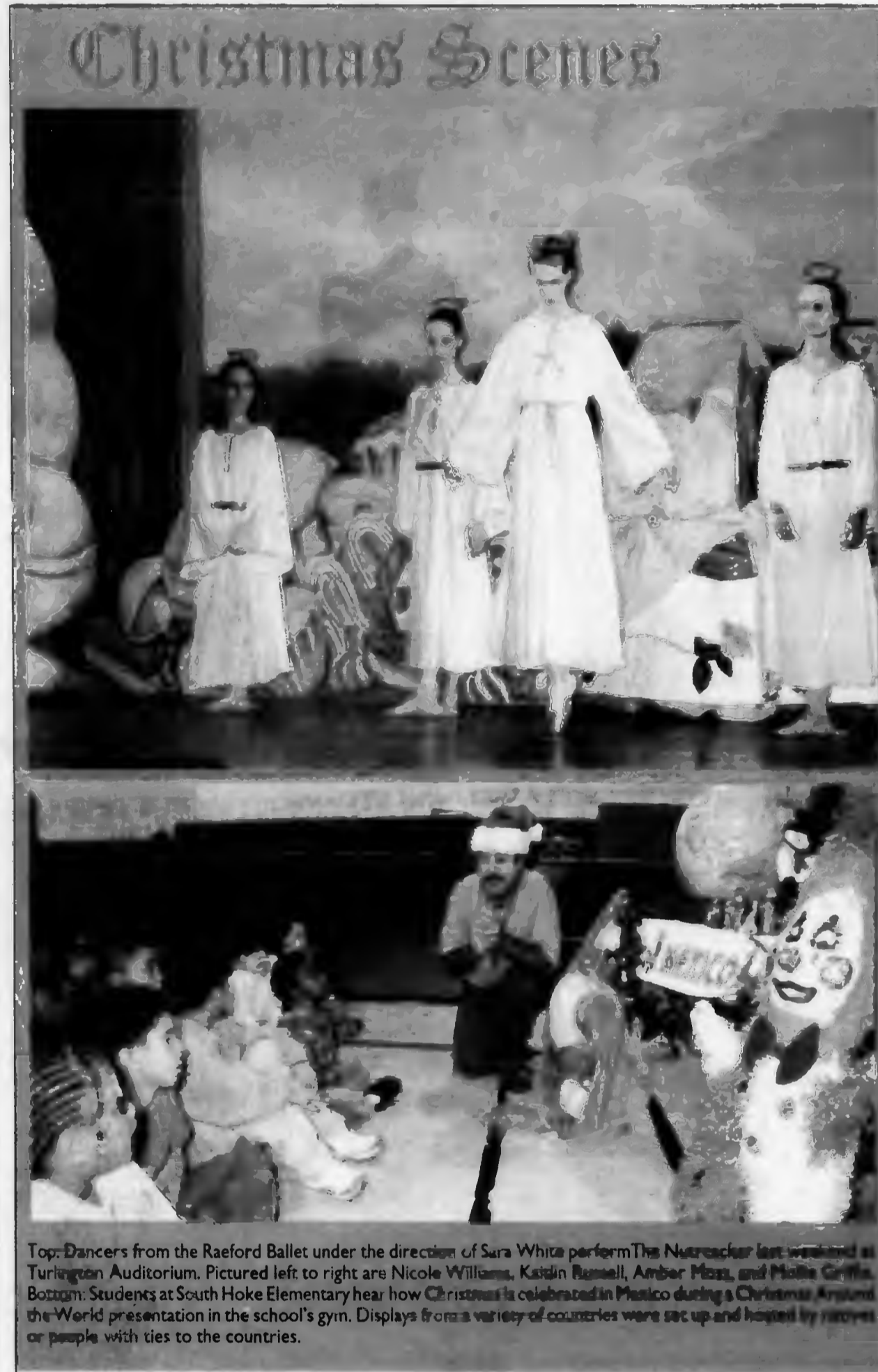
sioners, or asking for their approval, said Commission Chairman Tony Hunt.

"We are contacting our county attorney to see if the DOT violated any state statutes by finalizing this sale without informing us," Hunt said. "I cannot believe the DOT officials did not say a word

about the deal being completed.

"We need to see what recourse we have."

Hunt said commissioners, supported by the Raeford Hoke Economic Development Board, are urging citizens and county (See LAND DEAL, page 10A)



Top: Dancers from the Raeford Ballet under the direction of Sara White perform The Nutcracker last weekend at Turlington Auditorium. Pictured left to right are Nicole Williams, Kaitlin Russell, Amber Pizz, and Malia Griffin. Bottom: Students at South Hoke Elementary hear how Christmas is celebrated in Mexico during a Christmas Around the World presentation in the school's gym. Displays from a variety of countries were set up and hosted by natives or people with ties to the countries.

Rush takes job as probe continues

Staff changes announced

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

An unperturbed Shirley Rush, Hoke's finance director, officially accepted a lesser position as temporary assistant transportation director on Monday night after a one-hour closed session with county commissioners. Rush, previously suspended with pay since October 12, was supposed to return to work yesterday in her new capacity.

Rush was placed on administrative leave with pay shortly after former county manager Bernice McPhatter resigned on October 11 under suspicion of embezzlement. The State Bureau of Investigation is still conducting a criminal inquiry into the allegations of misuse of county funds regarding McPhatter.

"I am not concerned," Rush said. "I am just taking all this in stride. I would rather wait until they (the SBI) have all this cleared up before I return to the finance department anyway."

"This will give me a fresh start."

The board's decision to temporarily remove Rush came after scrutinizing whether Rush may have been aware of McPhatter's alleged involvement in mismanagement of county funds for personal use. Rush remained out of work for two months while the SBI has continued conducting its criminal probe into misappropriation allegations against McPhatter.

Rush says she does not think there is any conflict on her part, and repeated she has done nothing improper.

"When you have the Lord on your side, you do not need to worry," Rush said. "It was the commissioners' decision to put me on administrative leave, but now they apparently want me to return to work until all this is straightened out."

Rush, 50, has served the county since 1977, credited with 14 years of accounting experience working with Hoke. She said she is well experienced to resume her role as head of finance.

"I am well qualified," Rush said. "I hope to retire as finance director someday. I love working with figures."

Commission Chairman Tony Hunt announced the board's decision publicly in placing Rush in an alternate job.

"Thank you Shirley," Hunt said. "I am sure you will (See RUSH JOB, page 9A)

Sheriff candidate Peterkin's case comes to trial today

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The traffic violation case against Hoke sheriff candidate Hubert Peterkin is scheduled for trial in Hoke's district court today. On October 16, Peterkin said he was stopped "unlawfully" by Sheriff Jim Davis. Hoke District Attorney Kristy McMillan Newton withdrew from prosecuting the case early on because of a conflict of interest.

According to Newton's previous assessment, she is a "potential and likely" witness in the case. Peterkin called her at the District Attorney's office from his cell phone when Davis initiated the traffic stop. Newton said she was on the line with Peterkin during the incident.

The 29th Prosecutorial District has ac-

cepted responsibility for prosecuting the case today. District Attorney Jeff Hunt has assigned David Norris, assistant district attorney of the 29th, to proceed with the case. A source also disclosed that a district court judge is also being brought in from another jurisdiction in order to hear the case at the Hoke County Courthouse.

Peterkin was reportedly ticketed by

former Deputy Robert Schulte at the request of Davis. Schulte resigned the first week of November from the Sheriff's Office. Schulte charged Peterkin with careless and reckless driving and failing to stop for blue lights and a siren. Schulte later dispensed another ticket for speeding to Peterkin that was delivered to his home after the traffic stop.

(See PETERKIN CASE, page 10A)

Raeford weightlifter Croft wins world titles

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Some people want to take off a few pounds, but powerlifter Bill Croft of Raeford has a goal to add as many pounds to a bar as he can without injury. An accomplished athlete, Croft, a 1981 graduate of Hoke County High School, recently won three world championships in the Amateur Athletic Union competition held in Nevada. In spite of a deformity where one leg is shorter than the other, family support and determination have made him a winner, Croft said.

"Lifting is a part of my life," Croft said. "I could not imagine not being able to do it. It is a discipline like getting up in the morning."

"It would be like not eating to me if I

did not do it."

Croft was honored as the 2001 AAU World Champion in a triple win, receiving first-place trophies in the Submaster Division, Open Division and the Lifetime Division in deadlifting.

"I lifted 568 pounds of iron weights in the winning competition for the world," Croft said. "You must lift the bar with the weights and the judges tell us when to descend with it."

"You cannot just drop it. The challenge is you are defying gravity to put 600 pounds in the wrong direction."

Croft has dedicated his life to his family, powerlifting and teaching respiratory therapy as an associate professor at Sandhills Community College in Pinehurst.

He said he is particularly proud of his

accomplishments because he has achieved it in a drug-free athletic association. The AAU forbids use of steroids, drug enhancers or over-the-counter medications, he added.

Croft said he enjoys the exhilarating thrill of competition, but it is never enough. He always believes in giving his best. Croft competed with other lifters ages 20 to 60 for the world championships.

"I won the world's best lifter category for pound per pound body weight compared to the weights I lifted," Croft said. "It was quite an accomplishment."

Croft started lifting weights when he was just 14 years of age. Growing up in Ashley Heights, his mother learned early on he had a physical handicap, but never told him until he was in his 20s.

(See WEIGHTLIFTER, page 9A)



Croft shows off his word class trophies.