



e-NC initiative

A large crowd of Hoke residents turned out last night for a forum on constructing a technological infrastructure in the county with high-speed internet access as its focus. Donna Sullivan (right) used slides to talk about possible benefits of such an effort before the crowd broke into three groups for more intensive sessions. In one, Mary Patterson (below) learns to surf the net from Marianne Corins in the West Hoke Middle computer lab. The lab is open regularly for public use as part of the project.



Teen sought in connection with murder

Raeford-Hoke Crimestoppers and the Raeford Police Dept. are seeking the public's help in locating 19-year-old Jeremiah Baldwin, a black male who resides in the Doc Brown Road and Harris Lane areas. Police and Crimestoppers are

also seeking any witnesses who saw the shooting that occurred Wednesday afternoon, January 23, 2002 that left one person dead and two others injured. Any information leading to the arrest of suspects or information

that helps solve this crime could result in a cash reward, according to Robert Crull, president of the local Crimestoppers organization. Contact the Raeford PD at 875-4251; or Crimestoppers at (910) 308-8700.

County Manager (Continued from page 1A)

manager to "not be more" than \$60,000 with Wright supporting him. However, Bratcher, Leach and Hunt defeated that recommendation. "I did not think it was fair to ask a county manager to be compensated less than some of our department heads," Leach said. "We requested Mr. Hunt to negotiate with him over the salary, which must not exceed \$80,486 earned by the previous manager."

Leach commended Wood as his first choice to lead the county in the number one executive position. "Mike Wood is top-notch for the job," Leach said. "Mr. Wood successfully took this county from being broke with only a three percent fund balance, and increased our fund balance to 30 percent when he left."

"He landed the job because of his extensive experience in county government," Leach said he has worked with Wood before and he thinks the board will learn to enjoy working with him. "He is a family man — a church man — and with those qualities he can only do what is right for the county," Leach said. "We are looking forward to a bright future."

An affable Wood received a congratulatory welcome from staff yesterday, saying he felt right at home. "Bayonet was a tremendous expe-

rience," Wood said. "I had worked with government for 22 years. I thought it was important to experience the business world, and I learned a great deal."

"I can bring that experience back here and I think it will make me a better manager."

Wood said he briefly reviewed the county's financial forecast. "The county is in a good financial state," Wood said. "We are fortunate the county is growing, and our tax revenues are increasing."

"We must continue as strongly as possible to control additional spending," Wood said he does not foresee any drastic changes in personnel or other procedures. He said he is confident with the support of commissioners and staff the transition will flow smoothly.

"I think Don Steed has done such a magnificent job," Wood said. "His arrival elevated the morale of the organization."

"I have spoken to several department heads, and I have been impressed with the things he has done."

Leach said he would also like to personally thank Don Steed for his service and contributions to the county during the past months.

Wright and Daniels supported hiring Olivarez, insisting she was the "best" person for the job. Olivarez is a certified public accountant, handling all the finances and computer innovations for Hoke's school system. She has served for seven years as finance officer, providing financial guidance for the Board of Education.

"I think she would have been best for Hoke County," Wright said. "I am disappointed we did not get enough votes to hire her. She would have been a credit to our citizens."

Daniels said he preferred Olivarez's professional background over Wood. He said Olivarez could have represented the public well.

Wood was picked from an array of 34 applications that were narrowed down to five candidates. One person withdrew their application, leaving only four choices. The commissioners strongly considered the qualifications of Keisha R. Gill, an employee of North Carolina A&T State University, and Paul Bjorkman, who has served as a county manager in Georgia and South Carolina. However, their final votes focused only on Wood and Olivarez.

Wood's tenure with Hoke since 1976 included work as an environmental health sanitarian and environmental health coordinator. He was promoted to the health director's slot in 1989, working in that post until 1993. Wood served as Hoke's county manager from May 1993 until August 1998 when he resigned to accept a position at Bayonet in Puppy Creek.

During his employment at Bayonet, he was responsible for personnel management, budgeting, marketing, receivables and real estate.

Wood, a 1971 graduate of Hoke County High School, earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of North Carolina-Pembroke in 1976. He received advanced training at the UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Public Health.

Wood resides in Raeford with his wife, Carol, and their three daughters. The county has been advertising for a permanent county manager to fill the vacancy for the past three months. Criteria included experience in county government and holding at least a four-year college degree.

McPhatter resigned on October 11, and is being investigated by the State Bureau of Investigation in connection with embezzlement allegations.

Retired Hoke School superintendent Don Steed has been serving as interim county manager since November 5. He volunteered to assist the county temporarily until a permanent manager was hired.

Preserve (Continued from page 1A)

United States. Hoke's longleaf pine forest is considered one of North Carolina's and the nation's "natural treasures," according to Lyndo Tippet, state transportation secretary. "I am an environmental champion," Tippet said in his keynote address. "I can remember when you could step out your back door into a wooded area."

"It is our responsibility to protect tracts such as this. I have made it one of my top goals."

Bordering Highway 211 in western Hoke and adjoining the Fort Bragg reservation, the conservation lands were acquired by the N.C. Department of Transportation during two years of negotiations. The project was spearheaded by Tippet, Bill Gilmore, Roger Sheets and biologist Hal Bain of the DOT.

According to Tippet, the lands being protected will help mitigate impacts of future highway projects for Hoke, Scotland and other counties in the region. He also said the DOT is in negotiations with Hoke's government to address economic concerns in losing tax revenue from the woodpecker preserve.

"By opening this property up to limited public use, we can help pre-

serve this natural habitat so the public can enjoy the property," Tippet said. "What is good for the birds and is good for the pines is also good for North Carolinians."

Tippet commended the leadership of Hoke and the City of Raeford for making the environmental project possible. He said the property will be turned over to the Conservancy for long-term management after a land survey is completed. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will also serve as a consultant, he added.

"I am confident we will improve the habitat of the existing five colonies of woodpeckers and increase the colonies in the future," Tippet said. "We want our children to see something other than a picture of the woodpecker someday."

Tippet praised the efforts of Katherine Skinner, executive director of the Conservancy's branch in North Carolina.

"We are pleased to receive it," Skinner said of their management of the land known as The Calloway Tract. "This is Mother Nature at her finest. This is a breakthrough today for us. We can match our short term and long term goals with those of the DOT, and Fort Bragg's goals to pre-

vent encroachment of homes too close to the base, and to look at more training area."

Tippet and Skinner said goals for the land's use will be to encourage the five colonies of woodpeckers to flourish. They hope to transfer colonies from the outer loop area that is currently being constructed in Fayetteville.

According to Tippet, the red-cockaded woodpecker is the only woodpecker known to nest in live pine trees. It prefers preparing a nest, which takes almost two years to build, only in longleaf pines 30 years old or more.

"There is one dominant male and female in the colony who mate," Tippet said. "They mate for life. The point of our studying animals is it helps us to have a deeper understanding of our own behavior."

Other guest speakers praised the efforts of the DOT.

"I cannot think of a better place to be other than here with you today to celebrate this great environmental achievement," said Colonel Tad Davis, Garrison Commander of Fort Bragg, who attended the ceremony.

Davis said Fort Bragg's environmental headquarters planted 151,000 longleaf pine seedlings last year. Mil-

itary environmentalists also constructed 226 artificial cavities in pine trees in order for 123 red-cockaded woodpecker clusters to proliferate.

"The increase in our population is good news for our economy, but not for our wildlife," said John Pechmann, chair of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. "That is why we are so excited about our partnership here today. This land will be open to the public for hunting, but to also ensure wildlife resources will be protected."

"This is a dream in the making," said G.R. Kindley, emcee from the N.C. Board of Transportation. "It gives us an opportunity to go back to the place we were born in the words of the famous Walt Whitman."

After the dedication ceremony, a 30-minute walking tour through the wildlife refuge was conducted by The Conservancy.

Among state dignitaries present, were Senators Aaron Plyler, Bill Purcell and Tony Rand.

Also, Hoke leaders, including Raeford Mayor Bob Gentry, Raeford City Manager Mike McNeill, County Manager Mike Wood, Commissioner Bobby Wright, Executive Director Donald Porter of the Raeford Hoke Economic Development Board, A.K. "Dooie" Leach, chairman of Hoke's Democratic party and chairman of the RHED, and retired district attorney Jean Powell.

Also, LaFreda Williams and Roger Serrist of the Carolina Park Horse Foundation at Five Points.

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