

The News-Journal

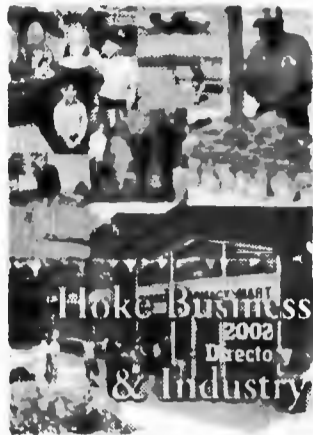
If it happened, it's news to us

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Wednesday, February 27, 2002

INSIDE!



This week

She looks after community's spiritual well-being page 1B

Retired Green Beret talks on CNN Live page 10A

Teenager killed in head-on crash page 8A

Lady Bucks take conference title page 7A

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Around Town



By SAM C. MORRIS
Contributing Editor

The weather is still going from hot to cold, according to weather forecasters. This is the warmest winter on record. I also believe it is the driest time for this time of year. We have had one snow and very little rain. We could be seeing plenty of insects this summer. Maybe this cold weather that is in the upcoming forecast will help.

The forecast for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday, calls for highs Wednesday and Thursday to be in the 40s and the lows in the 20s. Friday and Saturday the highs will be in the 50s and the lows in the 40s. There is no rain in the forecast.

Walter Coley came by the house last week and he brought some of his famous peppermint ice cream and some pound cake. He said he breaks up peppermint candy to make the ice cream. It was delicious.

He also brought me a brochure on the National D-Day Memorial that is being constructed in Bedford, Virginia. This memorial is being constructed in Bedford because the National Guard unit from that place lost 21 young men on D-Day, according to the brochure. The loss of 21 young men in a community of 3,200 gave Bedford the highest pro-
(See AROUND, page 10A)

County faces huge budget shortfall

State cuts, Medicaid deficit, tax losses conspire

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A massive state shortfall and a Medicaid deficit exceeding \$1.2 million of Hoke's current budget has county commissioners scrambling for solutions

and that estimate does not include all projected shortages for the 2002-2003 fiscal year.

Thus far, the board has rejected any hiring freeze. There has been no mention

of a staff reduction or future tax increase to ease the financial loss, according to the commissioners.

In the first six months of this year compared to last year, there was an increase in spending of \$900,000," County Manager Mike Wood said. "Our debt is also higher this year than in the past."

According to Wood, Hoke was previously in a "break-even" position — assuming everything would have gone as planned. With the unexpected shortfalls, Wood said the county's balanced budget for 2001-2002 became insufficient.

"We hear reports of problems in neighboring counties," Wood said. "We hear reports of problems in neighboring counties." (See BUDGET SHORTFALL, page 8A)

Paintball Tournament draws hundreds



Painting the Town

Some 230 paintball players on 46 teams gathered over the weekend in Hoke County for the first tournament of the Carolina Field Owner Association season. Players from as far away as Georgia pumped thousands of rounds of paintballs per game at each other on four fields at Wildwood, off Philippi Church Road. Several hundred friends and family members gathered to watch the action.



Hoke Commissioner James A. Leach files for the N.C. House on Tuesday with Caroline Shook, board of elections director.

Leach files to run for N.C. House

Sheriff, commission candidates file

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke Commissioner James A. Leach made history yesterday as the first known African American candidate from Hoke to run for N.C. House of Representative. His filing comes as a Friday at noon deadline for local election filing nears.

Leach is running in the 48th House district against incumbent Rep. Donald Bonner, a Democrat, of Rowland, according to the elections office.

"After serving in local government for the past ten years in our county, I know the needs and I feel the hurt of our taxpayers when funds are cut off at the state level," Leach said. "I want to make a difference."

"I want to be a voice and vision for the people."
(See LEACH, FILING, page 10A)

Community buries 'angel in blue'

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

The church was filled to capacity Friday afternoon as friends, family, fellow officers, and a community said farewell to Sgt. Clifford Stauffer Jr., a Raeford police officer who was killed in a traffic accident February 18.

Law enforcement officers came as far away as Raleigh for the funeral of the big 33-year-old man who was remembered for giving love and service to his family and the community.

The Rev. Rich Vaughan, who spoke at the funeral held at Raeford United Methodist Church, said the service was to "celebrate the life of a good

young man."

Cliff Stauffer was "not an ordinary man; he was unique in the eyes of those who worked with him," the minister said.

Stauffer was not only a police officer but also volunteered as an emergency medical technician with the Hoke County Rescue Squad. "Cliff's life was not short, it was full," Vaughan said. "What he lacked in quantity was filled with quality."

Vaughan spoke of a life filled with love for his family, friends and co-workers. He said life is often measured by the "words spoken about you when no one knows you are listening."

His former partner, Patrolman Robert Caughey, (See FUNERAL, page 8A)



Officers lined the sidewalk as the coffin of Sgt. Cliff Stauffer is borne from the church.

Judge Manning sends mixed signals in education lawsuit

Wake Superior Court Judge Howard Manning agreed with attorney Robert Spearman that good teachers hold the key in providing a sound, basic education for North Carolina students. Yet Manning said he remained unconvinced funding for higher salaries and more school equipment is the answer. He will likely issue a final ruling this spring on a lawsuit filed by Hoke County against the state, said Robert Tiller, co-counsel with Spearman and partners in the Raleigh

law firm of Parker, Poe, Adams and Bernstein.

"It is a tough decision that will be far-reaching for the future of public educa-

"I agree 100 percent that good teachers are the key, ... when we look in our file, there is zero applications."

— Mitch Tyler, Hoke Schools Superintendent

"We are hopeful that Judge Manning will rule in our clients' favor," Tiller said.

The legal team presented final argu-

ments to Manning last Friday in a hearing, representing Hoke as the lead school district in a civil lawsuit for "low-wealth" counties. They also represent Robeson, Cumberland, Halifax and Vance counties in the suit, suing the state of North Carolina for allegedly failing to provide at-risk students with a sound, basic education.

The legal battle, followed by a trial, has been waged by Hoke against the state since 1994 when the N.C. Supreme Court (See EDUCATION SUIT, page 8A)

McPhatter seeks retirement money

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Former Hoke county manager Bernice McPhatter was apparently less than 10 years away from qualifying for an early retirement when she resigned on October 11 amid controversy. While the State Bureau of Investigation continues its (See MCPHATTER, page 9A)

McPhaul is unaffiliated candidate for commissioner

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

In announcing his candidacy for one of three available commissioner seats, Scurlock resident Freddie McPhaul said he is running as a citizen for county commissioner "with emphasis on 'citizen.'"

"My stand is that county officials are appointed by the citizens to serve the citizens, and the citizens should always have input on any matter that will

affect their communities either positive or negative," says McPhaul. "Citizens should not be shut out of the decision-making process."

McPhaul thinks common sense is the main ingredient missing from the county decision-making process. "Simple decisions should not be made so technical that people don't understand them."

McPhaul says the flexibility of not belonging to a party appeals to him. He plans to run as

an unaffiliated candidate and will need the signatures of 700 registered Hoke voters in order to be certified to run in the general election this fall. His name will not be listed with candidates on the May 7 primary.

"I will not be a candidate that will play the proverbial three monkeys: 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil,'" McPhaul says. "I will not be a party to the good old boy network. We should deal with issues based (See MCPHAUL, page 10A)



Freddie McPhaul