

# The News-Journal

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50¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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

## This week



Tyler memorial scholarship set up  
page 4A

Adorations, Joy Grim to perform here  
page 9A

Autry's peach stand opens  
page 10A

## Index

Births .....	2B
Calendar .....	3B
Classifieds .....	6-7B
Deaths .....	6A
Editorials .....	2-3A
Legals .....	4-5B
Public Record .....	6A
Religion .....	9A
Socials .....	2B
Sports .....	5A

## Filing for school board opens with 5

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

A flurry of activity occurred when the filing period opened on July 1 for three Hoke Board of Education seats available in the upcoming election. In the course of nine days, three incumbents and two other candidates — all Democrats — have

announced they will run in the non-partisan category during the November election.

"To have all incumbents and one challenger file in the first week, and another candidate this week, indicates to me a significant interest in the positions," said Carolina Shook, Board of Elections director. "We have had inquiries from an-

other person who has expressed an interest in filing.

"Those candidates filing will not run in the primary race, but their names will appear on the ballot for the general election."

Incumbents included Russell C. Smith, a Raeford attorney, Tom Pilkington, retired from the N.C. Wildlife Commission

and Teddy Locklear, environmental health supervisor in Scotland County. Other candidates included Gloria Hill, an employee with Sprint Communications in Fayetteville and Roosevelt McPherson, an associate principal in the Cumberland County school system.

Newcomer McPherson, a Silver City (See FILING, page 7A)



John and Ruth Pecora sample the peach ice cream at Autry & Son peach stand, which opened July 5. See more photos and an article on page 10A.

## SBI ends Hoke embezzlement investigation

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

After more than an eight-month criminal probe into the alleged embezzlement of county funds by at least one former county employee, the State Bureau of Investigation said it is over. The bulk of the investigation has been done, and the file was turned over to District Attorney Kristy Newton, said Special Agent Janie B. Pinkston, an SBI supervisor in charge of the inquiry.

"We have completed our investigation into allegations of embezzlement against former Hoke county manager Bernice McPhatter for all intents and purposes," Pinkston said on Monday. "Our investigation found records that indicated the scope is well beyond misappropriation of funds.

"I am sure the case will be handed over to the grand jury for an indictment. We did a thorough examination of the allegations against her."

Pinkston did not want to specify if more than one person could (See INVESTIGATION, page 7A)

## Drought now severe, drops crops, profits

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Four years after farmers complained of drought conditions and hoped for "wetter" weather in seasons to come, severe dryness has persisted in Hoke's agriculture communities. Continued dry spells have resulted in dusty fields, crops withered from the heat or disease. It is the driest year local farmers have seen in the

"If I thought it would help, I would do a rain dance."  
— Farmer, Bobby Wright

last decade, and it could cause some to lose more than 35 percent of their crops, said farmer Robert "Bobby" Wright, who partners with his son, Bobby Jr. on the family farm off June Johnson Road.

"If you would compare our drought to a class five hurricane, our weather conditions would be about a class five drought," Wright said. "We got some scattered showers recently that have really helped, but the majority of the county is still awfully dry.

"If I thought it would help, I would do a rain

dance. All we can do is pray because most of the types of plants we are growing are already as drought-resistant as possible."

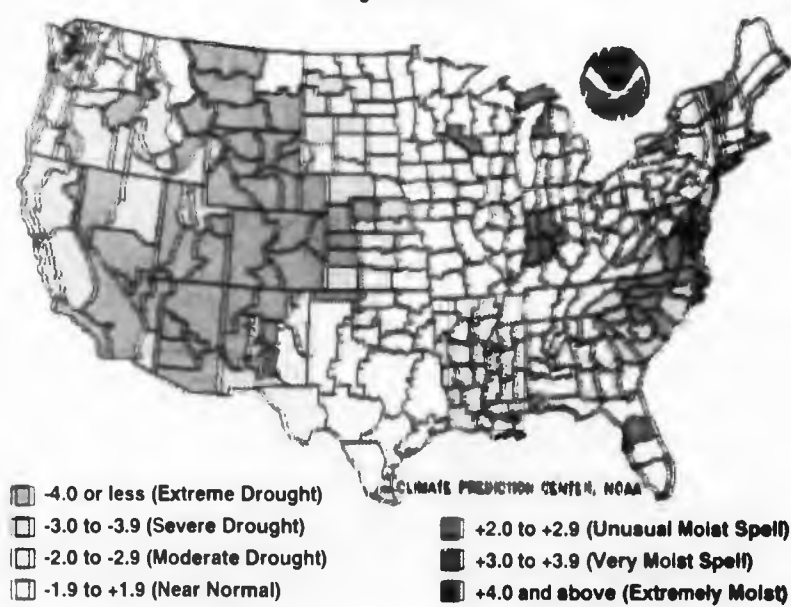
Wright's comparison is echoed by records monitored by Ron Fairbanks, E-911 supervisor in Emergency Management. "According to the U.S. Weather data, Hoke's drought is ranked in the extreme to exceptional range in severity," Fairbanks said. He said the total rainfall for some areas of Hoke in June was only 2.7 inches — and it was far less in other areas of the county.

According to the U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook, some improvement in drought conditions may be expected in North Carolina between now and the beginning of September.

"A lot of statistics reflect the El Nino world weather conditions have affected our lack of precipitation in North Carolina," Fairbanks said.

Wright is joined by other farmers such as Earl Hendrix and Roscoe McCollum, and by Eddie McNeill, owner of Home Feed & Garden. Wright and Hendrix are predicting the federal government will likely declare Hoke a disaster area because of the drought. If federal aid is ap- (See DROUGHT, page 8A)

Drought Severity Index by Division  
Weekly Value for Period Ending 6 JUL 2002  
Long Term Palmer



Eddie McNeill keeps up with a demand for beans at Home Feed and Garden on Main Street despite a dwindling county supply.

## Hoke veterans first to tell their war stories for national archives history film project

By PAT ALLEN WILSON  
Editor

Lawrence "Bud" Wilson ate nothing but boiled cucumbers for two weeks. John Mims ate snails, rats and snakes.

Wilson was a prisoner of war during the Korean War, and Mims during World War II. They and another Hoke veteran, Paul Sides, spoke of their wartime experiences before a video camera recently.

The film will become part of the archives of personal histories of North Carolina veterans preserved in the Library of Congress.

Hoke veterans were the first to be interviewed by Congressman Robin Hayes (NC-8) for the American Folklife Center Veterans History Project. Interviews took place in the commissioners meeting room at the Hoke County offices. The meetings were coordinated

by Tom Squier, Hoke County Veterans Service Officer, and by VFW Post 10 Commander George Balch.

"There are 19 million war veterans living in the United States today, but every day we lose, on average, 1,500 of them," said Hayes. "We're fortunate to have lots of information about the lives of our great military leaders, but we do not have nearly the same amount of information about the average soldier. These men and women

are the ones who truly carried the burden of our fight for freedom and their (See VETERANS, page 10A)



While Congressman Robin Hayes (left) listens, Paul Sides tells of his wartime experiences for a video camera

## McPhaul misses out on bid to become unaffiliated candidate

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

After almost five months of seeking signatures on a petition to run as an unaffiliated candidate for one of three available commissioner seats, Scurlock resident Freddie McPhaul missed his goal by 92 signatures. He squeaked in by the June 28 deadline, providing 39 pages of signatures that should have garnered him a bid in the commissioners' race. However, discrepancies prevented him from succeeding, according to McPhaul.

"I was out of town traveling on my job," McPhaul said. "I almost did not get back in time to turn in my sheets of signatures."

"Mrs. (Caroline) Shook was very nice about helping me coordinate everything, but I did not have enough signatures."

After a careful review of voting registration records and double-checking of signature authenticity, Hoke's Board of Elections officially informed McPhaul at their Monday meeting that he did not qualify as an unaffiliated candidate. The board cited reasons that included accidental duplication of signatures from registered voters, and many of those signing were not registered to vote. Some did not even reside in Hoke County, according to board findings.

A disappointed McPhaul said he appreciated their efforts in trying to certify his petition even if he was missing an adequate number of signatures. According to regulations, McPhaul said, he was required to submit 725 signatures of valid, registered voters. He acquired 768 signatures, but only 633 were certified as eligible voters. (See MCPHAUL, page 5A)