

# The News-Journal

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50¢

No. 17 Vol. 95

RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, July 24, 2002

Hoke's top stories  
are on the web  
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## This week



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## Congressman honors Morris in U.S. House

Congressman Robin Hayes last Tuesday remembered *The News-Journal's* Sam Morris in a speech from the U.S. House floor. Morris died June 28. What follows is the text of the speech:

"Two weeks ago, the 8th District of North Carolina lost one of its treasures. Sam Morris was the epitome of a newspaperman who cared deeply about his community, the City of Raeford in Hoke County, North Carolina. Sadly, my friend, Sam Morris recently passed away.

Sam played a number of roles in his community. He was a respected historian, longtime newspaperman, prominent civic and political leader, and a leader in the Raeford Presbyterian Church. Sam was the former General Manager of the Dickson Press and a former Raeford City Councilman. Additionally, Sam proudly served his state and country as a member of the North Carolina National Guard, rising to the rank of 1st Lieutenant.

Sam stepped down from his official role with the Raeford News-Journal back in 1982; but he kept up his weekly column until the very end. His column, "Around Town," focused on people, social events, weather, politics and anything else that caught Sam's eye. The column was widely read and widely respected in Hoke County. As a matter of fact, I would gladly trade a week of national TV interviews, for one good mention in Sam's column.

Sam had a reputation for always doing the right thing in all of his pursuits in life. His time at the newspaper was no different. He was a stickler for  
(See MORRIS, page 9A)



First day of school — ever

Ciara Everette took the first step of her formal education somewhat apprehensively yesterday at South Hoke Elementary School. She entered kindergarten as Hoke's year-round K-8 schools began a new year. But there were plenty of wide-open arms waiting on her.

## Schools open, staff gathers for pep talk and strategy



Larry Bell addresses educators Monday.

Part teacher, part consultant, part preacher, Larry Bell stood before some 800 teachers, principals, and staff of the Hoke County School System Monday with a message: "Somebody needs you."

The gathering at Turlington Auditorium was convocation and it was held the day before Hoke's year-round schools opened their doors for another year.

Bell was brought in to talk about research-based strategies that work in reaching at-risk kids, such as many of those in Hoke County. But judging from numer-

ous standing ovations, he was equally suited to inspire.

"Aw, ladies and gentlemen, I'm talking about a child who's at home right now thinking to himself, 'You know, I didn't do that well last year in school — oh, it's going to be tough.'

"I'm talking about the child who's at home thinking to himself, 'My gosh, nobody in my family's ever gone to college. I don't know that I can ever get there.'

"I want you to be a reason that child gets up in the morning. I want you to be the reason that some child keeps on keeping on when even their family is telling them, 'You ain't gonna amount to nothing.'"

Bell cited study after study saying with proven strategies the toughest kids can be reached. The key, he said, is high expectations.

His only claim to fame, he said, was his four classes of the "toughest kids" outscored the gifted and talented classes.

"Don't you let anybody this year tell you which one of your children you can or cannot reach," he said. "It's not how much money is in the home. It's not the color of their skin. It's not whether it's a single-parent household. It's whether or not the teacher shows high expectations.

"The power of an educator — the power  
(See CONVOCATION, page 10A)

## Judge removes Leach in civil suit Moore County heir, family complain James Leach, wife misspent from estate

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

A superior court ruled against Hoke County Commissioner James Leach Monday following allegations he misappropriated money from the estate of one of his parishioners. Moore County clerk of court Catherine Graham, acting judge in the civil action, found Leach to not be "a proper person" to administer the estate of Dorothy Dawkins Allen, who died in January, 2001 of cancer.

The complaint filed by relatives Helen Williams, Allen's blind sister, and her daughters, Marjorie Matthews and Kathleen Bedinger, sought to have

Leach and his wife, Valerie, "surrender" all assets of the estate of Allen. They also asked the court to "disqualify" the Leaches because of alleged violations.

After considering testimony for more than four hours, Graham ordered the estate, which had been closed after probate, to be reopened. And she removed the Leaches from the estate handling.

"It is highly unusual to have to reopen an estate like this," Graham said. "Based on the evidence presented, I made this decision."

During proceedings, the Leaches described Allen as a mother to them. However, Southern Pines attorney Marsh  
(See LEACH, page 7A)

## Hoke is disaster area Farmers eligible for low-interest loans

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has designated Hoke County as an agriculture disaster area due to the drought. The announcement came from Congressman Robin Hayes

The designation makes farmers and ranchers with losses immediately eligible for USDA emergency farm loans. Hayes contacted the U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman on Tuesday, July 16, to urge her to grant the disaster declaration for several counties in North Carolina. North Carolina Governor Mike Easley has also re-

quested the disaster designation.

"The economic slowdown that the U.S. suffered following September 11 has hit rural economies particularly hard," said Hayes.

"Now, we are being hit with one of the worst droughts in recent memory. It's abundantly clear that crop losses are going to be severe this year due to lack of adequate rainfall. The family farms of Hoke County can't afford to take a hit like this. The assistance that these farms receive under the disaster designation is urgently needed."

## Southerland partly repays county for convention costs

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

The former part-time, real estate foreclosure attorney for Hoke County has repaid a registration fee to the county after previously protesting he did not owe money for travel expenses to a Washington D.C. national convention. The county billed Raeford attorney Harry Southerland when it learned he attended the commissioners' conference on March 2 even though he resigned from his contracted county position on Feb. 27, according to Scott Edwards, Hoke's assistant finance officer.

Southerland said he never attended the convention, but was in Washington on other business. He did not comment on his recent payment to the county.

Finance records reflected on July 3 Southerland reimbursed the county \$385 of the \$568.20 Edwards said Southerland owed. The partial payment paid the registration fee for the National Association of Counties Legislative Conference on March 2-5, which was booked by Linda Revels, clerk to the county commissioners. However, a Hilton Hotel bill indicated Southerland checked out on March 3 instead of staying until March 5.

Southerland's trip was reportedly cut short because of the death of former Hoke school superintendent Mitch Tyler. Southerland is a member of the Hoke Board of Education. He resigned from his position with the county after filing to run in the upcoming county commissioners' race.

"I am very pleased that Mr. Southerland sent us a check for part of the bill," Edwards said. "We are still waiting for him to send the money for the rest of the bill he owes."

Prior to paying part of the bill recently, Southerland said in May he would not pay for the trip because he had been regularly attending the commissioners' conventions for two or three years. No one ever asked him to pay before, he added. County Attorney Neil Yarborough, the full-time legal counsel, did not attend the March conference.

Southerland also said he never stayed at the room reserved for him at the Hilton. Commissioner James A. Leach also said previously that Southerland was not there.

However, two commissioners, Bobby Wright and Charles Daniels, and another county employee confirmed they  
(See SOUTHERLAND, page 9A)

## Balfour, former Hoke commission chairman and cotton farmer, dies



John Goldie Balfour Sr.

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

John Goldie Balfour Sr., a Hoke County commissioner from 1964 to 1986 and its chairman for eight years, died on July 17 at Duke Medical Center.

"We have lost a giant of a man to

Hoke County with his death," said Harold Gillis, a close friend. "John Balfour always wanted to ensure that everyone was treated fairly," he said.

Balfour was a renowned cotton farmer. "He was one of our leading cotton growers and outstanding citizens," Gillis said. "He earned his stature by hard work and persistence."

After undergoing treatment for cancer for the past six years, Balfour died of complications. Until his death, his wife, Joan Harlow Balfour, said he maintained a positive attitude. He was determined his illness would not change their

lives. He continued to manage their farm, she said. "There is hardly a year that he was not involved with some sort of treatment, and he handled them unbelievably well and kept going," she said.

"He was a man of faith, courage, integrity, honesty, and fairness with love for his fellow man — regardless of their status in life," she said. "I am grateful for my 44 years with him, and I am a stronger person because of my life with him."

During his life, Balfour's honors were extensive. Balfour was recognized by the Raeford Junior Chamber of Com-

merce in 1956 as its "Outstanding Young Farmer." In 1984, Balfour received the Raeford Kiwanis Club's Citizenship Man-Of-The-Year award.

He was honored in 1985 as the Outstanding County Commissioner in North Carolina.

He served as the chairman of the N.C. Farmers Service Agency committee prior to his death — the only Hoke citizen to ever hold the post.

He was honored as the Hoke Conservation Farmer of the Year in 1970. He was named Outstanding Farmer by  
(See BALFOUR, page 9A)