

The News-Journal

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Passing the time
A bit young for politics, Lina Kuczero, 7, plays with her doll "Summer" during the Republicans on the Move pig pickin' at the home of Pete Hathaway Saturday. She is the daughter of James and Marian Kuczero.

Sheriff seeks federal help in Brittany case

Accusation against Byrd raises ire

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Sheriff Jim Davis has appealed to Washington for federal intervention in the investigation of the Brittany Lynn Locklear kidnapping-murder case, saying a witness now says Robin Byrd, son of former sheriff Wayne Byrd, was the individual seen in the vicinity of the kidnapping on January 7, 1998. Davis said Jordache Leach said he saw Robin Byrd driving a "blue truck" — not a brown truck as widely reported by the original investigators with an unidentified white or Indian male.

A spokesman from the U.S. Justice Department denied its civil rights division is conducting any investigation about the Brittany Locklear case.

"Sheriff Jim Davis did meet with assistant attorney general Ralph Boyd Jr. last Wednesday in Washington, D.C.," said media spokesman Casey Stavropoulos of the USJD. "The information passed on by Sheriff Davis is being reviewed."

(See BRITTANY CASE, page 9A)

Ex-county attorney investigated by SBI

VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Raeford attorney Harry Southerland has been targeted by the State Bureau of Investigation in a criminal probe concerning his conduct in county business. A complaint filed by District Attorney Kristy Newton's office has alleged Southerland "misappropriated county funds for his own use," and that another violation occurred when one of Southerland's checks written to the county allegedly bounced.

"The allegations are regarding misappropriated moneys that he collected

(See FORMER ASSISTANT ATTORNEY, page 9A)



Blue Bratcher Cameron Camp Cunningham Daniels Hardaway Hathaway Hunt McPhaul Powell Southerland

Hoke commissioner candidates address issues at forum

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Amid a chorus of affirmative "amens" and enthusiastic applause throughout the political speeches, Hoke citizens welcomed 10 out of 12 candidates for Hoke commissioner to a public forum held last evening. Sponsored by the Woman's Club of Raeford and the Raeford-Hoke Chamber of Commerce, the forum was intended to give a better understanding of county government and visions for its future.

Republicans and Democrats spoke at the candidates' political night along with one Libertarian and an unaffiliated, write-in candidate. Only eight Democratic candidates will be running in the September 10 primary. Two Republicans and a Libertarian will be listed on the November ballot. An unaffiliated candidate is running as a write-in.

Bratcher

Incumbent Commissioner Cleo Bratcher Jr., a Democrat, told the group he was a lifelong resident of Hoke, graduating from Upchurch High School in 1961 and the Harris Barber College in 1984.

He is an 18-year veteran of county government, and the owner of Elwood Barber Shop in Raeford.

Bratcher said his mission since being on the board of commissioners is "hard work" to keep taxes down, ensuring the county is in good financial shape. He said he continues to strive to help improve the public school system, and encourage the county and city to work well together. Bratcher also said his goal is to see that every citizen in the county can be connected to the county's regional water system.

"Anyone interested in serving this county —

you have to have a love for this county," Bratcher said. "Do you love the citizens of this county?"

"I feel like I have that love and sympathy for our county citizens."

Bratcher said he hoped citizens would be satisfied with the job he has done, allowing him to serve for another four-year term.

Daniels

Incumbent Commissioner Charles V. Daniels, 63, said he has resided in Hoke his entire life. He is vying for a second term of office. A Democrat, (See COMMISSIONERS FORUM, page 6A)

McPhatter's indictment surprises some, not others

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A week after the announcement of embezzlement and forgery indictments against former county manager Bernice McPhatter, her eight-year reign in finance and as Hoke's highest-salaried executive at \$80,000 still remains an enigma to many who were exposed to her on a daily basis. McPhatter's reputation as a "fine" finance officer who used "creative financing," and her ascent to her county manager in 1998 contrasts sharply with personal observations from some staff and commissioners.

Many employees privately complained McPhatter was seldom seen in the office. Some quipped if you wanted to find McPhatter, she could be found exercising on the "jogging trail" in Raeford at 4 p.m. while other employees were still working.

Linda Revels, clerk to the board of commissioners, commonly took the responsibility for public affairs because of McPhatter's closed door.

Revels screened most of McPhatter's phone calls, and it was rare that McPhatter picked up directly on her own phone.

Revels said when she learned of McPhatter's alleged deception in county business, she "cried and cried."

"I remember that the county attorney, Neil Yarborough, called me after I had left a planning board meeting in October and told me what was suspected," Revels said. "Naturally, I cried. I had worked with her on a day-to-day basis and had developed a close, personal and professional relationship with her."

"When she served as finance officer and county manager, the arena of finance was unknown to me and so was her involvement in it."

Revels said she was, in her opinion, impacted the most by the investigation, McPhatter's resignation, and subsequent indictments against her.

"I saw her every day, and I was shocked by what happened," Revels said. "I tried to do the best I could to hold things together through several

managers. "Through it all, it was a rewarding experience to know I could help keep the county running smoothly."

Commissioner Charles Daniels found McPhatter to thrive on controversial issues, blaming her shortcomings on the fact that commissioners were just "biased" because she was a woman.

"She wagged her finger at me when the scandal was going on about her misappropriating grant money for the Sheriff's policing grant," Daniels said. "She said 'my only problem was her gender and her race, and that she could not help being a black female.'"

"She said people were just trying to persecute her. I told her I had no problem with her gender and her race, but I did expect things to be done right in county business by her."

Commissioner Cleo Bratcher Jr., McPhatter's brother and colleague on the board, admitted he was notified by authorities that McPhatter (See MCPHATTER, page 10A)

Who are the 14?

Another mystery that surfaced with the announcement of McPhatter's indictment is who are 14 people accused of unjustified spending with county credit cards.

"Excessive" spending by at least 14 employees and "elected officials" on county credit cards was announced by District Attorney Kristy M. Newton last week during a press conference regarding McPhatter.

From Applebee's to the Outback Steakhouse, many employees enjoyed spending sprees at the taxpayers' expense, records reflected. From the beach to the mountains, employees timed seminars to coincide with holiday weekends, financial records showed.

"These people fell through the cracks and it was, in my opinion, a license to steal," Newton said of (See THE 14, page 6A)

Hoke High SAT scores up in 2002

Hoke County High School's SAT scores went up 10 points in 2002. According to figures released by the state Department of Public Instruction, the mean score for Hoke seniors rose to 860 last year. This reflected mean scores of 440 on the math portion of the test — up 10 points from 2001, and 420 — the same as last year — on the verbal section. (At presstime, no one was available to comment.)

Hoke's scores were below the state mean, however — 505 for the math portion, and 493 for the verbal. The U.S. mean scores were 516 for math and 504 for verbal.

According to the report, 146 — or 52.5 percent of Hoke seniors — took the test, up from 100 in 2000 and 101 in 2001.

Mean SAT Scores for Last Three Years

	Math	Verbal	Total
HCHS 2000	427	427	854
HCHS 2001	430	420	850
HCHS 2002	440	420	860
State	505	493	998
U.S.	516	504	1020