

The News-Journal

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No. 42 Vol. 95

RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, January 8, 2003

International drug ring leader gets 30 years

Hoke trucking company was headquarters of trafficking operation

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The owner of an Ashley Heights trucking company was sentenced to more than 30 years in federal prison following her conviction for running an international drug trafficking operation.

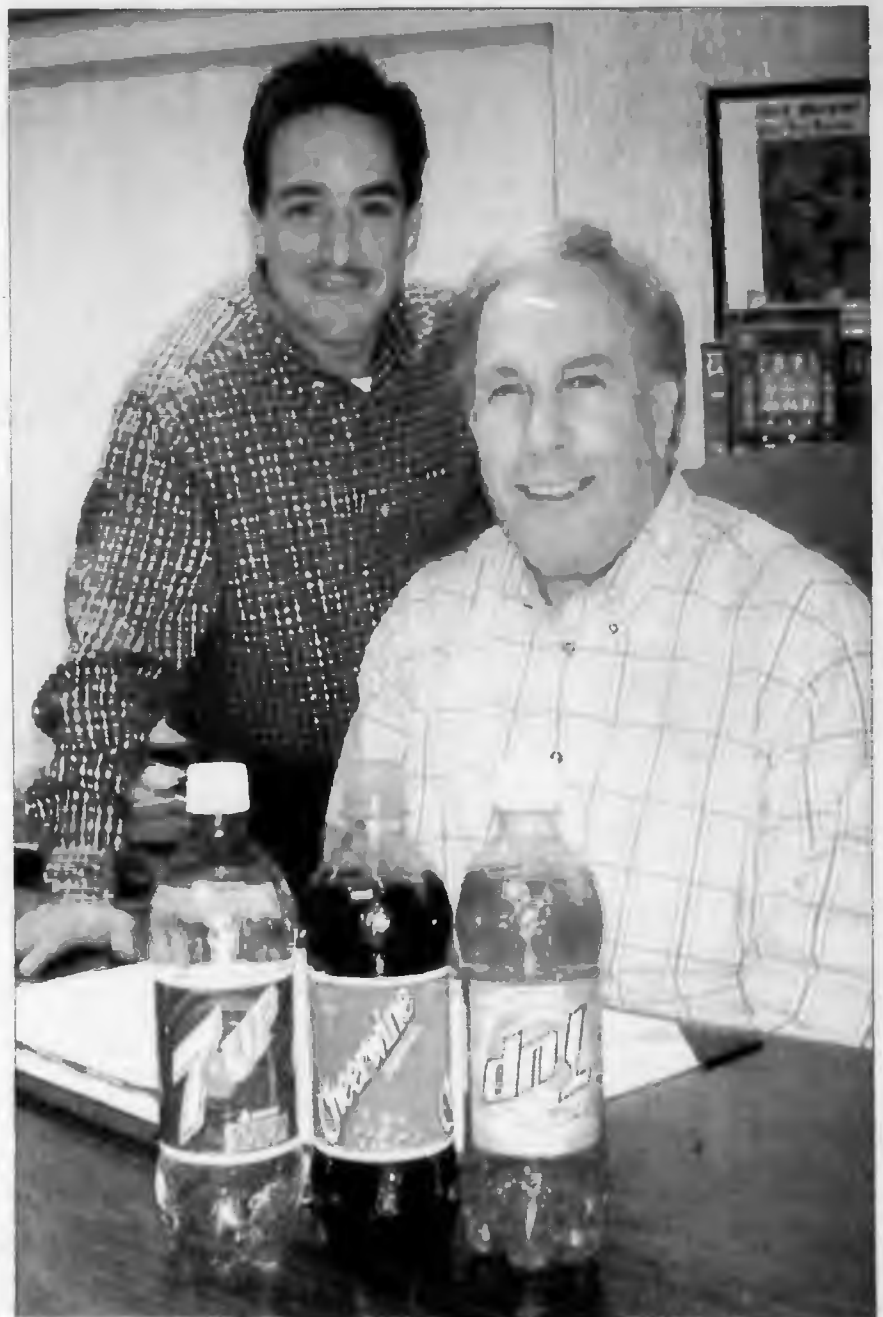
Along with the conviction of Audrey Dean McGirt, owner of Ashley Heights Trucking near Aberdeen, almost 40 members of an international, multi-million dollar narcotics cartel were apprehended during "Operation Knockdown," according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Charlotte.

Raeford Detective J. Pierce testified in the federal trial of McGirt. (See sidebar.) He indicated the operation was brazen. "In one of the smuggling incidents, a transportation driver was



Shown in an aerial view is the Ashley Heights Trucking firm's compound located between Raeford and Aberdeen.

stopped by authorities near Atlanta as he was smoking a joint of marijuana," Pierce said. "He did not even try to hide it. The truck contained a load of 3,000 pounds of marijuana." (See **TRAFFICKING**, page 6A)



Brian Landis, sales manager, (left) and Don Koonce, general manager, display 7 Up, Cheerwine, and DN L soft drinks.

Commissioners keep travel pay

Cameron, Powell return checks

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Commissioners did not approve a recommendation from Commissioner Bill Cameron, which was supported by Commissioner Jean Powell, to eliminate their automatic monthly \$300 travel checks. During a confusing, but intense debate Monday evening, a second proposal suggested by Commissioner James A. Leach as a compromise was also denied.

"I am going to give my check back to the county tonight," Cameron said. "I received a check in December before I had even accumulated any mileage for county travel."

"I am giving my check to County Manager Mike Wood." Standing up with a symbolic flourish, Cameron returned his check to a finance technician.

Cameron proposed the board comply with the county employees' reimbursement policy, receiving 30 cents per mile for (See **TRAVEL PAY**, page 4A)



Commissioner Bill Cameron returns his two \$300 monthly travel checks back to Finance Director Scott Edwards in protest of the mileage policy.

Cheerwine corners soft drink market in Cape Fear, beyond

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles on economic development in Raeford and Hoke County.

Cheerwine soft drink, created in 1913 by a North Carolina grocery store owner, may have its roots in Salisbury but the

profits from the cherry-flavored, burgundy-colored beverage are growing in Hoke. The bottling firm recently captured a contract to exclusively distribute 7 Up from its Raeford site to surrounding counties. It also introduced the new fruity-flavored, green-colored soda DN L to its repertory last week, according to Don Koonce, (See **CHEERWINE**, page 7A)

This Week



Needham is lineman for the county
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Hoke's top stories are on the web
www.thenews-journal.com



Commissioners present a resolution of appreciation to retired register of deeds Della Maynor-Bowen.

Dudley accepts position as new register of deeds

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Onnie Dudley, retired assistant register of deeds, was sworn in as Hoke's new register of deeds by Clerk of Court Vera Hollingsworth on Monday evening after commissioners unanimously approved her.

Dudley is distinguished as the first African American register of deeds in Hoke County history. She will fulfill the interim term of retired register of deeds Della Maynor Bowen, who served the county for 30 years. Dudley returned from retirement after a brief hiatus. Dudley served as assistant register of deeds

under Bowen for 25 years.

Democratic Party chairman A.K. "Dooie" Leach presented Dudley to the board as the party's nominee-elect. He said she was recommended for the key position after the majority of party officials voted to select her at the Democratic Party Executive Committee's meeting on Saturday.



Onnie Dudley is sworn in as Hoke's new Register of Deeds.

Dudley, 63, received a standing ovation at the swearing-in ceremony. The citizens who witnessed the event filled the assembly room and the lobby at the county office building on N. Main Street.

"I would like to thank the board of commissioners, the Hoke Democratic Party and Dooie

Leach for all of their support," Dudley said. "Without you, I would not be standing here."

"I promise to do a great job for you," Dudley was personally congratulated by all of the commissioners after she took the oath of office.

"We know you will do a good job for us," Commission Chairman Bobby Wright said.

Party's choice

On Saturday, Dudley was the only nominee voted on by the Democratic Party. She was recommended from the floor during the meeting by Sheriff Hubert Peterkin. Several moments passed without further nominations. Bobby Strother, McCain precinct official, proposed Dudley be nominated by acclamation, a recommendation that was subsequently approved by the Democratic Party executive committee.

"I nominated Onnie based on her experience," said Peterkin, who also attended the swearing-in ceremony. "She is held in high esteem by our community." (See **REGISTER OF DEEDS**, page 5A)

City nixes radio broadcasting tower

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

In a quasi-judicial hearing Monday night, Raeford council members voted unanimously to deny a conditional use permit that would allow a 499-ft. radio broadcast tower to be installed on 76 acres of woods off Turnpike Road.

On November 19, the Raeford Planning Board voted to recommend denial of the conditional use request for the property, owned by J.H. Wright Realty.

Wright appealed the planning board's recommendation to the city.

Both the planning board and the city had approved Wright's request to have the property rezoned to Light Industrial.

In Monday night's appeal, council- (See **TOWER**, page 5A)

Man suspected of robbing couple in home arrested

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A Fayetteville man sought for breaking into an East Hoke home and robbing a couple at gunpoint on December 12 has been arrested by the Hoke Sheriff's Office. Two other suspects will likely be apprehended as the investigation continues, according to Sheriff Hubert Peterkin.

James Prentice Roberts, 22, of Fayetteville, allegedly robbed 63-year-old Stephen Matis and his wife Margie Matis, 51, wielding a sawed-off shotgun. He was charged with two counts of (See **ROBBERY**, page 4A)