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Hope Mills businessman buys Unifi building

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

A Hope Mills businessman will be the new owner of the Unifi/Spenco building that once served as a manufacturing site for textile threads.

Raeford councilmen unanimously voted Monday night to accept a \$157,550 bid from Charles T. Gardner for the 90,000 square foot building and the six

acres on which it is located.

Gardner first proposed to buy the building, located at 315 North Bethel Road and owned by the city, in November, saying he would pay \$90,000 "straight out cash" for the property. Following Gardner's proposal, the city — following legal guidelines — advertised the property and received upset bids, pushing the value of the building and its acreage higher.

Gardner said he intends to procure some type of manufacturing, distribution or related industry to occupy the building. He said yesterday he has no tenant at the present time. "The first thing I have to do is clean it up," he said. Gardner has 30 days in which to close on the purchase.

Gardner repeated statements he made to councilmen in November, saying he likes Raeford and "all aspects" of the

area. He said in November, however, the worst thing going for the building is where it is in Raeford — near a residential area. "The best thing," he stated, "is it is in the town of Raeford."

Gardner said he will work as closely as possible with the Raeford-Hoke Economic Development Commission to find a suitable tenant. "They're the key," he said about RHED, "to securing manufacturing or even distribution" tenants

for the site.

Working with RHED, North Carolina Southeast, this area's state-supported economic development agency could place the building on an industrial development website and help market the building.

Gardner told councilmen in November, "I'm in the warehousing business," and said he has historically bought old (See UNIFI BUILDING, page 10A)

Ill-timed snowstorm causes 39 accidents

Four wrecks involved Hoke school buses

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

It was not a beautiful sight or a winter wonderland for motorists involved in 39 accidents during last Thursday morning's snow storm.

Four school buses with children on board wrecked before they were recalled by the Hoke school superintendent's office. "There were no injuries on the buses and none of the bus drivers were at fault in the accidents," said Hoke School Superintendent Allen Strickland.

Hoke schools were closed on Thursday and Friday, and an optional work day for teachers was scheduled on Friday.

"The other motorists who struck our buses were charged," Strickland

said. "We did not have any snow here until 6:15 in the morning. Our plan calls to make a decision whether to close school by 6 a.m. Naturally, you want to make a decision quickly.

"Most of our buses had phones on them and did not go out, but we were unable to turn around a few that had already left."

Strickland said there were 12 children riding on one bus, six students on another, and very few on the remaining two buses. He said the school officials based their decision to close school because of reports from the Sheriff's Office, the N.C. Highway Patrol, and the school's maintenance and transportation garages.

Details from the Highway Patrol were still sketchy because of the mass (See SNOWSTORM, page 8A)



District Attorney Kristy M. Newton and special investigator John Joseph discover debris next to the Scurlock Elementary School grounds that includes an empty liquor bottle.

D.A., state launch nuisance probe in Scurlock area

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The state Alcohol Law Enforcement Division began a public nuisance and abatement preliminary investigation in the Scurlock community, home of Scurlock Elementary School, two weeks ago. An SOS call for help was sent by Heritage Village resident Dawn Ferguson to the ALE office in Greensboro several months ago.

Since ALE began its inquiry of Scurlock activities, loitering, drug deals, gang violence, bullets found on school grounds, and litter from beer cans have decreased, according to Ferguson, school volunteer and community activist.

Ferguson said she is fondly called "target" by her husband because she is on a one-woman crusade to make a difference for Scurlock children. Barely one year ago, Scurlock resident Davis Cherry Jr. was murdered there, and the slaying remains unsolved. Cherry was bludgeoned to death.

In 2002, the Sheriff's Office responded to 73 calls at (See SCURLOCK PROBE, page 9A)

This Week



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

Hoke couple arrested on felony child abuse charges

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

An investigation into allegations of felony child abuse involving a four-month-old infant culminated on Friday with the arrests of a Hoke military couple by the Sheriff's Office, according to Sheriff Hubert Peterkin.

"The bruises and other injuries on this

child appeared very severe," Peterkin said. "The abuse allegedly committed by the parents happened in the family's home at Heritage Village military subdivision. The baby is about nine months old now.

"The incident occurred last August, but the previous sheriff's administration never acted on the case. We inherited this situation. After we reviewed the file, we realized it needed immediate attention."

Kevin Dewayne Staggs, 22, a U.S. Army specialist, and his wife, Rosie Ann Staggs, 19, were each charged with one count of felony child abuse with intentions to inflict serious bodily injury. Mr. Staggs is a native of Benton, Arkansas. He is assigned to the HHT 1/17 CAV at Fort Bragg. Mrs. Staggs, also known as Rosie Ann Langley, was born in Seoul, Korea. She was employed as a clerk by

General Jackson's Inc. on Yadkin Road in Fayetteville prior to her arrest.

Residents of Soyang Court, he was placed under a \$75,000 secured bond and she under a \$25,000 secured bond. Kevin Staggs remains in custody at Hoke County Jail, but his wife was released after paying her bail.

According to Peterkin, the infant was (See ABUSE, page 10A)

Addicts share in Hoke's only rehab program

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

"We are on this bus together, and there is no one higher than the other in this long journey back," said one of the recovering adult drug addicts and alcoholics who meet for group substance prevention sessions at Freedom Chapel AME Zion Church. Clustered in a small fellowship room, these former addicts say the volunteer therapy and "straight talk" is working miracles.

Those struggling to kick their habits are urged to join the only known rehabili-

tation group available in Hoke, said Shirley Hart, the volunteer counselor-supervisor for Freedom Community Recovery Support.

"It started out with three of us, but then two dropped out," Hart said of the group's beginnings. "I was alone except for Rev. Owens — what a blessed man. I continued, and it is the only place I know of in Hoke where addicts are being helped. More addicts joined because they saw there ain't nothing changed outside. It is still the same," she said.

"Recovery does work. We are helping those suffering the pain and anguish of

being an addict to get back on track," she said.

In a plea to teens who may be tempted to try drugs or alcohol, the group sent an impassioned message.

"Our advice to teenagers is just to say, 'No,'" they said in unison. "Do not participate. Once you get hooked on drugs or alcohol then it is all over.

"Listen to your parents. They love you and do not want to see you suffer."

Sponsored by the Rev. Ray P. Owens Ministry, a non-profit organization, substance abuse victims are welcomed with (See RECOVERING, page 4A)



Shirley Hart hosts a volunteer drug/alcohol rehabilitation group in Hoke County.

Neighborhood bust takes in 12 pounds of marijuana

By CHRIS SHUPE
Staff writer

Hoke County Sheriffs seized 12 pounds of marijuana in a recent drug bust in the McDougald Downs subdivision. This just one of several such moves by the Sheriff's office in recent times.

Roy and Elizabeth Edwards were arrested on January 22 after receiving a package through the U.S. mail, the package containing 11 pounds of marijuana. Also seized that day were more of the drug, several guns, a scale, and an undisclosed amount of cash.

Neighbors of the home at 1807 O'Bannon Drive had no clue what was going on. Sheriff Peterkin said, after speak-

ing to one set of neighbors, "They were shocked. They said that they could never have believed it."

The raid happened thanks to a tip from a postal inspector. Undercover agents followed the package and Roy Edwards attempted to flee the scene. Once apprehended, he was served with a search warrant and the rest of the items taken that day were found in his home. Also found in the home were two passports, with recent activity to Roy Edward's home of Jamaica.

"People are trying everything to get drugs into the area," said Sheriff Peterkin. "Just as soon as they realize we've figured out their plans, they make new (See DRUG BUST, page 10A)



Sgt. Scotti Luckie displays some of the items taken from the house in a raid Jan. 22.