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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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Retreat revives rapport among commissioners

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The Hoke commissioners unanimously gave County Manager Mike Wood more authority. During a retreat held at Camp Rockfish last week, the board agreed that he will directly exer-

cise hiring and firing power over county employees and be delegated more responsibility over citizens' concerns.

"The only exception to his authority will be the board's decisions on the clerk to the board, finance director and county manager positions that fall directly under our domain," said Com-

mission Chairman Bobby Wright. "He will be concerned with the day-to-day operations of the county personnel, allowing things to run more smoothly.

"This also gives him an opportunity to promote more from within departments to utilize the resources of the personnel we have on staff already."

Wright and Commission Vice Chairman Charles Daniels, members of the previous board, said the commissioners had taken on more responsibilities than they could handle last year. During an investigation of embezzlement allegations against former county manager Bernice McPhatter, the board accepted

more duties than ordinarily would be under its authority, members said.

Wood was re-hired in January 2002 as county manager after a hiatus from his position that was held by McPhatter until she resigned in October 2001. She was indicted last August on embezzle-
(See RETREAT, page 11A)



Athletes sign

Three Hoke High seniors last week signed to play college football. La Shawn McLean (left to right) will play for NC A&T; Quarterback C.J. Gaddis signed with Clemson University (hence the tiger in the foreground); and Curtis Quick will play at Fayetteville State University. Profiles of McLean and Gaddis are on page 9A. Quick will be profiled in an upcoming issue.

Precinct official's trial set, but election board seeks probe

Did Walker assault Davis campaign manager or thwart him?

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The trial for Hoke precinct official Alvin Walker for misdemeanor assault is scheduled for February 18, but Hoke Elections Board members are intervening separately on his behalf. They have requested the State Elections Board to investigate the actions of Rashad Rahmaan, who filed the assault charge against Walker on Election Day last year, according to Whiteford Jones, chairman of Hoke's Elections Board.

"We are confident Mr. Walker did not do anything improper," Jones said. "He was simply doing his duty. He was only enforcing state election laws."

Rahmaan said he stands behind his November 5 letter sent to Hoke's Board of Election. He said he was commissioned by the local coordinator of the N.C. Operation Big Vote, a sub-organizer of the National Coalition of Black Civic Participation to get the voting numbers.

"As I approached the door (Raeford Precinct No. 4), a man (Walker) locked the door to stop me from entering," Rahmaan said. "As I made an effort to enter the doorway, he pushed me backward.

"I suggested that he not put his hands on me again, and I tried again to get through," he said.

"This man pushed me a second time, refusing to allow me entrance into the voting precinct."

Rahmaan said other precinct officials finally allowed him to enter. He obtained the voting numbers and left, he added.

The local board has described Walker as "loyal, dependable and professional" with extensive years of experience. They said he was appropriately trained with a film, a judge's manual and two pre-election seminars.

"Judge Walker was particularly sensitized to the issue of unlawful entry into the voting enclosure due to prior problems at the polls and the training he had received," Jones said in his letter to state election officials. "Judge Walker knew Mr. Rahmaan was not a Hoke County voter and Mr. Rahmaan gave no legitimate explanation of his authority to enter the voting enclosure.

"In fact, he had none."
County Attorney Neil Yarborough is representing Walker. The trial will be prosecuted by the Hoke
(See ELECTION CONTROVERSY, page 8A)

This Week



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

Labor official investigates ex-deputy's wage complaint

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The U.S. Department of Labor's wage and hour division has just wrapped up a month-long preliminary investigation into a compensation claim for unpaid overtime filed by Thomas Carlton, former chief deputy-major at the Hoke Sheriff's Office.

"The county has shorted me at least \$35,000 in overtime they delayed paying me over the past two years," said Carlton, who filed an official complaint last year with the federal agency.

"This represents more than 1,300 of extra hours I worked that was promised to me under the administration of former county manager Bernice McPhatter."

Carlton said he was a dedicated, 24-7 employee, but no one should have to work extra hours without getting paid.

"I was forced to work in dual positions as the chief of detectives and as the chief deputy without receiving extra salary compensation," he said. "I kept detailed overtime records, but the county never responded to my requests to be paid."

(See WAGE COMPLAINT, page 11A)

School board shaves deficit Trims \$500,000 shortfall, seeks county help

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke School Superintendent Allen Strickland told the county commissioners at their annual retreat last week that the Board of Education had done all they could do to tighten the school system's 2002-2003 budget, attempting to compensate for a half-million dollar shortfall. After Strickland's proposal

on cutbacks is heard at the Monday evening commissioners' meeting, the commissioners will decide if they will contribute \$100,000 from the county's general fund to restore a balanced school system budget.

Strickland presented a plan to commissioners at their annual retreat last week, detailing how the school board could possibly cut up to \$400,000 in expenses to compensate for a
(See SCHOOL DEFICIT, page 11A)

Sheriff is Kiwanian Citizen of Year



Peterkin

The Raeford Kiwanis named Sheriff Hubert A. Peterkin as their Citizen of the Year at their Anniversary Night celebration Thursday.

Peterkin, who took office as Hoke sheriff in December, said he was surprised at the honor of being chosen the club's 79th "man of the year." His pastor, the Rev. Ray P. Owens, of Freedom A.M.E.

Zion Church, was selected for that honor last year.

A member of the Raeford Kiwanis Club, Peterkin is also a member of the Hoke County Civic League, Raeford-Hoke Chamber of Commerce, Raeford-Hoke Habitat for Humanity, N.C. Turkey Festival board and 100 Black Men of America.

With more than 12 years in law enforcement experience, Peterkin was a detective with the Fayetteville Police Dept. when he ran for sheriff, defeating the incumbent, Jim Davis. Peterkin also served as Davis' chief deputy for just over a year before resigning.

Peterkin ran for sheriff with a pledge to unite a county that had become divided during
(See CITIZEN, page 8A)



Officers work to reconstruct the accident that left a 6-year-old dead and a toddler critically injured.

DA orders reconstruction of fatal accident scene

Driver faces extra charge in death of 6-year-old

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A Dodge minivan is being named as the lethal weapon in the alleged murder of Pembroke child Nicholas Bullard. Shawn Craig Strickland is accused of driving the van with its headlights off in the dark while fleeing a deputy at high speed Jan. 2.

Strickland was arrested last week for second-degree murder in the hit-and-run crash, and is facing additional charges, said Sheriff Hubert Peterkin.

Strickland has been tested for the presence of alcohol or drugs by the Sheriff's Office because of the fatality he allegedly caused, according to Chief Deputy Troy McDuffie of the Hoke Sheriff's Office.

McDuffie said a search warrant was executed at the jail. It autho-

rized them to test Strickland for any impairing substances that could have allegedly been in his system.

"We do not have the test results back yet," McDuffie said.

"Mr. Strickland has also been charged with an additional felony charge of fleeing to elude a law enforcement officer," McDuffie said. "He still remains in the custody of the Hoke Detention Center on a \$75,000 secured bond. Other charges may be pending."

Operations Major Freddy Johnson of the Sheriff's Office said a reconstruction of the accident is also being conducted by the N.C. Highway Patrol. It was ordered at the request of District Attorney Kristy M. Newton, he added.

"It represents an exceptional case that led to the instant death of Nicholas
(See RECONSTRUCT, page 11A)