

# The News-Journal

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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## Developer plans multimillion plaza here

### Food Lion, Mi Casita are planned anchors; construction hinges on water, sewer

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Hoke Landing, a proposed multimillion Food Lion shopping plaza adjacent to East Hoke Middle School, is poised for construction. The plaza will include a Mi Casita Mexican restaurant and possibly a future Golden Corral restaurant. Located at Club Pond Road and U.S. 401 North, the 14-acre site's development hinges on the county extending water and sewer service to the tract, according to Joseph P. Riddle III, owner of Riddle Commercial Properties in Fayetteville.

Riddle said he is ready to bring in bulldozers to start moving dirt the beginning of April, estimating Hoke consumers could be celebrating a new Food Lion grand opening by October 2003.

"My commitment to Hoke County is strong," Riddle said. "I have been working on this project north of Raeford for three years. This is the third time I have taken out an option on this land. Food Lion officials are ready to sign the lease, but they are pushing for water and sewer to be intact.

"I put my money where my mouth was. I think Hoke is a great place to work and a good place to live. I am trying to make it better."

Riddle praised the efforts of Hoke's city and county leaders, saying they have been very helpful in paving the way for the commercial shopping center.

"This new Food Lion will be a better looking store," Riddle said. "It will include a delicatessen and bakery with decorative ceilings, contoured lights and special, glazed colors on the concrete flooring.

"This represents an upper end store."

The 14-acre parcel was purchased from Hoke resident William McNeill. Raeford real estate broker Buddy Blue is representing McNeill in the transaction. Wolfe & Group architects of Raleigh are designing the project.

With the 29,000 square-foot Food Lion grocery store serving as the anchor, Riddle's ambitious plans for the 48,000 square-foot shopping center include a 3,200 square-foot Mi Casita restaurant, an 8,000 square-foot dollar discount store, a 4,200 square-foot Video Hut, a national submarine sandwich chain, and a Papa John's pizza.

"In phase 2 containing 14,000 square-feet, I am saving a two-acre lot for a name drug store chain, but it may be used instead to construct a Golden Corral restaurant if people prefer that," Riddle

said. "I am planning an AutoZone autoparts store on one of the out-parcels, and also a Wendy's restaurant."

According to Riddle, other business owners interested in parcels and out-parcels for retail shops are welcomed at Hoke Landing by calling (901) 864-3135.

Riddle's request to receive water and sewer at the site was received by County Manager Mike Wood on March 6. County officials and Raeford's city leaders arranged a meeting for this week to discuss the feasibility of installation. Based on a 1998 Land Use Plan Update, the preliminary infrastructure plan is being reviewed.

(See PLAZA, page 4A)



**Green thumbs**  
Students in Hoke high school's Horticulture II Class work on a crop of gerber daisies in the school's greenhouse. See story, page 10A.

## Woman charged with scamming churches

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Two Hoke churches are still stunned after discovering relief supplies intended for the needy were apparently diverted by the recipient.

Almost \$2,000 of emergency donations plus large supplies of canned food intended for the people in "dire straits" were personally received under alleged false pretenses by Mernelle McLaughlin Baxter, an employee of Four Coun-

ties Community Services. Baxter is accused of misappropriating the churches' contributions, using them for members of her family, according to spokespersons from the United Methodist Church of Raeford and St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church.

Baxter, 68, of McLaughlin Road, was served felony warrants on Friday by Detective Greg Thomas of the Raeford Police Department. She is charged with 24 counts of obtaining property by

(See CHURCHES, page 3A)

### This Week



**Bataan March survivor to attend memorial**  
page 4A

**Hoke, Randolph merge mental health agencies**  
page 3A

**Kiwanians visit with international president**  
page 4A

### Index

- Births ..... 3B
- Calendar ..... 4B
- Classifieds ..... 7B
- Deaths ..... 9A
- Editorials ..... 2A
- Engagements ..... 3B
- Legals ..... 5-6B
- Public Record ..... 5A
- Religion ..... 6A
- Schools ..... 2B
- Socials ..... 3B
- Sports ..... 8A

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## Crumpler honored in U.S. House for service

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer



Hoke coroner Frank Crumpler is congratulated (from left) by daughter-in-laws Kim Crumpler and Margaret Crumpler, son Kemp Crumpler, Congressman Robin Hayes, son Kel Crumpler, wife Dayne Capps Crumpler, and daughter Kalen Crumpler Wilhide.

A mystified G. Franklin "Frank" Crumpler, Hoke coroner and a former Hoke sheriff, wondered why all of his family was gathered at Raeford's City Hall. Crumpler knew he was there to view a presentation to the City of Raeford by Congressman Robin Hayes on Monday. Suddenly, he realized that he was the actual honoree at the event as the longest serving elected official in North Carolina, said Crumpler.

"It was a complete surprise to me," Crumpler said. "I was on the verge of tears because I was so moved."

Hayes, representative for the U.S. House of Representatives in the 8th District, presented Crumpler with a plaque, congratulating him on many years of service to the state and his county.

On February 27, Crumpler also made history when Hayes read the same proclamation in his honor on the floor of the U.S. House in Washington, D.C.

"Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the accomplishments of G. Franklin Crumpler, coroner for Hoke County, North Carolina," Hayes said. "Mr. Crumpler holds the distinction of being the longest serving elected official in North Carolina.

"Please join me in expressing the appreciation of the House to Mr. G. Franklin Crumpler for over four decades of service to the state and his county."  
(See CRUMPLER HONORED, page 7A)

## McPhatter's tax trial hits snag, assigned state attorney resigns

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Former Hoke County manager Bernice McPhatter's trial on four counts of state income tax evasion has been postponed

indefinitely after the prosecutor resigned. Rudy Renfer, a state attorney at the N.C. Attorney General's office left the office short-handed with his resignation, according to Kim Brooks, media spokeswoman for the N.C. Department of Revenue.

"Mr. Renfer had special expertise in tax matters. Some of our tax revenue cases, but not all of them, will be prosecuted by the Wake County District Attorney's office instead," she said.

According to an administrative clerk of the

court, because McPhatter's case was filed in the Wake Superior Court, it falls under its jurisdiction not in Hoke, the origin of the allegations. It therefore can't be transferred.

McPhatter's trial has been delayed on  
(See MCPHATTER, page 8A)

## School board conveys land for county vans

### Also will preserve old schoolhouse

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

A united Board of Education approved conveying a strip of property owned by the school board to the county. The land is located next to the Department of Social Services and will be used for van parking.

"We appreciate the partnership we have with our county commissioners and working together," Superintendent Allen Strickland said. "I feel anything we can do to help each other is an opportunity."

"I recommend we make the land available to them."

Strickland and the board heard a presentation by Commission Chairman Bobby Wright, who was accompanied by Commission Vice-Chairman Charles V. Daniels and County Manager Mike Wood. The thin sliver of land, 80 feet by 420 feet, was requested by the county for parking of vans that serve the Hoke Area Transportation Service. The land will also provide space for a small building to house administrative staff. The transportation service has been transferred to the jurisdiction of Social Service, and 90 percent of the cost for the small building will likely be funded by the county.  
(See SCHOOL BOARD, page 4A)



Pine Forest School, an historic, one-room school house, will be donated to the Raeford-Hoke Museum by Willa Lindsay.