

The News-Journal

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50¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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Task force to voice concerns on Bragg buffer

Citizens group wants Hoke County to 'sit at the table' on regional issues

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

City councilmen voted to establish a task force to voice concerns over a proposed one-mile buffer around Fort Bragg.

The council took action after viewing a multimedia presentation compiled by a group of private citizens addressing the land use plan put together by state planners to protect the perimeters of Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base. Once Steve Connell, chairman of the

Raeford Downtown Revitalization Commission, completed the presentation, councilmen voted to establish a task force whose mission is to voice the concerns of Raeford and Hoke County to Fort Bragg, the governor's office and to the Legislators.

Both Hoke commissioners and Raeford councilmen have rejected the regional land use plan that calls for controlled development of a one-mile "greenbelt" as a buffer for military training. Connell proposes that Hoke and

Raeford negotiate for benefits for the Raeford-Hoke Community. "All we have is our land. What we have is dwindling away," he said. Connell began his presentation by pointing out a shrinking Hoke County. (See BRAGG BUFFER, page 3A)

City ponders 2¢ tax hike

Cites loss of revenue from Burlington bankruptcy

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

For the first time in four years, a budget proposed for the City of Raeford contains a tax hike.

Councilmen are studying the FY 2003-04 proposed budget totaling \$5 million that includes a two-cent tax hike. City Manager Mike McNeill presented his budget at a special meeting Monday night.

The proposed tax increase would bring the tax rate to 49 cents per \$100 valuation and would add \$45,000 in revenues, McNeill said. In FY 1999-2000, taxes were reduced from 49 to 47 cents. The previous year, taxes had been reduced from 57 cents.

In his budget, McNeill cites an inability to collect \$100,766 in 2001 taxes from Burlington due to their bankruptcy filing. He also said the city has been unable to collect almost \$58,000 from Burlington for water bills from September-November 2001, also due to bankruptcy.

McNeill addressed an increased city employee turnover rate due to low salaries, incentives and benefits. He said the leave accrual policy rate needs to be updated in order to be competitive.

Following a salary comparison with the county and other municipalities the size of Raeford, some positions need to be reclassified with resulting salary increases — "a slight amount of money" — for some personnel, according to McNeill.

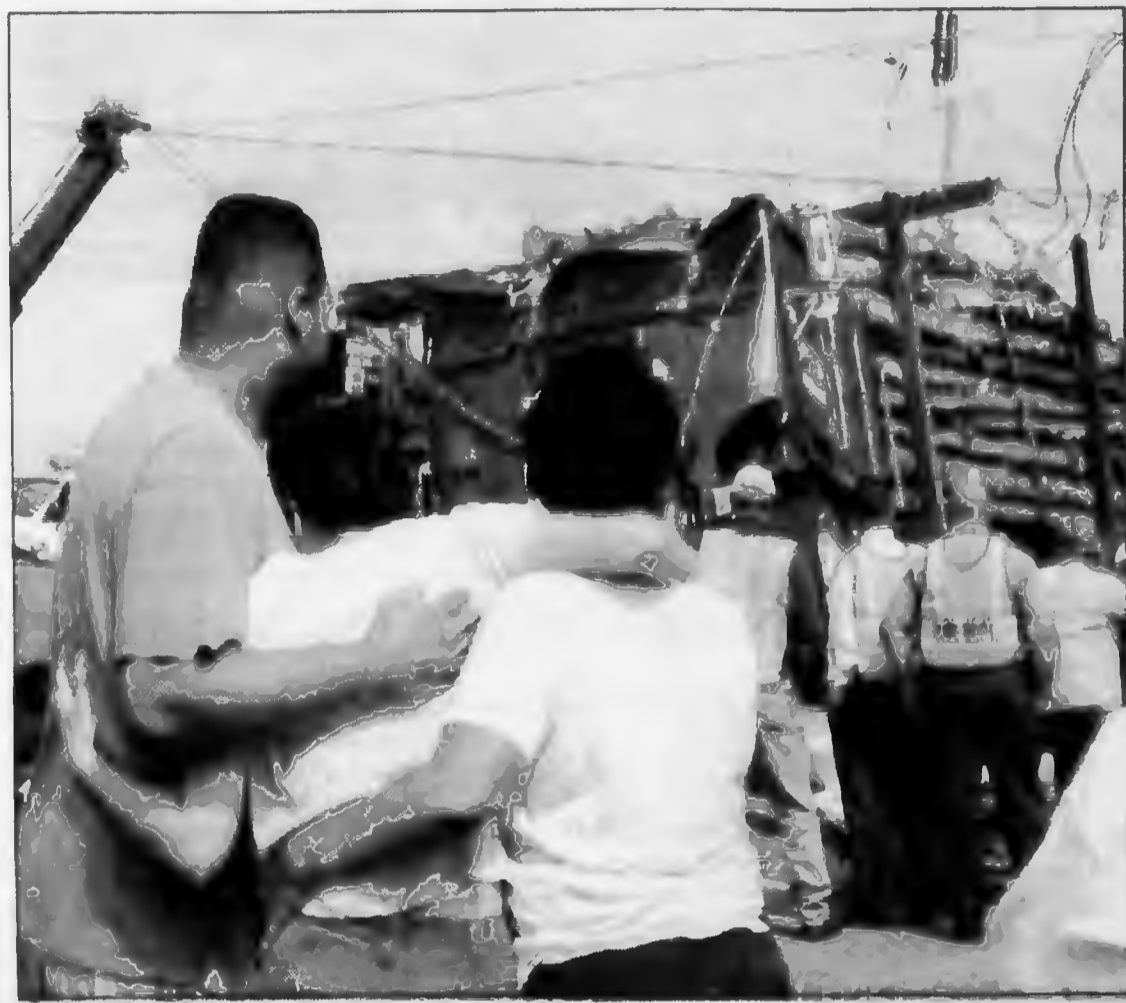
McNeill proposes a cost of living allowance of 2.5 percent for each employee but no merit raises. COLAs were not given last year. He is also requesting one new position, customer service clerk, be added to a full-time work force of 50.

Insurance premium rates for employees have increased 36.4 percent for dental and medical coverage, McNeill said. He added that there was a \$30,595 savings last year when 10 insured members, including two council members, waived the city's medical coverage for other medical coverage.

In lieu of previously frozen reimbursements from the state, the Legislature has approved a one-half cent sales tax and "Hold Harmless Funds" as replacements. The city would receive \$240,000 from this, McNeill said.

In proposed expenditures, the city added \$25,000 for a total of \$75,000 for demolition — if necessary — of the Raeford Hotel at the corner

(See TAX HIKE, page 3A)



Tense rescue

A relative is comforted as medics and rescue workers attempt to free a couple pinned in their smashed vehicle Thursday at the intersection of US 401 and Palmer Street. Both survive. The story is on page 3A.

This Week



Extreme sport comes to Hoke page 4A

Man charged with robbing country stores page 5A

Kidnap suspect's bail reduction denied page 4A

\$20k incentive for Hoke superintendent gives board pause

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

County commissioners reacted negatively on Monday to a request in the school board's \$4.4 million proposed budget to provide a \$20,000 incentive bonus for Hoke Schools Superintendent Allen

Strickland next year.

Commissioners heard the 2003-2004 budget presentation by Strickland but took no action. Their meeting was recessed until 8 a.m. today to continue with a budget session.

"We are not trying to 'nit-pick,'" Commission Chairman Bobby Wright said of a

\$750,000 increase proposed over last year's school budget and the jump in Strickland's pay. "It makes us look hard at the budget."

School Board Chairman Russell C. Smith, who attended the meeting, said afterward his board fully supported Strickland receiving a \$20,000 incentive.

It would be partially based on the academic performance of Hoke schools, he added.

"Our superintendent supervises the largest departmental budget in the county of \$34 million, but he is probably one of the lowest paid superintendents in the region," (See INCENTIVE, page 8A)

Businessman charged in alleged scam

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

The man Hoke officers say took the life savings of some families has turned himself in.

Gerald Dixon "Jerry" Graham Jr., 49, is charged with five felony counts of obtaining property by false pretense and with two misdemeanor counts of failure to deliver titles, according to Major Freddy Johnson of the Hoke Sheriff's Office. "More warrants are forthcoming," he said.

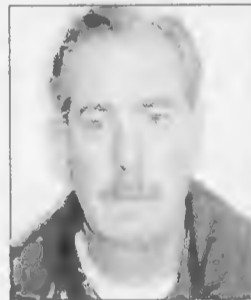
Graham is accused of accepting payment for mobile homes he never delivered. He transacted business at Circle G Trailer Sales, located at 752 Highway 401 South just outside of Raeford, although his son is listed as the CEO of the company.

The business closed after Circle G was evicted for nonpayment of rent.

"He and his business partners, employees took advantage of innocent people," Johnson said of Jerry Graham.

Johnson said the HSO had put a lot of energy into a vigorous investigation. "We have two types of victims here. We have victims with criminal cases and victims with civil cases," he said.

Johnson said some victims walked onto the lot, (See CIRCLE G, page 4A)



Gerald D. Graham Jr.

Rockfish woman allegedly shoots, kills husband who beat her

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A Rockfish woman allegedly killed her husband early on Saturday morning, shooting him once during a domestic quarrel, according to Sheriff Hubert Peterkin.

Alton Reese Mozingo Jr., 46, was shot in the upper torso. He was found dead, lying face up in the master bedroom at their 2597 Lindsay Road residence when deputies arrived at approximately 5:35 a.m.

Mr. Mozingo was employed as a civilian contractor at Fort Bragg for 18 years. His wife, Susan Mozingo, 44, a former school teacher at a private school in Fayetteville, admitted she shot her husband, Peterkin said.

(See SHOOTING DEATH, page 3A)

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News Other stuff

By KEN MACDONALD
General Manager

Ever wondered what would happen if everybody in Hoke County decided not to pay his or her state income tax? Would they arrest us all? I confess to such mental rantings after reading the story last week about John Merritt, a senior official in the governor's office, who reportedly threatened that the state would withhold funds from counties that don't go along with a one-mile buffer around Fort Bragg. (He later said he was joking. If he was, he ought not quit his day job for stand-up comedy.)

Merritt was speaking to military, state and local government officials at a meeting held to celebrate the development of (See JOURNAL, page 8A)



Relay for Life scenes

Cancer survivor Evelyn Price and others walk the first lap (left) of this year's Relay For Life, which benefits the American Cancer Society; and a survivor adds his name and handprint to a poster. The event was held Friday and Saturday at Hoke High School.

