

The News-Journal

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50¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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Raeford, Hoke to join forces in buffer response

Committee appointed to draft detailed resolution

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke commissioners and Raeford city councilmen unanimously approved developing a joint resolution to respond to proposed restrictions on land around Fort Bragg.

"It is a working document for both boards," Commission Chairman Bobby Wright said of 17 proposals under consideration by the boards.

The boards are studying ways to prevent excessive restrictions on Hoke land by proposals in the Fort Bragg-Pope Air Force Base Joint Land Use Study. Recommendations of the study seek to limit growth encroaching on Fort Bragg by establishing buffer zones.

Hoke County Attorney Neil Yarborough said

Monday night the "delineation" of buffers should be occurring "500 yards" inside the boundaries of Fort Bragg on federally-owned land. It should not be imposed on the property owners in Hoke, he said.

"The whole way of looking at this got turned upside down," Yarborough said. "They (military) are talking about encroachment. It is a good word, but I think they are talking about the wrong group."

"It makes it seem somebody in Hoke County and Cumberland (counties) are offending the people at Fort Bragg," he said.

"Who is encroaching on whom?"

Primary goals of both boards are to establish local regulations to dodge the need for the state to pass regulatory legislation on a statewide basis for

(See *JOINT APPROACH*, page 7A)

FBI, SBI investigate reported death threats against sheriff

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the N.C. State Bureau of Investigation are looking into reported death threats against Sheriff Hubert Peterkin.

SBI Supervisor-Agent Jerry Weaver said his agency is working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to solve the death threat case.

"We know the source, but we are attempting to confirm the original source of the death threats," Weaver said. "The case is still pending."

"We are trying to determine the validity of the threats against Sheriff Hubert Peterkin."

SBI agent Charles Massey is being assisted by FBI agent Bob Burda in the ongoing probe that may also be linked to suspects outside of Hoke County.

Peterkin said the death threats occurred shortly after a drug raid was conducted by his narcotics officers and the Raeford Police Department's task force.

"I have not received the death threats directly," Peterkin said. "I have taken precautions in my personal and professional life."

"I want to commend the FBI and the SBI for their thorough investigation. We have identified several persons that may be involved in the threats against me."

(See *DEATH THREATS*, page 8A)



'Speed demon'

Retired superintendent of Hoke Schools Don Steed is a racing enthusiast who worked on the team of L. G. Dewitt while in college. Recently he was in the driver's seat for 20 laps with the Dale Jarret Adventure Driving School. See related article, page 4B.

This Week



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Hoke educators ready for vindication in supreme court

Final arguments set for Sept. 10

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

It will be sink or swim for the state when it submits final arguments to the N.C. Supreme Court in its appeal on September 10, according to Allen Strickland, Hoke school superintendent.

"If state officials lose their appeal, no

higher court appeal will be granted," Strickland said. "That means we win."

Lawyers at the N.C. State Attorney's Office are attempting to prove the state is not in violation of its duty to provide a sound basic education for Hoke's at-risk students.

Hoke educators insist the state has erred. They say the state is not providing an equal opportunity for disadvantaged students to receive an education equivalent

to students residing in wealthier counties.

Hoke's Board of Education is hoping for a second victory in a legal battle that has been ongoing between Hoke and the state since 1994.

"We won our lawsuit we filed against the state before the N.C. Superior Court, showing that the state has failed to provide at-risk students in Hoke with an equal opportunity for a sound basic education like other wealthier counties."

Strickland said. "This is the last appeal for the state. Our lawyer, Raleigh attorney Bob Spearman, will present arguments on behalf of Hoke."

"If the Supreme Court upholds the lower court's ruling, the case goes back to Superior Court Judge Howard Manning to make the final determination on what is ultimately awarded to us."

Other low-wealth counties in Hoke's (See *EDUCATION SUIT*, page 5A)

Mercer hopes audit will answer questions about transportation services

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The board of commissioners unanimously authorized Raeford CPA Frank Baker, the county auditor, to conduct a special audit on the Hoke Area Transit system on Monday evening.

Questions about possible misuse of funds and questions of irregularities have surfaced, according to Commission Vice Chairman Charles V. Daniels.

"I have seen evidence that some employees were previously receiving 100

hours per week in overtime," Daniels said immediately following the meeting. "They were part-time employees. There is no way anybody worked 100 hours a week."

"We need to find out what happened in that department, or if something was wrong."

Bob Mercer, Department of Social Services director, told the board an audit needed to be completed in order to review the activities, use of grant moneys and federal funds. HATS was transferred to Mercer's agency earlier this year.

"There are some things the county may

not find acceptable," Mercer said of his reasons for an audit. "There may have been some double-booking of revenues and some questions about expenditures."

Baker will be paid \$5,000 to \$8,000 for the audit that may go back as far as 1998-1999. Mercer said though some records are reportedly missing, he had acquired backup documentation for most of HATS' data.

"I will pay for the audit out of \$1,300 already in a line item and pull money out of lapsed salaries in the department," Mercer said. "This is so you do not have

any costs for the audit."

Wright commended Mercer for his diligence in organizing HATS.

"When we are dealing with public funds, I think we ought to get to the bottom of it," Wright said.

Mercer said he had questions about the management of HATS prior to his assuming the supervisory role. He said it appeared there may have never been some submissions for grant moneys on some items, and that the county may have also footed the entire bill for HATS in one year (See *AUDIT*, page 8A)

The News-Journal

News Other stuff

By KEN MACDONALD
General Manager

Encroach: 1: to enter by gradual steps or by stealth into the possessions or rights of another 2: to advance beyond the usual or proper limits (*Webster's new Collegiate Dictionary*)

In discussions about creating buffers around Fort Bragg and other military bases, much has been made about the notion of "encroachment," and who's encroaching upon whom. Monday night, Cumberland County At-

torney Neil Yarborough told the Hoke Commission and Raeford City Council it's Fort Bragg who's the aggressor in this episode, and suggested if it wants one, the military place a buffer zone inside the borders of Bragg. His speech was humorous and impassioned, but alas, he is wrong. Hoke County development is encroaching upon the borders of Fort Bragg.

(I suppose you could make the point Fort Bragg is encroaching upon Hoke County in that it is conducting training on private (See *OTHER STUFF*, page 6A)



A head up on safety

Officer P. Chavis with Raeford's Bike Patrol gives Mallory Gibson, 9, a helping hand with her helmet at the Hoke County Health Center Helmet Safety Fun Day Saturday. Looking on is brother Brandon Gibson, 7. They are the children of William and Angie Gibson.