

The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

50¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, September 24, 2003

Awed by Turkey Festival



Balloon power

Jawaan Harris, 10, makes sure DeMarial Harris, 3, and DeMorney Harris, 2, don't go up, up and away with their balloons. The youngsters visited the N.C. Turkey Festival Saturday with their mother, LaKeisha McGeachy, and grandmother Linda Harris. More photos may be found on 8A and 1B.

McPhatter to be tried in Cumberland County

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The upcoming trial of former county manager Bernice McPhatter will not be held in Hoke County. A superior court judge this morning granted a motion by District Attorney Kristy M. Newton to have the trial moved. Judge Jack A. Thompson also denied a motion by the defense to have Newton barred from prosecuting the trial. Defense attorney Gregory Thompson had maintained Newton's prosecuting the case would have been a conflict of interest.

McPhatter's trial will take place in Cumberland County beginning either the week of October 27 or November 3.

Judge Thompson said a change of venue request by the prosecution was unusual, but agreed that pretrial publicity could affect the outcome of the case.

In arguments earlier this week, Newton told the judge she wanted the trial moved in "fairness" to all sides. She said it should be moved to a place "within reasonable proximity" to the Hoke community, because of public sentiment. She said this would ensure each side is neither "prejudiced nor harmed" in any way during the trial.

"It is a bit unusual for the state to request a change of venue," Newton said. "I have an obligation because there are specific appellate issues involved."

"The News-Journal was the primary source of news media coverage," she said.

"Mrs. McPhatter is very well known in the community. This case is very

significant to the community."

Newton said some of the Hoke citizens who could be called as potential jurors were actually alleged victims of McPhatter.

"The citizens were directly impacted by the embezzlement," Newton said.

"They were directly victimized. She is charged with the theft of public funds (See TRIAL, page 7A)



Bernice McPhatter, former county manager, appears at a court hearing on Monday concerning her upcoming embezzlement trial.

McPhatter breaks silence

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A serene Bernice McPhatter, who resigned as Hoke's county attorney in October 2001 and is charged with embezzlement, broke her silence on Monday after almost two years.

"God is with me," she said.

McPhatter was arrested in August 2002 after a State Bureau of Investigation was completed. She is being tried on four counts of embezzlement and 64 counts of forgery and uttering.

Since leaving the employment of Hoke County, McPhatter operated a children's day care service and is also reportedly serving as a minister. Until Monday, she has never publicly spoken to news media or addressed the allegations against her.

McPhatter, who was not required to testify as a witness, appeared in Hoke Superior Court on Monday.

Sitting calmly next to her attorney, Gregory Thompson, she occasionally conferred with him privately as he inter-

(See BREAKS SILENCE, page 7A)

This Week



Isabel was kind to Hoke page 3A

Bucks gobbled up in Turkey Bowl page 5A

United Way campaign kicks off page 7A

Fayetteville can't annex us page 7A

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Hoke's top stories are on the web; send us stories, subscribe

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Building inspector fired over repairs in South Hoke

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke's building and permit inspector, Mike Sands, was fired yesterday by County Manager Mike Wood, apparently over substandard housing in South Hoke.

Wood reportedly took the action after a tour of Shirley Bullard's home off Gainey Road, and after consulting with County Attorney Neil Yarborough.

Building and Zoning Administrator Linda Revels and Wood determined that a number of permits had not been submitted to the county's inspection's depart-

ment before work was begun at the home.

Raw sewage oozing into a stream and into the Bullard's pond, a septic tank within 10 feet of the pump used for the drinking water, and an electrical box inside the house with live wires mangled and installed against building code were among many hazards found in a home where children reside.

The tour took place after substandard housing was reported by Lumbee Native American Elisha Dial. He sought the help of Commission Vice Chairman Charles Daniels and Commissioner Bill Cameron.

Bullard said her home was rehabili-

tated by the Lumbee Tribal government, but was not completed safely nor satisfactorily.

"I am calling for an audit from the Inspector General's Office at the federal Housing and Urban Development agency in Washington," Dial said. "Native Americans cannot be treated this way by their own people, and be taken advantage of this way. This is a misuse of public funds."

According to the county offices, Bullard's home will likely be condemned unless repairs are made in compliance with Hoke County building codes.

"I would assume the personnel action

came as a result of our visit to Mrs. Bullard," Revels said today. "I did not directly discuss this with Mike Wood because I was not here yesterday."

Sands admitted he was aware of the situation at Bullard's home, but said he was not required to enforce regulations if the repair crews had never sought permits to begin with.

Daniels disagreed with this assumption.

"It was Mike Sands' responsibility," Daniels said. "He is supposed to uphold the standards of this county so people can

(See INSPECTOR, page 6A)

West Nile Virus found in Hoke horses, is now 'everywhere'

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

The West Nile virus is so prevalent in North Carolina it could be in any county, says Debbie Crane of the state Dept. of Health and Human Services.

In Hoke County, one blue jay has been found to have the virus, and three horses became infected and are being treated. As yet, no Hoke human residents have been diagnosed with West Nile.

The first confirmed case in North Caro-

lina was a bird found in Chatham County on October 20, 2000. This year, 14 human cases have been confirmed in the state — one a fatality.

West Nile virus (WNV) originated in Africa, west Asia and Europe. It is carried by mosquitoes which feed on infected birds. In addition to birds, horses and people, mosquitoes may also infect sheep, cattle, cats, dogs and other animals. WNV was first detected in New York City during the summer of 1999.

N.C. Health Director Leah Devlin is-

sued a public health warning in early June of this year. As WNV made its way down the eastern seaboard and across the state, the focus had been on dead birds. "Then we were tracking the virus and seeing where it was going," Dr. Devlin said. "But, now we know it is here and our focus has changed to one of prevention."

The first cases this year in North Carolina were detected in a chicken flock in Brunswick County in January. Later WNV turned up in a Macon County crow.

"It's here," said Hoke County Health

Dept. Director Don Womble. He said two cases of WNV in horses were in western Hoke, another in eastern Hoke.

Womble warned citizens to be cautious. He advised using the "common sense we have heard over the past 100 years about mosquitoes.

"When you go outside, wear long sleeves and long pants legs whenever outdoors, use DEET (no more than 30 percent DEET on children) insect repellent and stay inside at dawn and dusk

(See WEST NILE, page 4A)

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News Other stuff

By KEN MACDONALD
General Manager

The wind speed indicator high atop the News-Journal office building has apparently been needing some attention for a few weeks but I didn't really pay it any nevermind until Thursday morning when Hurricane Isabel approached. When I opened the office door and was blown inside by a gust from the north, I

glanced at the indicator and it read, "0."

It's imperative for us weather lovers to know exactly what is happening second-by-second, and a malfunctioning anemometer in a hurricane does not cut it, so I immediately borrowed a 16-foot PVC pipe, walked to the back of the building, reached up to the post on the roof, and gave the wind cups a few good whacks (See OTHER STUFF, page 8A)

Missing Raeford woman found dead

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Raeford native Cheryl Baxley Ashburn was found dead on Saturday afternoon in south Hoke after being reported missing by her husband, Odell Ashburn on September 16.

"We were racing to save her," Mr. Ashburn said. "I am heartbroken that we could not get to her in time. She had begged me to find her when I called her on her

(See MISSING WOMAN, page 6A)



Cheryl Ashburn

SBI charges Crull with assaulting Hoke High student

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Robert Wayne Crull, a former Hoke County High School safety officer, has been charged by the State Bureau of Investigation with assault on Hoke High senior Lamar Crawford.

Crull's trial is scheduled for September 30.

According to Special Agent Jamie (See OFFICER CHARGED, page 7A)