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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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State threatens to close jail

Sheriff says four jailers needed to comply with rules

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke commissioners are planning a special meeting to discuss improvements needed at the Hoke Detention Center after Sheriff Hubert Peterkin told the board on Monday evening the county jail is in jeopardy of being shut down by the state.

"On September 16, we had an unannounced visit by Donnie Byrd from the state," Peterkin said. He found the control room was out of compliance at the jail.

"He said he would shut the annex

down if we do not man it."

Peterkin said it was not the first time the Hoke Sheriff's office had been cited for noncompliance with an un-staffed surveillance booth that is located in the rear of the jail, but the situation had never been corrected. Peterkin said the booth is supposed to be manned by a jailer, but there were not enough personnel on staff to do so.

"If we do not man it, 40 inmates would have to be housed elsewhere," Peterkin said. "We are asking for additional personnel — a total of four — to be in compliance."

"There are only three jailers per pla-

toon right now, but some time we may only be staffed with two on a shift.

"This will be a liability if we get into an emergency situation without it being manned. That extra detention officer would have to remain in the back at all times on the shift to be in compliance."

"I am concerned about the jail because as sheriff the job of this office is to oversee the health, safety, and welfare of all inmates who are housed in our facility," Peterkin said. "Even though no commitments have been made at this time, I am confident we have a board of commissioners who have the vision for

(See JAIL, page 6A)

Hoke's effort to fund schools ranks second highest in state

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke County commissioners' efforts to fund the local school system with limited resources has improved even more — ranked the second highest of counties in the state.

This is based on 2001-2002 figures in a study released by the Public School Forum of North Carolina on October 6. Climbing from third place in 2000-2001 to No. 2 in the most recent findings, Hoke's ranking is derived from a formula that compares the actual effort and ability to pay for education in the state's 100 counties.

Yet since Hoke and four low wealth

counties initiated a school finance lawsuit against the state in 1994, the gap between capabilities of the wealthiest and poorest counties to fund local education has grown by 130 percent, according to Forum officials.

"The Forum found the gap in school spending between the wealthiest and poorest counties is the largest it has been in the history of the study," John Dornan, executive director of PSF, said of its 16-year accumulation of findings. "Schools in our most affluent counties are now spending \$77,324 more per class of students than are our poorest counties."

"At the same time, students in the state's poorest counties are twice as

likely to be at-risk than are students in our richest counties."

Hoke School Superintendent Allen Strickland and local school officials are waiting for a ruling from the N.C. Supreme Court on their 10-year legal battle. They contended without extra resources and financial assistance from the state that at-risk students could not receive an equal, quality education as students in wealthier counties.

The state appealed a lower court ruling in 2003 that agreed the state was not providing a sound basic education for students in Hoke and other low wealth counties. A similar ruling in 1997 by the N.C. Supreme Court in the Leandro (See SCHOOL FUNDING, page 4A)



Fishmonger Grady Peeler prepares fish for frying at the Hospice Fish Fry held last week. The Raeford United Methodist Men sponsored the event and are donating the proceeds to Liberty Hospice, which cares for terminally ill patients. The event has so far grossed over \$4,500.

This Week



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

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Raeford Police Chief announces retirement plans

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

Mayor Bob Gentry announced at Monday night's city council meeting that Police Chief Mack High will retire at the end of the year.

"We don't get many complaints about the police department," Gentry told High, who was in the audience. "We are going to miss you."

City Manager Mike McNeill said, "I appreciate everything you have done."

High told *The News-Journal*, "I've had

some health problems, and I just figured now is the time to leave the department.

"I've got my time in and I figure now is the best time to do it. It's just that simple." High joined the Raeford PD in 1989, serving first as a patrolman.



Mack High

Later he was promoted to detective and was named chief in 1997.

High came to the Raeford PD from the Hoke County Sheriff's Office, where he had attained the rank of lieutenant. He began his career in law enforcement in Randolph County, where he was a deputy sheriff. At one time he served as a magistrate, he said.

High and his wife, Amanda, plan to stay in Raeford, High said. "I made a lot of friends here. This town has been good to me. I don't have any complaints about Raeford or Hoke County. They have

treated me great."

High's retirement target date is January 1.

'Good audit'

In other business, the city's annual audit report for fiscal year 2003-2004 was given by Frank Baker CPA PA.

Baker reported his audit found "no instances of noncompliance," as required to be reported under Government Auditing Standards.

Under material violations of finance-related legal and contractual provisions, (See CITY COUNCIL, page 8A)

Dignitaries gather for Guard sendoff

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

More than 100 family, friends, and dignitaries attended a spirited send-off at Hoke County High School last week for the N.C. National Guard's Headquarters and Headquarters Company 105th Engineer Battalion from Raeford, Rockingham, Laurinburg and St. Pauls.

During the deployment ceremony held last Wednesday in Raz Autry Stadium, Lt. Col. Tom

Harris commended the troops for their commitment.

"Today, we honor Americans as selfless heroes," Harris, stationed at the National Guard headquarters in Raleigh, said. "We gather here as a world class military force, protecting America and guarding our freedom."

Leaving behind husbands, wives, children and jobs, the 105th Engineer's combat battalion joined Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom to fight "global terrorism." They

represent part of the largest mobilization of the National Guard in North Carolina since the Vietnam War.

Raeford Mayor Bob Gentry, guest speaker at the event, greeted the "full brass" in an emotionally charged speech.

"To the young men and women standing in front of me today: You are courageous and aware of your responsibilities," Gentry, a military veteran, said. "Thank you for what you are doing for our (See GUARD, page 7A)



Captain David Heilman, a national guardsman being deployed from Hillsborough, plays with Kali McClain. Kali is the daughter of Megan McClain (left) and SPC Mitch McClain, being deployed from Mooresville.

Raeford man shot to death in robbery

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A 26-year-old Raeford man was slain in a brutal shooting near the edge of town on Friday night. The shooting occurred around 8:30 during a robbery. Two to three assailants, described as black males, apparently confronted Feliciano Torres Tolentino at St. Pauls Drive and Reaves Street. Tolentino was walking with four friends to a convenience store on Central Avenue to purchase

beer, according to Detective Greg Thomas of the Raeford Police Department.

Witnesses said the shooter, accompanied by his accomplices, pointed a long-barreled gun — possibly a shotgun — at them. Two of the men, unharmed, ran to safety along Highway 20 as they heard shots behind them. Fortino Rodriguez, 38, was bashed in the head by the gun, and Marcial Calisto, 32, was struck in the mouth by the weapon because they were unable to evade the robbers, Tho-

mas added.

Tolentino, also known as Guadalupe De La Garza III, resided in the 200 block of Lamont Street in a mobile home park. Tolentino, who was shot in the chest, was pronounced dead at the scene, according to Thomas, lead investigator in the case.

"We are asking for the help of the community in identifying these suspects," Thomas said. "The State Bureau of Investigation has also entered into the murder investigation."

(See MURDER, page 8A)