

# The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, November 12, 2003

## Veterans Day observed, patriotism honored



Clockwise from above: VFW Post 7930's Freddie McPhaul with Hoke High students Andrew Hicks (left to right), Zach Crawford, Thomas Manning, Tiffany Ross, Jessica Hanson and Kristin Franklin, local winners of an essay contest on "My Commitment to America's Future." They were recognized during Hoke's Veterans Day ceremony Tuesday at the Hoke Courthouse; Floyd McNeill, VFW Post 10 salutes for the National Anthem; the placing of memorial wreaths; VFW Post 7930 and members of JROTC at Hoke High School demonstrated proper disposal of the American flag during a ceremony recently at East Hoke Middle School.

## Prosecutors detail checks in McPhatter trial

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

A Cumberland County jury remained riveted for almost seven hours of testimony on Monday in the trial of former Hoke county manager Bernice McPhatter. She's charged with embezzling \$269,000 of county money.

In testimony, prosecutors linked cars and homes purchased by her to county funds.

Several jurors took notes throughout the day of proceedings while three Raeford bankers and one State Bureau of Investigation agent tracked the financial records of McPhatter.

Testimony for the prosecution resumed today after a day off to observe Veterans Day. Commissioner James Leach, former chairman when McPhatter was county manager, and County Manager Mike Wood, McPhatter's former boss, are tentatively scheduled to testify today. McPhatter allegedly forged Leach's signature on county checks 48 times either by stamp or signature.

In alleged straight theft indicated on Monday, Hoke District Attorney Kristy M. Newton showed the jury where McPhatter had allegedly used unauthorized county funds, totaling slightly more than \$25,000, as a down payment for property. McPhatter reportedly used the proceeds to purchase a real estate tract off Wayside Road in November 2000. The four-plus acre property included two doublewide mobile homes valued at approximately \$150,000.

SBI Agent Janie Pinkston produced documents that showed McPhatter purchased a cashiers check made payable to Raeford Attorney Harry Southerland for \$22,900. The official bank check was used for a portion of the down payment to purchase the local real estate, Pinkston said.

After Southerland reportedly deposited the check into his trust account, he handled the real estate transaction for her, according to Pinkston.

Jurors reviewed hundreds of documents — check-by-check, exhibit-by-exhibit — presented by Newton in what she referred to earlier in the trial as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Documents presented into evidence appeared to substantiate that McPhatter wrote county checks to herself

(See MCPHATTER TRIAL, page 9A)

### This Week



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**Diane Richardson earns national award**  
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## Prisoner rights group: jail a threat to inmates, staff

### Raleigh officials tour jail, seek a cooperative effort over litigation to fix problems

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

The North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services Inc. alleges conditions in Hoke County Detention Center threaten the safety of inmates and the guards who supervise them. County officials have been requested to initiate reforms to reduce overcrowding and to correct deficiencies immediately.

A corrective plan of action is being

prepared to avoid a lawsuit and to improve conditions, according to Hoke county commissioners.

"Compounding dangers posed by inadequate supervision is the problem of overcrowding," said Michael S. Hamden, executive director of the NCPLS in a recent letter. "For an extended period, the number of persons in the Sheriff's custody has consistently exceeded the jail's rated capacity."

After being contacted by Sheriff Hubert

Peterkin more than one week ago, representatives of the state organization toured the local facility on November 5. Their goal was to observe the operation on a "first-hand" basis. The official visit followed a jailbreak of four inmates on October 28, all of whom were subsequently recaptured. In the Hoke jail annex, site of the jailbreak, a booth was supposed to be monitored by a fourth jailer. It remained unmanned during the escape because of continued understaffing, according to

Peterkin.

However, findings from the tour addressed more than understaffing and overcrowded conditions.

"On the day of our tour, staff had difficulty locating the keys required to unlock secure areas," Hamden wrote in the letter. "To make matters worse, on the date of our tour, it appeared that the fire alarm located in the annex was not wired to the main jail's control center to alert staff in

(See JAIL THREAT, page 3A)

## Escaped prisoners returned to Hoke, sent to Cumberland jail

By PAT ALLEN WILSON  
Editor



Christopher Handon



Hector Frausto

After more than a week of freedom, three men who escaped from the Hoke County Detention Center in a cold rain the night of October 28 are back behind bars.

Hector Noel Mojarro Frausto, 23; Christopher Damien Handon, 22; and Steven Ray Locklear, 20, were returned to Hoke County at 3:30 Thursday afternoon. All three had been picked up by

Cobb County authorities in the Atlanta area.

A fourth escapee, John Shannon Phillips, 32, was apprehended the day after the escape when he allegedly attempted to shoplift a pair of shoes at a Raeford store.

"We were very concerned about your community as well as ours, and we put all our resources to locating and apprehending these people as quickly as possible," Col. Lynda Coker, chief investigator with

(See PRISONERS, page 6A)

## Santa Claus joins Saturday's parade

### Postponed Turkey Festival parade features bands, floats among 80 entries

The long-legged North Carolina turkey meets Santa Claus at Raeford's annual parade this coming Saturday.

The parade that would have been held in September in conjunction with the 19th Annual N.C.

Turkey Festival had to be postponed because of a visit from Hurricane Isabel. Now that the parade is happening in mid-November, the Jolly Old Elf is jumping aboard.

The better to entertain you.

One of the highlights of any parade are the school

(See FESTIVAL PARADE, page 6A)

**The Wright thing**  
Jason D. King, left, formerly of Rockfish, portrays Orville Wright, and Todd Scofield plays Wilbur Wright at an exhibit at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' accomplishments. King and Scofield, as the Wright brothers, welcome visitors to the exhibit, which features the Wright Flyer, the world's first successful engine-powered airplane. King is the son of Donald and Ann King, residents in Graham. (Photo courtesy of Kristian King)

