

The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

50¢

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Christmas gift returns Guard County pays for bus to make return possible for troops

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

Thanks to the creativity of local leaders and a little county funding, the local National Guard will be home for Christmas after all. Hoke commissioners authorized County Manager Mike Wood to sign a contract providing local citizen soldiers with a free return ride to resume training at Fort Stewart, Georgia after spending the holidays with families here.

From Louisiana they will be no longer be in training and deployment will begin. "The bottom line is they will be gone for more than a year, and they cannot leave their vehicles at Fort Stewart for safety and logistic reasons," he said.

"That's the primary reason they needed to return to Fort Stewart by bus. The timing was right that they could have four-day holidays with their families and bring their cars back if they

A soldier asked how much it would cost to ride the bus. "It was gratifying to say it would not cost them anything, the county was going to take care of it." — Tom Squier

Some 440 troops of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 105th Engineer Battalion out of Raeford were activated in early October and sent to Georgia for training. The battalion is expected to be deployed to Iraq early next year.

The troops weren't going to be able to come home before their deployment because of transportation problems.

While the local troops were allowed to drive their vehicles to and from Fort Stewart, Hoke Veterans Service Office Tom Squier explained, they will be there for a only a short time before they are sent to Louisiana, also for a brief period.

Wood said buses carrying members of HHC, 105th Eng. Bn. will leave the National Guard Armory between noon and 1 p.m. Saturday. He said authorities at Fort Bragg recommended some companies the installation uses for troop transfers, and Lancaster Tours was chosen for the trip, which will take approximately five hours. A contract was being drawn up yesterday, and it will cost the county around \$2,000.

"I'm proud of the commissioners for making that commitment and I'm sure the soldiers are — and their families," (See NATIONAL GUARD, page 6A)



Sign of the season
Santa (Mike Lucas) got visits from lots of children recently at a fundraising event for the Children's Development Center held at Raeford Presbyterian Church. One visitor was Thomas McGirr, son of Mike and Linda McGirr.

School board re-elects Smith chairman

Pilkinton elected vice chair

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Raeford attorney Russell Charles Smith has been unanimously re-elected as chairman by the Hoke County Board of Education. In another uncontested vote, the board elected Tom Pilkington, a retired N.C. Wildlife Resources officer, to serve for the first time as vice chairman.

Both educational leaders are serving a second term. They credited Hoke School Superintendent Allen Strickland for positively guiding the local board through an exceptional academic year.

A former teacher and coach for 13 years at Hoke High, Smith has consistently retained his popularity in leading the school board. This was the third time Smith was elected as chair, a position selected on an annual basis. His philosophy is "once a teacher, always a teacher."

Pilkington, a veteran of the U.S. Navy, says his philosophy is to improve the school system. "Without quality education, we do not have quality citizens," he says.

Formerly vice chairman, Harry Southerland nominated Pilkington. Pilkington subsequently nominated Smith to serve again as chairman. The school board without further nominations acted upon both recommendations.

"I feel honored and humbled to be selected by our leadership," Smith said. "I hope to continue enjoying a good working relationship with our board and the school administration."

(See SCHOOL BOARD, page 7A)

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Sheriff announces promotions, pronounces 2003 good

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

When Hoke Sheriff Hubert Peterkin was elected, he promised to meet numerous goals to improve Hoke County during his four-year term. The Sheriff's Office has already achieved almost 50 percent of those objectives in only one year, Peterkin announced on Monday.

Since Peterkin took office in December 2002, the Sheriff's Office has closed cases with up to almost 2,000 arrests. The Sheriff's Office has also conducted 16 successful drug raids in the county, he added.

"We have arrested 96 people on drug

charges," Peterkin said. "This has paid off because of our team effort."

Peterkin said five of the suspects arrested on felony drug charges have also "gone" to federal prisons on additional drug trafficking allegations.

"We feel good about our accomplishments," Peterkin said. "Morale is up — very high — among our deputies. We have made a tremendous impact on preventing crime this year."

"We could not have done this without the support of our community and the backing of the Hoke County Board of Commissioners."

Peterkin said his administration is continuing to work on these issues. (See SHERIFF, page 8A)



Shown from left are Major Freddy Johnson, Sheriff Hubert Peterkin, Chief Deputy Troy McDuffie, Captain Gary Hammond, and Captain John Pierce.

Drug smuggling ring cracked

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Law enforcement officers arrested three out-of-county men on drug charges after a stakeout last Tuesday.

Officers also seized one-half kilo of cocaine and weapons in the undercover drug raid, according to Sheriff Hubert

Peterkin. "This was a joint task force operation, and we are very pleased with the outcome," Peterkin said. "We are going to continue to rid the county of these serious drug problems."

"These illegal drug operations are what is contributing to our major crime in the county." (See DRUGS, page 8A)

Mims remembers death march \$2,000 needed for trip to take part in documentary

For John Mims, it's all about remembering.

Not the almost four years of forced labor and torture he endured while he was a captive of the Japanese during World War II, but he wants to keep alive the memory of those who died at Corrigidor and in other battles, on the Bataan Death March and in the POW camps.

Now, at age 81, Mims and other survivors who fought in The Philippines, have the opportunity to make a return trip to visit the sites where battles were fought and to once again follow the death march route.

A documentary is to be made of the visit and will be aired on the Discovery Channel this spring.

The cost of the three-week trip, to begin January 11, is approximately \$2,000 — that is from LAX airport; a fellow member of Roman Eagle Lodge in Aberdeen has donated Frequent Flyer miles to pay for Mims' fare to Los Angeles.

Less than half the prisoners of war of the Japanese lived to see freedom. Now only a handful is left to make the return trip.



John Mims

"There were James Snyder and John Freeman — both in the furniture business, I think, and a captain from Tennessee — I don't remember his last name — but he gave me a couple of drops of water on the march," Mims says. "I passed out. I didn't fall but I passed out. The good Lord kept me up, and they (See MIMS, page 6A)



By KEN MACDONALD
General Manager

I can be made to feel guilty for my part in global warming, filled-up landfills and world hunger.

I do not always shop in Raeford or always stay off the sidewalks with my bicycle. I have ridden in an SUV. All of that can bring a tinge of guilt too.

I have told blonde jokes, Yankee jokes and lawyer jokes. (Okay, maybe I'm not sorry about those.)

I confess to having less than pleasant thoughts on several occasions recently when

I went to the mailbox and none of the stuff mailed to me over a week ago had arrived. But then I felt guilty because I realized the poor postal system folks have been swamped, they've been contending with the flu like the rest of us, and \$2 is still pretty good to get 45 5X7 photographs from Austin, Texas.

I confess to thinking it is past time to paint over the mural on the old hotel building and that sometimes art does not appreciate with age. But now I feel guilty because, come on, it was Boy Scouts who pitched in and painted it, and I don't want to (See OTHER STUFF, page 5A)