

# The News-Journal

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50¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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## Guard gets sendoff after holiday at home

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

By PAT ALLEN WILSON  
Editor

There was no place like home for the holidays as local National Guard en-

joyed a week's reunion with their families for Christmas.

An informal send-off to end the week was held on Saturday at the National Guard Armory on Teal Drive, which was attended by about 50 people. Troops had returned for the first time after be-

ing deployed almost three months ago to Fort Stewart, Georgia, activating Headquarters & Headquarters Company, 105th Engineer Battalion in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Authorizing funding for a charter bus to depart Raeford. Hoke County com-

missioners offered free return service to Fort Stewart for all local Guardsmen. Local leaders, families, and friends waved goodbye as National Guardsmen boarded a bus provided by Lancaster Tours.

A homemade sign fashioned by Richard Ferguson, a Vietnam veteran and commander of the Alphonso Pickett VFW Post No. 7930, proclaimed Raeford is part of "America, Home of Heroes."

Many of the Guardsmen needed transportation because they would be unable

to leave their vehicles permanently at Fort Stewart if they would be deployed to Iraq.

"Oh Jesus, thank you for answering our prayers," Mary Harris, wife of activated Sgt. First Class Wilson Harris, said. "It was a blessing that the county commissioners did this for our husbands and the wives serving locally in the National Guard," she said.

"This was our last opportunity to see them before they will probably be shipped off to Iraq."

(See NATIONAL GUARD, page 8A)



Richard Ferguson, who was just named the new Hoke County Veterans Service Officer, bids National Guardsmen farewell. See more photos on page 1B.

## Locklear to take oath as Raeford police chief

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Major Kevin Locklear, Raeford's assistant chief of police, has been named the successor of retiring Chief Mack High. Locklear is distinguished as the first Native American to take command of the Raeford Police Department.

He will be sworn in today, according to Mike McNeill, Raeford's city manager.

"Kevin Locklear is the best man for the job," McNeill said of his decision to appoint him. "He has worked his way up through the ranks, and I think he deserves this position."

Locklear has worked as second-in-command to High since 1997 when High was named chief.

A swearing-in ceremony attended by Locklear's wife, Earlina, High, McNeill and other dignitaries will be held at 2



Kevin Locklear is shown in September being congratulated by the late Mayor Bob Gentry after Locklear earned Advanced Law Enforcement Certification.

p.m. at the Raeford City Hall. Vera Hollingsworth, Hoke Clerk of the Superior Court, will officiate when Locklear takes the oath of office.

(See POLICE CHIEF, page 8A)

### This Week



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Collards separate southerners from the rest page 4B

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Flood returns as MLK speaker page 3A

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## County back to business following McPhatter conviction

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

County business appears back to normal after former county manager Bernice McPhatter was convicted of an embezzlement and forgery-uttering scheme. Spanning more than six years, her criminal financial activities have been hard to reconcile by some Hoke commissioners — past and present. They still find it hard to conceive the enormity of her crimes.

Sentenced to six to eight years in state prison without benefit of parole, McPhatter's fall from power ended with District Attorney Kristy M. Newton convincing a Cumberland County jury that

McPhatter was guilty in November. She was sentenced on four counts of embezzlement involving almost \$270,000 of county moneys and more than 60 counts of forgery and uttering of county checks.

### Other misconduct

What many Hoke citizens may not be aware of is that Newton was unable to introduce into evidence at the trial past irregularities levied against McPhatter. This, because McPhatter was reprimanded by a state and a federal agency, but not ever criminally charged.

County finance personnel revealed in 2002 that McPhatter had allegedly "sold" herself approximately \$6,000 in vacation (See MCPHATTER, page 4)

## Then and now: Commissioners' views

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Opinions vary among commissioners on the embezzlement committed by former county manager Bernice McPhatter. Some strongly condemned her actions, but only one board member, Commissioner James Leach, expressed sympathy toward McPhatter after her conviction.

Commission Vice Chairman Charles V. Daniels, one of those most critical of

McPhatter prior to her being investigated, said he is glad the trial is over. He thinks McPhatter got what she deserved in sentencing, but said some citizens think she should have been sentenced for a longer period of time.

### Now

"I am glad District Attorney Kristy Newton got a conviction on Bernice McPhatter, and the county recovered its money," Daniels said. "Of course, we did not recover all of the money because there were other checks written that (See THEN AND NOW, page 4A)

## County explores building sewer plant to foster growth

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Hoke County officials are exploring the feasibility of building a county-owned sewer treatment plant that would make

possible commercial and industrial growth. It could also prevent droughts that cause devastating losses to crops, according to Commission Chairman Bobby Wright, also a tobacco and cotton (See SEWER PLANT, page 8A)

## The News-Journal

News Other stuff

By KEN MACDONALD  
General Manager

Christmas with the Riddle side of the family — in Riddle-land, or Ridlin as I like to call it — could have been a scene from Norman Rockwell's home.

No wait — wrong Norman. I'm thinking of Norm from Cheers. Anyway, get-togethers in Ridlin are always interesting.

For example, one of the kids was running around pointing at people and yelling, "Bang, bang, bang, BANG! Who did I shoot?"

"Huh?" I replied.

"Bang, BANG, bang, bang, bang, bang, who did I shoot?"

I gave him another puzzled look, and he said, "You!"

"Bang, bang, BANG, bang, bang, who did I shoot?"

Silence.

"Me!" he said.

"Well it didn't take. You're still talking."

I said, "Try again."

He played this game off and on the entire afternoon, and I was thinking, "Somebody give this kid a kazoo or a drum set — he's not being obnoxious enough."

(See OTHER STUFF, page 6A)

## Trash at H.E.L.P. store last straw

After-hours bin to close, Johnson says store needs help



Bonnie Johnson amidst items discarded behind the H.E.L.P. store over the weekend, most of which are not usable.

By PAT ALLEN WILSON  
Editor

### H.E.L.P. needs help.

The last straw for Bonnie Johnson, director of the nonprofit H.E.L.P. store in downtown Raeford, was arriving at work and finding a truck load of junk furniture piled at the back door.

"I thought the day a gentlemen

brought me three truckloads of junk that I unloaded and then had carted off to the trash dump was it but..." Johnson says, indicating a pile that contains a couch that no self respecting person would risk sitting on, chairs in several pieces, a dirty and rotted bench, table legs without tops, tops without table legs, a box springs with no mattress and bed frames, (See H.E.L.P., page 4A)