

# The News-Journal

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50¢

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Mike McNeill

## City Manager McNeill resigns

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Raeford city manager Mike McNeill tendered a letter of resignation yesterday without warning, shocking many city and county officials.

After serving the city for almost seven years as its chief executive officer, McNeill announced he was leaving. During an unscheduled personnel session, requested at the Raeford city council meeting on Monday evening, McNeill privately discussed his deci-

sion with them.

Employed with the city of Raeford for nearly 17 years, McNeill, 54, said there was no planning involved. The decision to resign was "sudden" because of health concerns, he added.

The recurrent shakeup in city government during the past two months began with the sudden death of mayor Bob Gentry of an apparent heart attack on October 29 and subsequent appointment of John Jordan, vice president of Fidelity Bank as mayor pro tempore. That tragedy was followed by the retire-

ment of police chief Mack High because of medical reasons and promotion of Kevin Locklear, former assistant police chief, to chief of police.

McNeill's temporary successor is assistant city manager Betty Smith, who was promoted to interim city manager on Monday evening.

McNeill cited the condition of his health as his primary reason for quitting and the stress of the job as secondary. He underwent successful heart bypass surgery two years ago. He was deeply impacted by the death of Gentry, a close friend.

"I would like to tender my resignation due to personal reasons," McNeill wrote in his letter to Jordan and the councilmen. "I have enjoyed working for the City of Raeford. I feel that it is now time for me to take a new direction in my life."

"Thank you for the opportunity to serve the citizens of Raeford."

McNeill was not required to provide notice. The city council agreed unanimously to accept his resignation effective immediately. They also unanimously (See MCNEILL, page 5A)

## Land use update generates options, not just sacrifices

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Raeford city attorney William Fields, a member of the commission spearheading the Hoke County Preservation Project, told 30 residents at a special meeting on Monday evening that a land use study of the county is essential.

This, after a regional Fort Bragg/Pope Air Force Base Joint Land Use Study recommended by the N.C. Department of Commerce was approved by some counties last May. The study was supposed to protect military training around the bases.

The City of Raeford, Hoke and

Cumberland counties rejected the plan because they were the biggest stakeholders to lose the use of their land. If approved by the N.C. General Assembly, the JLUS would permit only one dwelling per 19 acres on almost 5,000 to 7,000 acres of Hoke land and enact various restrictions on 21,000 acres of remaining land. The plan would also limit water and sewer installation in much of the northern end of the county.

"We have to be ever vigilant," Fields said of compatible land use. "This is not going to be over within six months."

"It is going to be here the rest of our lives."

(See LAND USE, page 6A)

## Honored



Raeford Mayor Pro Tem John Jordan, right, thanks retired police chief Mack High for his service at a reception in High's honor Monday night.



Retired Register of Deeds Della Maynor-Bowen received the Hoke County Native American Club 2003 Path Makers Award. See related story page 8A.

### This Week



McRae makes All Cape Fear page 4A

Golden LEAF grant to help horse park page 3A

Rep. Bonner won't run again page 3A

'Pink' luncheon is for cancer awareness page 3A

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## Under new city pet ordinance, pets must be restrained

Law passed Monday defines nuisance animals, stops short of restricting number of pets

By PAT ALLEN WILSON  
Editor

City Councilmen unanimously passed a new animal control ordinance but backed off from limiting the number of cats and dogs pet residents may keep — a consideration when the ordinance was first proposed.

Animals are to be kept under restraints, be properly cared for, have rabies shots and may not be nuisances. Failure to abide by the ordinance is a civil disorder and the

owner of the animal is subject to a \$50 fine.

An animal is under restraint if it is on or within a vehicle being driven or parked; within a secure enclosure; is controlled by means of a chain, leash or other like device; or is on the premises of the custodian and attended by and under the control of a competent person.

An animal is a nuisance if it molests passersby or passing vehicles; attacks other animals; damages property; habitually barks, whines, howls, crows or makes

other noises or threatens the comfort, health or safety of others; is an unconfined animal in season; habitually defecates or urinates on the property of others; destroys plants, shrubs and the landscaping on property other than its owners; results in excessive odor or other unsanitary conditions; or is vicious and not confined.

Cruelty to animals is covered in the ordinance as are instructions on how animals are to be seized humanely.

Cows, goats, horses sheep and cattle

may not be kept on land of less than an acre and must be kept at a certain distance from other residences. Only five chickens may be kept and they may not run at large. Swines are not allowed and horses may not be ridden on sidewalks.

The feeding and harboring of stray animals is forbidden.

Decisions of the animal control officer regarding civil fines may be appealed to the city council through a written request.

Attorney William Fields, who drew up (See PET ORDINANCE, page 7A)

## Hoke annual audit delayed for 3 months due to law change

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Raeford CPA Frank Baker, county auditor, said the N.C. Department of Treasury has granted an extension to Hoke County until January 31 for submitting its annual audit that was due by October 31, 2003. The fiscal report for 2002-2003 is

almost complete, according to Baker.

He said Hoke's delay in sending in its audit report for approval to the Local Government Commission, a division of the Treasury department, was due to a requirement to use new accounting standards. GASB-34, the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, will be used (See AUDIT, page 8A)

## Autopsy closes case on woman's death

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

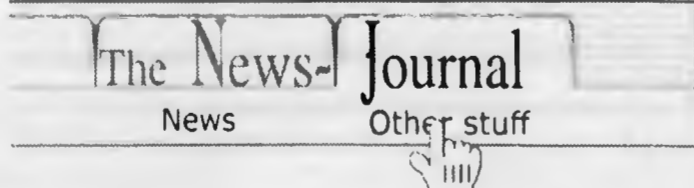
according to Dr. Anthony C. Soldano, a pathologist who issued the findings.

Her body was discovered three months ago off McPhaul Road after she was reported missing by her husband, Odell Ashburn.

According to the autopsy comments, Ashburn, 51, was known to have a (See CASE CLOSED, page 7A)



Raeford firefighter Jason Branch, left, and Raeford Police Officer Johnny Jarman, center, were honored for saving the life of a CVS Pharmacy employee who suffered a heart attack in the store. Raeford Fire Chief Dickie Lippard made the presentation at Monday night's city council meeting.



By KEN MACDONALD  
General Manager

One of the prettiest trees in the South is the live oak, so named, I'm guessing, to set the record straight, because if you look closely at them you'll think they're dying.

Though a live oak tree might be mostly green, much of the trunk and many of the limbs can be dead, and not just dead, but rotten, giving the appearance that the tree is doomed. These huge old trees call attention to themselves by dropping their rotten limbs on driveways, cars, slow-moving pedestrians and Roadrunner cable lines.

But even more annoying is their habit of dropping leaves. To be such big trees, live oaks are covered with teeny tiny, middle-finger-shaped, rake-proof leaves. Neither evergreen nor deciduous, the trees are insidious, twirling those little devils to the ground from the first of January until the end of March.

Almost everyone else in town rakes once toward the end of November and doesn't worry about yard work again until it's time to cut grass. Not me. I have six large live oaks, and I am paying for the beauty of the South.

(See OTHER STUFF, page 5A)