

The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

50¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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State says no immediate money for Hoke Board of Education says Manning ruling shows they're on right track

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

State educators at the Department of Public Instruction have indicated they will not infuse more low wealth dollars into the Hoke School System for at-risk

students even though a Wake superior court judge has ordered them to do.

In response, Hoke educators said they would not give up fighting to receive more additional funding for at-risk students. Judge Howard Manning has not responded yet to DPI officials who

are apparently disregarding his ruling to provide more funding. A quarterly progress report on Hoke schools by DPI is what elicited the recent evaluation from Manning.

DPI officials already announced they plan to ask the General Assembly to

budget \$22 million next year, earmarking it for educating students with low achievement and those residing in impoverished counties. Hoke educators say that will still leave a massive deficiency in educational funding for counties with fewer resources.

In the interim, a decision is pending in the N.C. Supreme Court on an appeal filed by the state after Hoke County Schools won a lawsuit seeking more low wealth money for its disadvantaged children. Hoke has waged a 10-year (See *STATE RESPONSE*, page 8A)

Health board fires Womble



By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The Hoke Health Board without explanation fired Don Womble, the board's part-time consultant, and former Hoke health director.

Some county officials said privately it appeared Womble was attempting to undermine interim health director Cynthia Oxendine's management of the Health Department. Blaming Womble, they said a bio-terrorism plan that brought \$75,000 to the county was in danger of being withdrawn because Womble allegedly never submitted a required plan to the state. He was to complete it before he retired in November 2003, but did not advise Oxendine it was still pending, according to the county officials.

(See *WOMBLE*, page 8A)



Hoke musician Smith McInnis, right, plays with Alasdair Fraser, considered the best fiddler in Scotland, and Natalie Haas. See the story on page 4A.

This Week



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Hoke's top stories are on the web; send us stories, subscribe
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Vote on rezoning land near Camp Rockfish postponed Commissioners also sign with Time Warner for cable TV service to east Hoke

By Victoriana Summers
Staff writer

Hoke's board of commissioners postponed a controversial decision on rezoning a nine-acre tract of land near Camp Rockfish on Davis Bridge Road from residential to highway commercial. The board will again take up the matter its first meeting in May.

A Dollar General Store is currently under construction in the area. It will front Davis Bridge Road next to a dirt road that serves as the entrance to Rockfish Outdoor Center, a spiritual retreat known as Camp Rockfish. However, numerous people are against a rezoning request for property situated behind the future Dollar General, saying it would encroach on the camp.

Commissioner Jean Powell, supported

by Commissioners James Leach and Bill Cameron, said she was struck by the two different views expressed on the rezoning request. Commission Chairman Bobby Wright wanted to evaluate both sides, but was concerned it would open up "a can of worms" to rezone commercially on a dirt road.

However, Commissioner Charles V. Daniels pointed out that property owner

Hector Davis, who requested the rezoning, had offered to previously sell the property to the United Methodist Church for Camp Rockfish. The offer was declined, Davis told Daniels.

"Mr. Davis has been paying taxes all these years on this property," Daniels said in defense of Davis's request.

Raeford attorney Gina Sutherland represented (See *REZONING*, page 8A)

Young driver leads police on 3-county chase, then wrecks

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

Call it bad luck or being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but the end result is that a young Hoke man wrecked the vehicle he was driving and is in police custody after leading law officers on a chase in three counties Friday afternoon.

Wagram Police Officer George Britt was attempting to stop another vehicle in Scotland County when he first spied Christopher Tant's vehicle. "He saw my (blue) lights and thought I was after him," Britt said. "He passed the car I was after at

a high rate of speed, and I followed."

Driving a 1989 Chevrolet S-10 pickup, Tant drove into Hoke County on Edinborough Road then south onto Hilltop Road.

It was shades of "Thelma and Louise" as Tant neared the Robeson County line on South Hilltop because the Hoke Sheriff's officers had set up a license check station. Because Britt knew about the checkpoint, he radioed ahead, and Hoke officers laid down spike strips. Just 30 minutes after the roadblock was set up, Tant's pickup went speeding through.

(See *CHASE*, page 9A)



Christopher Tant wrecked this vehicle near the Campbell's plant near Maxton.

Courthouse break-in a mystery

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

Hoke County Courthouse employees discovered the courthouse had been broken into when they reported for work Tuesday morning. So far, Raeford police have no suspects.

Chief Kevin Locklear said entry was made after a downstairs window was broken sometime after midnight. A thief or thieves then made their way upstairs and broke another window for access to offices where court records are kept. He said this morning the only thing determined missing was "just a bunch of

loose change. So far, at this point, that is all we can tell."

Detective Greg Thomas said the perpetrator or perpetrators did a lot of damage inside the building — broken glass and torn-up desks. The damage was believed to have been done when entry was made, not the result of vandalism, according to the chief. "They just went through stuff on the desk," he said.

An attempt to break into the court vault was also made. "You could see pry marks on the vault," Locklear said.

Clerks are going over files to determine if any are missing. (See *COURTHOUSE*, page 3A)



By KEN MACDONALD
General Manager

honor of what is only slightly short of a religious holiday.

Yes, the stories about the tower going up downtown, and Pinehurst annexing Five Points and the horse park were April Fool's jokes. And yes, our website was also upside down Wednesday afternoon and Thursday for the same reason. If you're new to this area, be advised to put up your guard toward the end of March. You can be sure we will suspend the principles of journalistic integrity and good taste in

My favorite story coming out of reaction to this year's jokes is that a resident of Five Points, who has some land for sale out there, quickly decided to raise the price of the land because it was now in Pinehurst. Sorry to disappoint.

I'm also sorry to report everything else in the paper was more or less the truth, and we're stuck with it.

(See *OTHER STUFF*, page 6A)