

The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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Trial of fired Hoke finance director looms

D.A. files motion to move trial of Shirley Rush, trial date may be set next week

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer



Shirley Rush
Rush was fired shortly after being indicted on one count of accessory after the fact

Two years and three months after former Hoke finance director Shirley Rush was charged with accessory after the fact in the embezzlement case of former county manager Bernice McPhatter, Rush could finally be going to trial.

The Hoke District Attorney's office wants to transfer Rush's upcoming trial to another county prior to setting a trial

date. District Attorney Kristy Newton is requesting a Hoke Superior Court judge consider this request during the court session next week.

Rush was in August 2002 in connection with the criminal activities of McPhatter. Found guilty in November 2003 of four counts of embezzlement of \$269,000 in county funds, McPhatter was also convicted on more than 60 counts of forgery and uttering of signatures, which included those of several county commissioners. McPhatter is currently serving up to an eight-year sentence in state prison without the possibility of parole.

Rush's defense attorney, Fayetteville

lawyer Glenn Mitchell, has previously remarked that Rush is determined to prove her innocence. Mitchell said he did not think Rush would accept a plea-bargain to a lesser charge even if it was offered. Rush is currently serving as the secretary/bookkeeper of The Laurinburg District Christian School located on Old Wire Road.

New motion

Newton and Assistant District Attorney Chris Rhue filed the change of

venue motion yesterday. Their secondary request is to require a special jury be based in from another county if a judge will not grant switching the trial outside of Hoke.

"As a result of the nature of these proceedings and the pretrial publicity and media coverage regarding these matters, the passions of the population are so inflamed as to make a fair trial within Hoke reasonably unlikely, if not (See RUSH TRIAL, page 8A)

Manufacturer to open Friday

To bring nearly 100 jobs to Hoke

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

More jobs are on the way to Hoke County with the announcement today of the grand opening scheduled on Friday of Military Manufacturing Group. A million dollar firm, MMG is merging a Florida company with a local partner, according to Don Porter, Hoke Economic Developer.

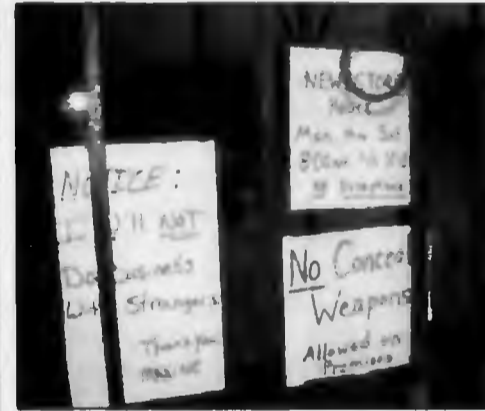
"Things are looking up for Hoke County," Porter said. "This company will be creating new jobs — not just bring personnel from Florida.

"The company officials recognized that Hoke would be a good corporate supporter even though the state of Florida was trying to keep them from leaving the state. The firm is solid financially," he said.

"We were able to attract them here even with us facing the out-of-state competition."

Porter said MMG is recognized as a quality company that will make a significant contribution to the Hoke and North Carolina economies. Grand opening festivities will begin at 3 p.m. at the manufacturing corporations' new facility at 925 Doc Brown Road northwest of Raeford. MMG joins Cheerwine bottling firm and Raeford Aviation on what is developing as a central corporate corridor for Hoke businesses, according to Porter.

Porter said MMG is a partnership that was formed between Tim D'Annunzio of Paraclete Armor & Equipment Inc., a large firm operating in St. Pauls, and Pat and Derek Thomas of Sun Path. MMG will manufacture harness and container systems for parachutes. Sun Path and another (See PLANT OPENS, page 5A)



Top to bottom: Shown in happy times are Steven Stuart with his wife, Mary (left) and the late Sadie Holiday, Mrs. Stuart's mother; the store, closed after the robbery; signs on the door, one reading, "Notice, I will not do business with strangers."

Hillcrest store clerk killed in robbery

Robbery was third at store in past year

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

The fatal shooting of Steven Stuart, a disabled convenience store clerk, in a Hillcrest robbery on Saturday marred the Thanksgiving weekend for members of the family who owned the grocery store.

Stuart, 53, of Beard Road, an amputee using an artificial leg, was shot by an unknown assailant early Saturday morning. At the time of his slaying, Stuart was working alone on the morning shift at Daniel's Quick Stop, which is owned by his wife's relatives.

Maxine Blackburn co-owns the grocery store located at 2743 U.S. 401 Business with daughter Joyce Blackburn. She said they might never re-open the neighborhood grocery. "I had hoped the community would have turned around in Hillcrest, but it is riddled with drugs and break-ins.

"These hoodlums are bold and dangerous and no one is stopping them," Blackburn said. "My prayer is that the Sheriff's department will find the person who killed my brother-in-law," she said. "I will not cease praying until they do."

Major Freddy Johnson, supervisor of the major crimes division for the Hoke Sheriff's Department, said all efforts are being put forth to solve the crime.

"Because we are trying to catch the killer quickly, very few details are being released yet," Johnson said. "We don't want to give out too much pertinent information that might damage the investigation."

One customer said Stuart was usually armed, making no attempt to conceal the weapon.

"Mr. Stuart showed me a gun that he carried," the customer, who asked not to be identified, said. "He said no one was going to get away with robbing him."

(See ROBBERY, page 6A)

This Week



From Iraq duty to firefighting in Tylertown page 1B

Security tight at West Hoke Middle page 3A

NJ wins press awards page 3A

Lady Bucks win, Boys lose page 5A

Index

- Births.....3B
- Calendar.....5B
- Classifieds.....7-8B
- Deaths.....7A
- Editorials.....2-3A
- Engagements.....3B
- Legals.....6B
- Religion.....8A
- Schools.....2B
- Socials.....3-4B
- Sports.....4-5A
- Weddings.....3B

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Woman dies when car goes out of control

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

A woman died Monday when her out-of-control car backed into a small tree, and then hit another tree and fence while moving forward on Health Drive.

The driver, Sally McDuffie Jones, 82, was dead at the scene and her passenger, Nettie McDuffie McQueen, 78, received an injury to the wrist.

The accident happened as Jones and McQueen were leaving the parking lot at Open Arms Retirement Center after visiting a resident, who is a resident there.

(See FATAL WRECK, page 7A)



Sally Jones died in this one-car wreck.

The News-Journal

News

Other stuff

By KEN MACDONALD
Publisher

I call on those that call me son, Grandson, or great-grandson, On uncles, aunts, great-uncles or great-aunts.

To judge what I have done.
William Butler Yeats

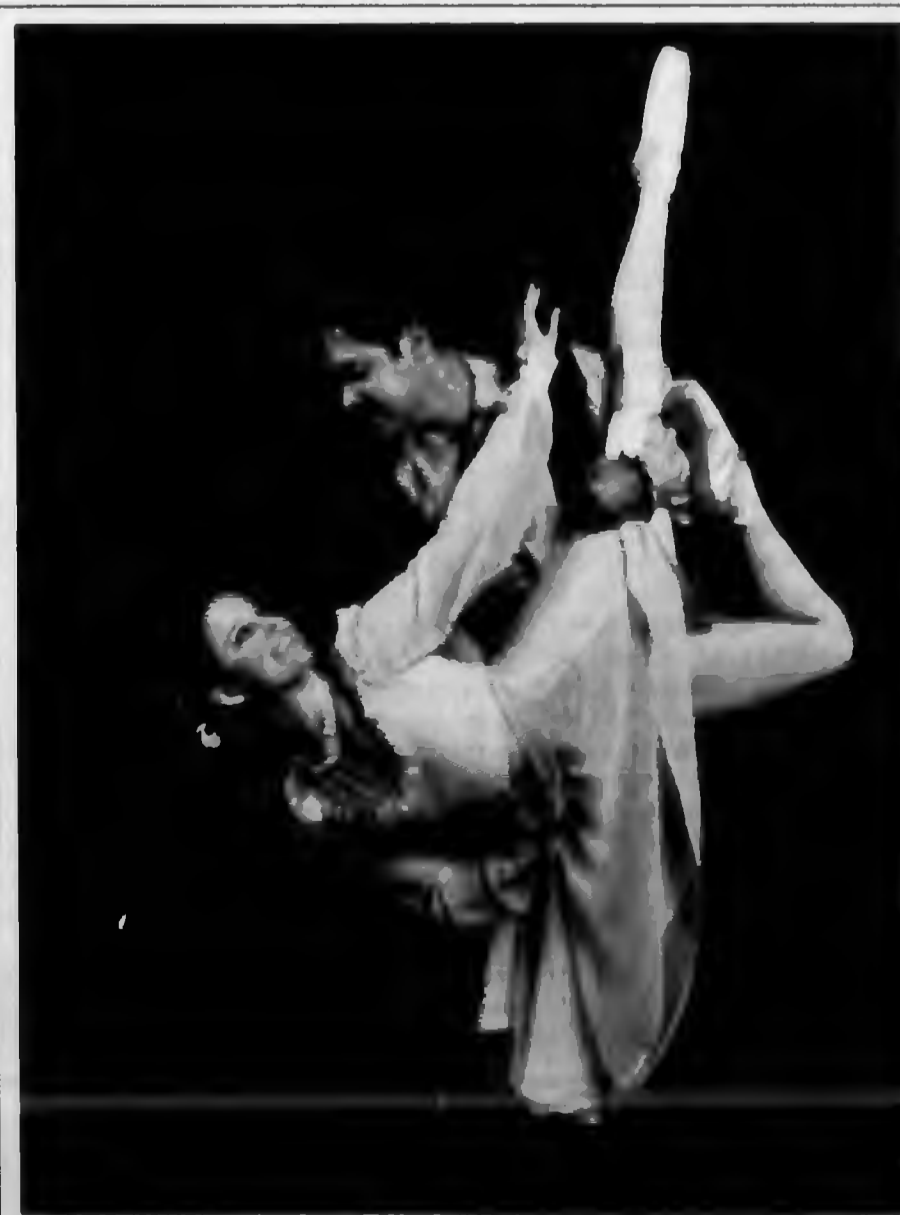
After the Norman Rockwell Thanksgiving was over at our house, my son was in the living room typing away on schoolwork.

I let him type awhile before I went into the room to be supportive.

"You've got a 30-page senior thesis due Monday and you're still not done yet?" I asked. Actually, I was quite pleased he'd started it.

He told me his goal was to complete the first draft that day, which was Saturday, and then have a little time to correct it and massage it.

His topic, the "political ambiguity of the poetry of Yeats," struck me as inter- (See OTHER STUFF, page 7A)



Raeford's Sarah Beth Barnes dances as Clara with Alfred Marengo in the North Carolina State Ballet production of the "Nutcracker" on December 5, 11 and 12 at the Crown Center in Fayetteville. See related story on page 3B.