

# 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 board of education holds meeting here Hoke superintendent Strickland urges board to make good court's ruling

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

It was history in the making when the State School Board and staff from the state Department of Public Instruction met for the first time in Hoke County on

January 6—seeing rather than just hearing about educational challenges.

Holding their monthly meeting at Sandy Grove Elementary School, state school board members were greeted with songs performed by the school's fourth and fifth grade student chorus. Leading

the state delegation were State Board of Education chairman Howard Lee and interim State School Superintendent Tricia Willoughby.

Hoke school superintendent Allen Strickland, host of the event, warned that the gap was widening between the top

and bottom counties with fewer financial resources available. He criticized the state and federal government for recently labeling Hoke an "urban" rather than a "rural" school district. This change in classification, he maintains, decreased the potential for Hoke to receive federal

grants for parental involvement in the schools and some additional teacher recruitment dollars.

"I can take you on a bus tour of Hoke County, and you will quickly realize that we are not an urban county," Strickland said. (See BOARD MEETS, page 5A)

## Veteran magistrate Washington fired Judge appoints councilman instead

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

The first African American female magistrate to be appointed in Hoke County has been fired after a 15-year career, according to judicial authorities.

The firing happened even though Hoke Clerk of Superior Court Vera Hollingsworth nominated former Hoke magistrate Sherra McGregor Washington to be reappointed for another term.

At the request of judicial officials, Hollingsworth subsequently swore in Raeford city councilman Wayne Mills on Monday, replacing Washington after a three-week vacancy. A former Hoke schoolteacher and semi-retired businessman, Mills



Sherra Washington

has resigned from his elected city council position.

"I nominated all five of the Hoke magistrates to be reappointed, and she was one of them," Hollingsworth, serving a second term, said. "I have worked with her. I found Sherra Washington to be a fair magistrate. I thought she did a fine job."

Washington indicated her immediate supervisor, Chief District Court Judge Warren Pate, previously advised her of some problems concerning her actions.

"There were some things that happened last year and some accusations," Washington, a 45-year-old Hoke native, said of her judicial service. "There was no proof or foundation to it."

"I feel like this decision was unjustified and made unfairly. I do not think I was treated equally as the other magistrates. It is impossible to please everyone in this type of profession when you are working with the public, but I took my job seriously."

Washington was next in seniority to Hoke magistrate Steve Hedgpeth when Hoke Superior Court Judge B. Craig Ellis, officially dismissed her in December. Ellis is delegated power to "hire or fire" magistrates. Ellis said Washington had been aware of the pending situation.

"After having discussions with Judge Pate on a number of occasions, I thought it was not appropriate to reappoint her," Ellis said. (See MAGISTRATE, page 4A)



Dee Dee Richardson and the two youngest Richardson children, Brennan and Laurel, with some of the stuff toys she is collecting for children affected by the tsunamis.

## Woman is collecting stuffed animals for children in tsunami-ravaged areas

By PAT ALLEN WILSON  
Editor

Dee Dee Richardson and her three children recently came across stuffed animals and toys the children no longer played with when they cleaned up the children's playroom. They were put in sacks for "good will" donations. Later, watching on TV the news of the tsunami tragedies, she thought, "I can do something better with these toys."

Richardson talked it over with her eight-year-old daughter, Demi, a student at Rockfish Hoke Elementary School. "We could send these to the kids over there," Demi said, referring to the children whose lives were uprooted by the tsunami.

"Everybody was sending, food, clothes. We thought it would be nice if they had something different to give the kids," Richardson said. The military wife and mother began collect-

ing stuffed animals to send to the youngsters of the 12 countries affected by the tsunamis. "If I were there I'd give them hugs," she said, and dubbed her menagerie of stuffed animals "Hugs for the Children."

"You see all these children that are orphaned, some not even orphaned. You don't know what the children have lost. The thought of having something sent that they can hold on to... Here it's an everyday thing for our children," Richardson said.

Richardson's project won the approval of her husband, Ben, and she is waiting to hear from agencies she has contacted that she hopes to send the stuffed animals to and who will distribute them. She will use her baby-sitting money for postage, she said. "Everybody says it will be expensive," she added.

She began collecting stuffed toys from acquaintances and posted "Hugs for the Children" online on the Free-Cycle site and

on her own site on Free Ads in NC. She also contacted CNN and local news stations to get the word out.

Yesterday she had already collected approximately 180 stuffed toys. Included in her collection are soft animals of all sizes, colors and species. There is the "Caddy Shack" groundhog that sings and moves his head back and forth, a March of Dimes bunny, a pink elephant, and a talking Elmo and a talking Barney.

Demi donated Spirit Horse, the stuffed animal she got for Christmas. "She said she'd like to give to the children for 'spirit,'" Richardson said, "I thought that was touching."

One woman contacted Richardson through the Free-Cycle site with the promise of hand crafting some animals.

Demi and her siblings, Brennan, 4, and Laurel, 21 months, will decorate (See HUGS FOR CHILDREN, page 5A)

### This Week



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## The News-Journal

News Other stuff

By KEN MACDONALD  
Publisher

My sailboat has been collecting moss and yearning for the good old days. The days before my crew got their driver's licenses, and left Raeford and sailing in their rearview mirrors. The days when we plied the open waters of the mighty Atlantic. Okay, well mostly Mott Lake.

She has been sitting under a tarp for so long that vines have grabbed the axle of her

trailer as if to hold her back and squeeze out what little life may be left in her. Parked at the edge of the backyard, her exposed bows a nasty green, she has been a daily reminder that I am no sailor, I am a weenie. Or else I'd be out there, crew or no, riding the winds and parting the waters.

Then it occurred to me last week when spring arrived: there is a new crew to be nurtured. Two people who would love the thrill of screaming across the waters about (See OTHER STUFF, page 3A)



Lokie - mom's gone, needs home.

## Woman convicted of 'dumping' dog Missing dog's pup needs home

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Hoke District Court Judge Richard T. Brown sent a stiff message to potential animal abusers when he recently convicted Rockfish resident Sharon Harris of cruelty to animals and abandonment of her female dog, "Sheba."

A friendly mixed retriever-chow and mother of a recent litter of puppies, Sheba's whereabouts (See DOG ABUSE, page 5A)