# The News-Journal

If it happened, it's news to us

**50**¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, March 16, 2005

## Rush trial cut short as plea agreement reached Former Hoke finance director pleads guilty to misdemeanor, avoids jail time

BY VICTORIANA SUMMERS Staff writer

Hoke assistant prosecutor Chris Rhue and defense attorney Glenn Adams spent two hours selecting a predominantly minority jury in the Robeson County

courthouse. However, the trial of fired got off the ground on Monday.

Rush withdrew her plea of "not guilty" to a felony on Monday after — at her attorney's request --- Rhue agreed to a reduced charge.

The trial was transferred from Hoke well publicized in The News-Journal elsewhere.

Rush was initially charged with as-Hoke finance director Shirley Rush never to Lumberton because Rush's case was sessory after the fact in connection with the embezzlement case of former county and other newspapers. A Hoke judge manager Bernice McPhatter. Convicted determined for Rush to receive a fair of stealing \$269,000 of county money, years in state prison.

Rush decided to plead guilty to a lesser criminal charge of violating auditors' rules as a county official when she "unlawfully and willfully" concealed information leading to a crime. She received trial that the case should be prosecuted McPhatter is serving a sentence of eight a suspended sentence of 45 days in the

## County audit results mixed Shortfalls cited in some areas

**By VICTORIANA SUMMERS** Staff writer

audit for 2003-04, the state's treasury department commended Hoke commissioners and staff on March 3 for their efforts, but also chastised them for temporary budget shortfalls tion previously supplied by found in some departments.

The state officials sent a mixed message, praising the financial condition of the county's general fundasit "continues to improve." Yet state auditors indicated the county was required to keep its budget balanced throughout the year without acquiring any

deficits, but failed to do so.

best reserve fund balances they After reviewing the Hoke have had in years," said Raeford CPA Frank Baker, annual county auditor. "I will be presenting the annual audit on Monday night to the commissioners."

> Preliminary audit informathe Hoke finance department indicated revenues for Hoke increased from \$16.7 million in 2003 to \$20.9 million in 2004. The available reserve fund balance also increased from \$4.3 million in 2002-03 to \$5.7 million in 2003-04 --- almost a two percent jump.

However, the state treasur-





er's department expressed concern that the audit was received seven months late, leaving less time to identify any financial or operational problems so the county could take any effective action. State officials accepted the reason offered for the lateness that the new accounting system implemented two years ago requires more complex information from the auditors. **Discrepancies** 

More seriously, the state au-(See AUDIT, page 8A)

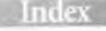
#### kids, parents mage 18

Sports center nears completion page 6A



**Olympic equestrians** compete page 7A

Sports center nears completion page 6 Y



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## No, construction on US 401 is not finished

**By VICTORIANA SUMMERS** Staff writer

Even though Hoke County citizens are benefiting from almost \$5.3 million worth of road improvements on U.S. 401 from the N.C. Department of Transportation, some

be completed.

People have also complained that some newly installed turn lanes are missing directional arrows on the pavement. Other turn lanes have been eliminated, and pavement is frequently uneven in some lanes, creating potential hazardous Hoke citizens wonder when the work will driving conditions. Citizens are worried

the conditions are permanent.

Marcus Jones at the Aberdeen division office. "The project is not completed.

"The resurfacing on U.S. 401 represents only the first layer of pavement, and the lines on the pavement are only temporary.

"Winter weather prevented the contrac-"Not so," says DOT assistant engineer tor from continuing with the project, but after today the paving season starts again. The contractor will soon continue finishing the improvements on U.S. 401."

> Jones said pavement will be refined, all arrows drawn in, and appropri-(See CONSTRUCTION, page 4A)

> > "We have draped his patrol

"Although he was not

### Hoke deputy killed in Fayetteville motorcycle accident

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS Staff write

sons in a two-vehicle accident. Deputy Larry Walker, a Hoke High School graduate and two-year veteran of the Hoke duty, Walker was found still wearing

Sheriff's Office, was killed Saturday in his Hoke deputy's badge Fayetteville.

While operating a motorcycle he was Hoke County has lost one of its native test-driving, Walker was the victim of a Jeep, according to Sheriff collision with a Jeep sports utility vehicle on Bragg Boulevard. Although not on

We tripped across that little one on a

I guessed JROTC when they march

Fortunately, I had access to a teacher's

handbook and discovered a precision unit

is the smallest unit of measure on a scale

Well, yes, now it makes sense, but I had

(See OTHER STUFF, page 4A)

worksheet, as in, "What is the precision

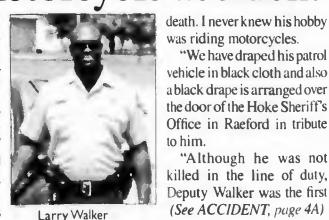
unit of a football field?"

rulers, or a second on a clock.

the flag out.

clipped to his belt after being pinned under the Hubert Peterkin.

"Deputy Walker always wanted to be a law enforcement officer his whole life," Peterkin said. "He loved serving his community, and he loved his family. "I was so shocked at his



#### Progressive Energy's plan to move lineman from Raeford opposed by local officials

#### By VICTORIANA SUMMERS Staff writer

city councilmen are concerned that Don Needham, the county's own lineman who resides in Raeford, may be pulled out of Hoke as its area service representative for Progress Energy utility company.

Based in Hoke for four years, Needham's position may be phased out within the next 30 to 60 days, according to Andy Honeyc-Hoke County officials and Raeford utt, public affairs spokesman for Progress Energy at the Aberdeen office.

> Raeford City Manager Richard Douglas said the city council is discussing possibly signing a resolution, urging (See LINEMAN, page 4A)



BY KEN MACDONALD Publisher

I have been helping a 7th grader with math lately. Okay, I admit the jury is still out on whether I'm helping. A few times I have felt like Jethro ciphering. Or maybe even Mister Ed.

Oh yeah, you laugh. How hard could - such as a sixteenth of an inch on most seventh grade math be? Okay, mister smartypants, what's a "precision unit?" I didn't think so.