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Proposed industrial site attracts interest Dignitaries, officials tour it by train, large company says it wants more info

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke Economic Developer Don Porter announced on Monday that a large corporation has

shown a "major interest" in reserving the new Hoke County Regional Industrial Park in southeastern Hoke as its headquarters.

"Our new super industrial

site has generated a lot of excitement, and this represents a major bite out of many nibbles that we have received from national manufacturers," Porter said of the site located near Dundarrach on

Highway 20. "I hope we will bat a homerun at this site in attracting this substantial firm."

"The decision will be made soon by the corporate players in this proposal so it won't be long

before we know," he said.

"Our mega site is one of the hottest products in the state of North Carolina right now."

Porter's announcement comes only five days after state, regional, county and municipal (See *SITE TOUR*, page 9A)



Going ... going ... The old Raeford Hotel falls to a demolition crew Friday as bystanders look on. By the end of the day, the building was just a pile of rubble.



Ed Lewis, president of the Aberdeen & Rockfish Railroad, surveys the Hoke County Regional Industrial Park from a deluxe train car.

Raeford's budget put at \$3.2 million

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor

employees with no new positions planned.

Raeford city councilmen received the proposed \$3.2 million budget for fiscal year 2005-06 at Monday night's meeting.

Councilmen also turned down a request to allow a therapeutic day care facility for youngsters of middle and high school ages on West Edinborough Avenue.

The 2005-06 budget is a three percent increase over last year's budget of \$3.1 million. It carries no proposed property tax increase.

The proposed fund balance of \$200,000 is a 28 percent decrease, according to City Manager Richard Douglas, who said the balance is in "excellent shape" with seven months worth of operation in the fund. "We'll have some money going into the general fund balance," he said.

In the proposed budget are a 2.42 percent cost of living allowance, longevity pay and up to five percent merit increases for all city

The budget proposes a capital reserve contribution of \$25,000 be put aside toward a new sanitation vehicle and \$5,000 toward a fire truck.

Highlights of the proposed budget, according to Douglas, are \$16,000 for a computer for the customer service supervisor; an increase in legal fees in planning and zoning of \$5,000 to address abandoned vehicles and nuisance properties; funding for a patrol vehicle at \$24,000, nine mobile radios at \$6,400, and \$1,950 for a copier for the police department; an increase in volunteer supplements of a maximum of \$2,300 for the fire department plus \$1,500 for a computer, \$500 for a pressure washer, \$3,000 for intake gate valves and \$10,000 for a five-inch hose; \$3,000 for a tractor finishing deck and \$17,000 for a leaf machine for street maintenance; and \$10,000 for the study/application of downtown (See *CITY BUDGET*, page 10A)

This Week



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Rockfish man given 144 years for sexually assaulting girls

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

After an emotionally-charged trial, Asheville Superior Court Judge Ronald Payne, presiding at the Hoke Courthouse, sentenced a Hoke man to 144 to a maximum 179 years in the state prison yesterday for sexual offenses.

"I think this length of sentence could be historic for a sexual of-

fender in Hoke," Mike Hardin, Hoke senior assistant district attorney, said yesterday.

A Hoke-selected jury, during a week-long trial, found Raymond Mueller guilty of 36 counts of sexual offenses committed against two girls, according to Hardin, lead prosecutor in the case.

"I was very moved by the verdict and extremely pleased," Hardin said yesterday. He said

Mueller raped and sodomized the girls when they were only 11 and 12 years old.

"Both of the victims have been extremely traumatized by this experience. They testified in court and so did their mothers."

"This was a very extensive investigation where we obtained a search warrant and found items stored in a warehouse that were (See *CONVICTED*, page 8A)

Commissioners reign in spending as budget time begins

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke commissioners are tightening their grip on spending this year, as they get ready to prepare a new budget beginning July 1.

A budget amendment request from Barbara Brooks, interim director of the Department of Social Services, to appropriate \$305,000 in extra Medicaid funds to carry

the county until June 30 was not passed on Monday night by the board of commissioners.

The board also put the brakes on another request from The Wooten Company, headquartered in Asheboro and Raleigh, to begin the second phase for the Hoke Land Use Plan. Estimated to cost \$74,000, the plan elicited concerns from Commissioner Vice Chairman Charles Daniels

and Commissioner James Leach — both protesting the price for the land use study proposal. County Manager Mike Wood told the board the cost of the additional study appeared "steep," but with cooperation from county staff he thinks that amount could be reduced.

The board decided to postpone decisions on both requests. They plan to vote on the Medicaid

increase at their May 16 meeting and discuss implementing the second phase of the Hoke Land Use plan at their budget retreat next week.

"The money for the Medicaid would come out of our general fund balance," Wood told the board. "You have to have enough in the budget to show any over expenditure so DSS will not overspend this year's budget. It

has to balance."

Brook, who temporarily replaced former DSS director Bob Mercer, said DSS was left with virtually "no latitude" in Medicaid spending. She predicted a shortfall would occur if the county did not fund the additional \$305,000. Brooks said the local DSS budget of \$1.7 million this year was still less than the \$2.3 (See *COUNTY*, page 4A)

Teenager recovering after being hit while riding bicycle

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

After being critically injured last week when he was struck by a pickup truck, 14-year-old Rakeem Dillard's condition has been upgraded to serious but stable at the University of North Carolina Hospital at Chapel Hill, according to his family.

"Rakeem's father Roy (Doug-

las) and his sister Pamela Pittman Love are constantly by his side because he cannot be left alone," Jennie Bell, Rakeem's stepmother, said yesterday. "He came through the surgery on his shoulder and his broken leg, but they put a rod into his leg."

"He is in terrible pain, and he has some kind of memory loss from his head injury. The doctors said there was swelling on his

brain," she said.

"He cannot talk right, but he knows who he is. Rakeem does not recognize all of his family yet."

Love said they will know later this week how much longer Dillard may be hospitalized at Chapel Hill.

This week, the state Highway Patrol released the findings from the accident, which was investi-

gated by Trooper David Hoover. Hoke resident Keith Crowder, driver of the pickup, was not cited for any moving violations after an extensive investigation. According to the report, Hoover estimated Crowder's speed was 45 miles-per-hour in a 55-mile zone as he reportedly braked to avoid hitting Dillard on his bike on Wallace McLean Road. (See *RECOVERING*, page 4A)



Rakeem Dillard