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Unilever to cut another 50 jobs in Raeford

Company officials say aim behind second round of layoffs is efficiency, profitability

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

One of Raeford's major industries plans to eliminate 50 jobs by the end of November in a restructuring endeavor, impacting

the local economy for the second time this year.

Unilever Personal Care Products, housed in a vast industrial complex on South Main Street, will eliminate 15 percent of its administrative and factory

workforce, laying off salaried and hourly employees. As one of the top three employers established in Hoke County, Unilever has traditionally offered high-paying salaries to skilled manufacturing personnel.

With goals aimed at higher profitability, Unilever, with its headquarters in The Netherlands, amassed \$50 billion in sales worldwide in 2004. It is also one of the world's largest consumer goods companies, distributing

products to 150 countries. Unilever also acquired \$10 billion in sales in the United States last year, according to Tom Metelmann, Unilever's Raeford plant manager.

"Unilever has announced

a workforce reduction from October through November 2005," Metelmann said. "This strategic decision is part of the Raeford facility's ongoing effort to achieve manufactur- (See LAYOFF, page 3A)

Thomas plans to retire from police force

Has been officer for 31 years, 18 in Raeford

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Major Greg Thomas — Raeford's first African American assistant chief of police — is retiring January 1 after a law enforcement career spanning from the nation's capitol to Scotland County and Raeford.

"There comes a time when everybody knows it is right for them to move on beyond whatever kind of work they are doing," Thomas said. "In the law enforcement profession, you have to be a psychiatrist, a father and a mother." Thomas said during his law enforcement career he has become closer to his church, making him more compassionate toward others.

"I have enjoyed law enforcement," Thomas said. "When it comes to the law, a person is either right or wrong. "However, I have

learned through the years to understand why people do some of the things they have done."

Thomas has served in law enforcement for more than 31 years with 18 of his tenure dedicated to the Raeford Police Department. He plans to work in the private sector as a loss prevention fraud agent and security officer after retirement.

"It has been challenging as assistant chief of police," Thomas said. "I feel like the job has given me opportunities to understand people more.

"You cannot always go strictly by the law when you (See THOMAS, page 7A)



Greg Thomas



Flames consume an unoccupied 1980s Mustang convertible that was destroyed after the owner parked in the Raeford Post Office parking lot. See story on page 6A.

This Week



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Johnny Baker honored as Firefighter of the Year

Award presented at annual appreciation dinner for emergency volunteers

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Editor



Johnny Baker

Always on duty, the men and women arrived at the dining hall with papers hooked to their belts.

Volunteer emergency services personnel of this community were honored with an appreciation dinner for them and their families by the Raeford-Hoke Chamber of Commerce. And one of those

volunteers, North Raeford Fire Dept. Chief Johnny Baker, was named Firefighter of the Year.

The annual event, held last Thursday at West Hoke Middle School, is "a small way to thank you for protecting our lives and our property," said Chamber President Rick Sandy, who emceed the event.

Calling for a round of applause for firefighters and medics, Sheriff Hubert Peterkin said, "Thank you

for taking care of us all in Hoke County."

"Hoke County would not be the place it is without you. You're not recognized as much as you need to be," said Hoke County Commissioner Chairman Bobby Wright.

Raeford Mayor John K. McNeill III also spoke of volunteers' sacrifices. "We appreciate all you do," he said, adding, "Alarms go off at strange hours."

David Willis, president of the Hoke County Fire and Rescue Association, recognized all departments and their spouses. "Wives and husbands don't get near the recognition they deserve," he said.

Medics from the Hoke County Rescue Squad and firefighters from Antioch, Raeford, North Raeford (which now includes Tylertown), Puppy Creek, Stone (See HONORED, page 6A)

Regina Joe announces for judge

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer



Regina Joe

Regina "Gigi" McKinney Joe, Hoke-Scotland County public defender, is pursuing a lifelong dream as she declares her plans today to run in the 2006 district court judge race.

Joe has had the opportunity during her career to be on both sides of the courtroom

as a prosecutor and defense attorney. She brings almost 18 years of legal experience into the upcoming judgeship race when filing begins in February.

Joe has also already made history as the first female African American public defender to be appointed in the state. Now, Joe, a registered Democrat, hopes to triple that (See JOE, page 3A)

Smith seeks judge position

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Raeford attorney Russell Charles Smith has enjoyed a diversified career, devoting 21 years to molding the minds of children as an educator and defending the rights of citizens in the courtroom as a lawyer.

Now, Smith wants to step up to the bench, changing his venue permanently as he seeks the office of district court judge in 2006 for Hoke-Scotland District 16A.

Formerly teaching full-time at Hoke

County High and coaching high school sports, Smith transitioned eight years ago to practicing law. However, Smith has retained a key role in the academic futures of Hoke youth, serving on the (See SMITH, page 3A)



Russell Smith



By KEN MACDONALD
Publisher

There I was among 1,100 Lance Armstrong types — muscular, fearless bicycle riders intent on pedaling from Asheville to Wilmington in seven days. I had pedaled the first day's 63 (mostly downhill) miles without incident. My training had paid off. Perhaps I was one of them.

At 5 a.m. the second day, crammed into a dark, dew-soaked tent, I was trying to

wrestle myself into my cycling britches, and suddenly realized that the day before I had ridden with them on backwards.

"Argh!" I called to my uncle Jim and his friend, Bill West, in adjacent tents. "I just rode the whole first day with my pants on backwards." Someone from a distant tent called back: "That would explain why you were riding up the downhills and down the uphills!"

It was an inauspicious start, but it wasn't (See OTHER STUFF, page 8A)

Board plans superintendent search

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Recruitment to replace Hoke School Superintendent Allen Strickland, who retires February 1, will likely begin in the spring. An interim superintendent will be appointed who will probably supervise the school system until the end of the school year, according to Board of Education chairman Russell C. Smith.

This, after the board discussed alternatives at their meeting last evening. Smith reminded the board of the famous words formerly expressed by his mentor, retired board of education chairman John McAllister.

"I quote from Mr. McAllister: 'The superintendent search and superintendent is the most important thing the board of education does. Num- (See SUPERINTENDENT, page 6A)