

The News-Journal

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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McNeill is mayor, Conoly, King win council

Voter turnout approaches 30 percent

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Mayor John K. McNeill III, incumbent Raeford city councilman Robert L. (Bobby) Conoly and councilwoman challenger Mary Neil King saw sweeping victories in the Raeford city election last night.

From the get-go when it was apparent they had carried the majority of the one-stop and absentee votes, the three winners kept up the momentum for all three precincts in Raeford after 766 people had cast their ballots. This represented almost a 30 percent turnout—15 percent more than the last municipal election.

McNeill follows in the footsteps of the late

Raeford mayor Bob Gentry and McNeill's father, the late John K. McNeill Jr., who served as mayor of Raeford for 20 years. King is distinguished as the first female city councilwoman to be elected. Conoly, who had been appointed to his position, will now serve his first elected term of office as city councilman.

McNeill garnered 485 votes, winning over challengers Tim D'Annunzio, who received 116 votes, and Evelyn C. Price, the first female African American mayoral candidate in Raeford. She won 159 votes.

Incumbent city councilman Eddie McNeill and newcomer Buddy Blue were shoo-ins, running unopposed for their two four-year term council (See *ELECTION*, page 5A)



County to appeal tower ruling

Maintains 499-foot tower endangers aircraft

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Hoke's Board of Commissioners is going to appeal a judge's ruling forcing the board to allow construction of a 499-foot radio tower within five miles of the Raeford Airport.

Superior Court Judge B. Craig Ellis had overturned the county's decision and said the county must grant a conditional use permit for Cumulus Broadcasting to build the tower, which would be located less than five miles from P.K. Airpark, also known as the Raeford Airport.

The judge said commissioners erred in denying Cumulus's request.

The proposed tower would be located off Ranch Road, expanding the listening audience of a Southern Pines FM radio station owned by Cumulus.

Most commissioners think the tower would endanger pilots flying or parachutists jumping at



Marianne Baker addresses the board.

the county's only public airport. The board is also concerned a tower less than five miles from the airport would prevent the potential of expansion at the local airport in the future.

(See *TOWER APPEAL*, page 8A)



Victors: Bobby Conoly (Clockwise from top left); Mary Neil King congratulated by Bobby Strother; John K. McNeill III with Eleanor Gentry, the late Mayor Bob Gentry's wife.

This Week



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Coach Pecora
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Beatty ran for city council despite delinquent taxes

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

City of Raeford and Hoke County tax records revealed last week that defeated Raeford city council candidate Martha M. Beatty owes \$922.47 in delinquent city taxes, dating back as far as 1996. Past due county property taxes for three years, totaling \$282.05, had also not been paid by Beatty as of last week, according to Judy Pittman, Hoke Tax



Beatty

Collector. Since filing for a council seat in July, Beatty never publicly disclosed she was behind on her property taxes. She also refused to offer an explanation why she has not paid her taxes when contacted by The News-Journal on Monday. "I will comment maybe next

week after the election is over," Beatty said the day before Election Day.

Aware that the newspaper would not go to press until the day after the election, Beatty acknowledged that many voters may not have known she was tardy in paying her taxes.

"Some do," she said.

"May God bless my friends and foes," Beatty said.

According to the county and city tax records, Beatty was the

only city candidate among nine with overdue tax bills. Beatty said she is unemployed. She is a volunteer as a community advocate of youth and senior citizens.

Prior to this week, the last time Beatty paid on her city taxes was in April, 2002 when she made a payment of \$83.10. Beatty paid off her 2001 city tax bill. She paid \$40 toward her county tax bill in May 2003.

This week Beatty paid \$50 more toward her county tax bill,

lowering the balance to \$232.05, according to Pittman on Monday afternoon.

Pittman and Smith said Beatty has promised she would make payments until her taxes are paid in full, which is why no foreclosure proceedings have been implemented thus far. No preferential treatment was shown toward Beatty, according to them, because city and county property tax collection policies (See *BEATTY*, page 7A)

Audit of Clerk of Court's office finds 'serious' deficiencies

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

State Treasury auditors detected "significant deficiencies" and noncompliance with regulations during a routine audit conducted this year in the Hoke County Clerk of Superior Court office. Improper accounting procedures of cash collected were noted, according to Leslie W. Merritt Jr., state auditor who released the report last week.

"The results of our audit disclosed deficiencies in internal control that are considered reportable under government auditing standards," Merritt said.

Out of six counties in the region, Hoke was the only one found not to be in compliance, according to the report. Superior Court Clerk's offices in the surrounding area that passed most recent audits with clear records included those in Cumberland, Scotland, Robeson, Richmond

and Moore counties.

State auditors recommended Vera Hollingsworth, Hoke Clerk of Superior Court, improve internal control procedures in cash procedures, improve cash-receipting methods, and separate duties so one person does not handle cash, write receipts for it, reconcile and deposit it at the bank.

Hollingsworth defended her office, saying "extenuating" circumstances of increased case

loads and a "grossly" understaffed office during a transitional period caused weaknesses in cash receipts and cash disbursements. She told auditors that their bookkeeper of more than 25 years died, another employee was out due to pregnancy complications and another had to undergo surgery. There was not much time for cross training during that period, she added.

"The recommendations of the audit staff are well taken and are

now being and will be put into action immediately," Hollingsworth said in her response to the state. "Let me add, the employees in the clerk's office are to be commended for their hard work and the long hours of some to keep this office functioning."

Hollingsworth said it was disappointing to receive such a report when she had previously requested additional funding from the state to hire more per- (See *CLERK AUDIT*, page 3A)

Former Hoke High student killed while serving in Iraq

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Private First Class Dillon Miles Jutras was a born soldier destined to march on the trail blazed by his father, Army Major Pierre D. Jutras, according to his family.

Dressing up in his father's military uniform, he used to play army games when he was a kid, according to the Jutras family, but he became more serious

about a military career when he participated in the Junior ROTC program at Hoke County High School.

Dillon did more than defend his country and participate in the Operation Iraqi peace-keeping mission in the Middle East. On October 28, he died for it. While on a combat mission in Iraq's Anbar province, he was killed, just two weeks from when he was scheduled to return home, according to a TV station in Virginia.

Details of his death have still not been released by the military, according to his father.

At the time of his death, the 20-year-old was serving in the U.S. Army's elite 3rd Battalion,



Loved soccer, music

75th Ranger Regiment based out of Fort Benning, Georgia. He joined the Army in December and was assigned to Iraq shortly afterward.

"Dillon idolized his father and wanted to follow in his footsteps," Randy Abner, a civil service employee and friend of the family said. "I was always impressed by Dillon. I never recall anyone who had an unkind word to say about him.

(See *JUTRAS*, page 3A)



Private First Class Dillon Jutras