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Hoke skydiver receives Wiley Post award



Stearns after winning international championship.

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

World championship skydiver Cheryl Stearns, a Puppy Creek resident, was recently honored with the highest of skydiver/aviator awards, the Wiley Post Spirit Award for 2005. Presented annually to an individual who best exemplifies the "innovative and pioneering spirit" of the late, world-class aviator Wiley Post, the award was presented to Stearns on January 27 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The Governor of Oklahoma

also issued a proclamation in her honor, declaring January 27 as Cheryl Stearns Day in the state.

Post, the first pilot to fly around the world in only eight days, is famous for discover-

ing the jetstream and building the first pressurization suit for pilots. Dying young, Post was flying with popular humorist Will Rogers when they fatally crashed into a mountain peak in Alaska.

In the three-dimensional frame presented to Stearns, a crystal sphere of the world is displayed on a crystal column. Fascinated by the design, Stearns twirls the crystal ball on display in her

Hoke home. The 50-year-old Stearns said she is humbled by the recognition, won over 10 experienced, champion skydiver-aviators. Inscribed in the crystal are the words, "Citizen" (See STEARNS, page 9A)



Couple plans coffee shop

Renovating old Belk Building

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Steve and Shelley Wilburn are sold on Main Street USA right in Raeford.

"We are hoping to revive a nostalgic time when shops were thriving," Mrs. Wilburn said. "We want to bring some new grandeur downtown."

All week after school and on weekends Shelley Wilburn, teacher at West Hoke Middle School, and Steve Wilburn, an insurance adjuster at N.C. State Farm, spend all their spare time restoring the old Belk Building on North Main Street. Opening for business in May, the historic structure will house a classic coffee house and old-fashioned ice cream parlor called The Chatterbox Café. Reminiscent of the past, 14-foot high ceilings in the former Belk building remain intact with decorative, stamped tin. An old, hand-painted emblem remains on the elevator inscribed with the name of the Moffatt Machine Manufacturing Co. of Charlotte. The Wilburns say they are salvaging as much of the his (See BELK, page 7A)

Attorney seeks millions in fees

Wants state to repay Hoke, others for education battle

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

After nearly 12 years and 16,000 hours waging a court battle over insufficient educational funding for Hoke's school district, Raleigh attorney Robert Spearman is seeking to recoup millions of dollars in legal expenses from the state.

Spearman submitted a

47-page memorandum to the Wake Superior Court in late December on behalf of Hoke's Board of Education. He urged the court to award \$10.7 million in legal fees and \$322,258.91 in costs to Hoke schools and five other school districts. After serving as the lead plaintiff in the winning lawsuit against the state, Hoke's school board would potentially recover \$2.5 million of the total settlement. The remaining \$8.2 million of the settlement would be divided among co-plaintiffs Robeson, Cumberland, Vance and Halifax counties. The Asheville City Board of Education, an intervener in the litigation, would also share in the reimbursement.

"Such an award is supported by the facts and the law," Spearman said of Hoke's victory. "Such an award is appropriate to encourage the vindication of consti- (See ATTORNEY, page 8A)



Above: Steve Wilburn on upper floor of Belk Building; below: Shelley at window front.

This Week



Black churches here before county formed page 1B

Raeford PD initiates car theft prevention page 4A

WHMS puts Title 1 to work page 4B

DSS moves into Health Building page 7A

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West Hoke gym named after long-time teacher, coach

By HAL NUNN
Sports writer

The Hoke County school system recognized a long-time teacher and coach by naming West Hoke Middle School's gymnasium The Robert A. Blue Gym.

Blue, who coached and taught at West Hoke Middle since its beginning in 1990, has been with Hoke schools 27 years.

Blue retired in the middle of the season due to health-related problems. His overall record in basketball at the school was 198 wins and 38 losses. Assistant Coach Rodney Fairley

continued with the remainder of the season as head coach of the Tigers.

Blue's most recent accomplishment was winning the Southeastern Middle School Conference Championship last year with an 11-3 record. That championship was his eighth since taking over the team in 1990.

Fairley invited special guest Sgt. Slam, the National Basketball Association D-League Fayetteville Patriots Mascot to excite the crowd at the MacDonald Gymnasium. Sgt. Slam is Blue's favorite mascot and has also been invited to the NBA All-Star Game in the past. Accompanying Sgt. Slam was T'nesha Shaw, a former

Hoke County High School graduate, and now a member of the Patriots dance team.

School Board Chairman Russell C. Smith presented Blue with a plaque commemorating the event and certifying the naming of the gym after him. The entire Blue family was present and the gym was packed for the annual West Hoke vs. East Hoke game.

East Hoke Athletic Director Brenda Ramsey honored Blue with a stuffed Tiger, a display of sportsmanship, considering East Hoke is West Hoke's number one rival.

In the future there will be a re- (See BLUE, page 6A)



Blue accepts award.

Embrace growth, group says, but ensure the Sandhills survive

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Encouraging economic prosperity while fending for future generations were goals voiced at a local Sandhills Sustainable outreach meeting.

Jon Parsons, executive director of the non-profit organization, informed Hoke leaders the county's population might soar by 91.5 percent in 25, and pushed for proactive planning that would accommodate the growth but ensure the needs of future generations

are met.

"One of our major challenges is to engage the business sector in our initiative," Parson said. "If we can recruit eight to ten businesses to enter at the partnership level, the N.C. Department of Environmental and Natural Resources will bring the Environmental Stewardship program to the Sandhills."

"This would be invaluable to our initiative."

More than 50 business, city, military, county and state leaders attended

"Population increasing can turn out well if you are doing lots of creative things to move ahead or it can turn out bad if you are not planning." - Bill Ross, Secretary, N.C Dept. Environmental and Natural Resources

the event, held recently at the Raeford Civic Center. Parsons emphasized the importance of preserving the Sandhills region's way of life for future generations.

"This is truly the only way that we as a community can go forward to

grow in the future," said introductory speaker Walter White, vice president of the Lumbee Electric Membership Cooperative's community relations and a volunteer with Sustainable Sandhills.

(See SUSTAINABILITY, page 9A)