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School board hires new superintendent



Dr. Freddie Williamson addresses Hoke school board members.

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

A united Hoke Board of Education hired Dr. Freddie Williamson, associate superintendent for human resources, auxiliary and student services in the Scotland County School System last week. He plans to steer a positive course on uncharted challenges such as overcrowding, a massive influx of military students, and improving academic test scores in Hoke County Schools.

Selected after a closed, executive session that was held at last Thursday's meeting, Dr.

Williamson is distinguished as the first African American to become a permanent Hoke school superintendent. Retired Hoke assistant school superintendent John D. McAllister, the first African American serving briefly as interim superintendent when then-Hoke school superintendent Raz Autry retired, preceded Williamson in 1982. McAllister went on to serve four elected terms to the Hoke school board, where he was named chairman.

Williamson received a recommendation by Hoke school board member Tom Pilkington. His lead

was followed by a second motion from school board member Hank Richards and even a third motion echoed almost simultaneously by school board member Rosa McAllister McRae.

The board congratulated Williamson, who appeared before the board with his wife. Shirley Bryant Williamson, to hear their positive decision.

"Thank you for your vote of confidence," Williamson said to the board.

School board chairman Russell C. Smith, a former Hoke County High schoolteacher and current

associate dean of student life at Campbell University's School of Law, served as the "shepherd" to guide the board in their ultimate search. Williamson will replace retired Hoke school superintendent Allen Strickland who stepped down February 1. Retired Hoke school superintendent Don Steed has been serving as interim school superintendent. Steed remains temporarily at the helm until Williamson comes on board July 1.

"I want to publicly thank members of the Hoke County school (See SUPERINTENDENT, page 5A)

Schools get OK audit

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

After a prolonged period, CPA Phyllis Pearson of Petway Mills & Person in Raleigh presented the annual Hoke County Board of Education audit last week, indicating their were no "material weaknesses" found in the school board finances for 2004-05.

Yet the yearly audit was delivered almost five months late, failing to meet the Local Government Commissions' requirements under state statutes. No fines, however, were im-

(See AUDIT, page 7A)

The family piano serves a dual role as a trophy case for all of William Jr.'s accomplishments. Mom and Dad stand proudly with him.



Williamson: Focus on goals

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff Writer

Pledging a crucial focus on defined goals instead of "random acts" of improvement, Dr. Freddie Williamson, newly selected Hoke school superintendent, joins the school district on July 1.

After he resigns from Scotland County's school system as associate superintendent for human resources, auxiliary and student services, Williamson will take part in the hiring process of an assistant Hoke (See GOALS, page 5A)

Kershaw, family and friends anxiously await NFL draft

By HAL NUNN
Sports writer

When William Kershaw Jr. was small, there wasn't anything little about his heart and his stature.

Heart is definitely what it takes to succeed at the highest level of your sport and being 6' 3" tall, 240 lbs. and running the 40 in 4.62 seconds, now that's what the NFL wants. Hopefully, on April 29-30, the NFL will decide that William Kershaw is what the NFL needs. Kershaw, the son of William Sr. and Betty McDuffie Kershaw, grew up in Raeford on Pinehaven Drive off Doc Brown Road. That's where this sports writer had the opportunity to

meet the NFL prospect and his parents along with Elvenia Southerland, a long time supporter of Kershaw. Southerland commented about young Kershaw playing the drums in the all male chorus at Wall's Chapel United Methodist Church. "William has always been involved in church and participating in church activities," Southerland said. That's where he got his calm spirit, which is crucial in staying on track and focused in life and heading down the right roads when faced with decisions young people face.

Kershaw grew up loving football and playing in the Hoke County Parks and Recreation league here in

Raeford and played flag football as well as tackle football. Coaches and parents always recognized him as a big boy who mostly stood as tall and as big as the coaches he played for.

"Look at his hands and see how big they are. He always had big hands and loved to play basketball and football."
—Betty Kershaw.

When he was 10 and 11 he played for the Trojans in the Parks & Rec league, and they finished the season undefeated. He did have someone to

look to for football experience.

Fellow teammates remember Kershaw Sr. as a "tough man to tackle on the field" when he was a fullback at Hoke High. When reminded of this, the elder Kershaw said,

"You see, boy, when I was playing I was pretty tough just like you."

Kershaw Jr. chuckled in disbelief but recognized that his dad was a strong player as well. As a youngster, Kershaw Sr. was in bed one Saturday morning when Raz Autry the principal at Hoke High came into his bedroom and said, "I heard you want to play football young man."

"Yes sir, I do," was the reply.

(See KERSHAW, page 9A)

Hoke officials meet with FORSCOM civil service leaders BRAC employee expansion at Bragg could be county's future boon

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

"Y'all come," may soon be a friendly refrain uttered by Hoke's board of commissioners to the currently Georgia-based FORSCOM civil service command soon to be transferred to Fort Bragg, according to Hoke commission chairman Bobby Wright.

County commissioners are hoping to not only immediately attract more military families to reside in Hoke, increasing sales tax revenues and spawning commercial growth. Concentrating on advance, economic planning, the board is also inviting the top brass in civil service to relocate here with their families to purchase homes that could potentially bring up to \$100 million in real estate sales to Hoke.

"The board is discussing forming a military liaison committee to help with the military connection," Wright said. "We are looking at establishing a special website for civil service and military families so they may find out more information about moving to Hoke County."

"We would be delighted to welcome these families here. There is a whole lot to offer in this region."

Commission vice chairwoman Jean Powell said recent census figures are predicting that by 2030 Hoke's population will double, totaling 75,000 people. County commissioners think with the abundance of land in Hoke and county services available that real estate developers and agents would be able to accommodate the military (See BRAC, page 7A)

The day the embezzlement stopped County auditor releases new info on McPhatter case

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

Raeford CPA Frank Baker proved that crime does not pay, breaking the embezzlement case of former Hoke county manager Bernice McPhatter without seeking any credit. McPhatter was convicted of embezzlement in an investigation that even was reported on by USA Today after she stole almost \$269,000 of taxpayers' moneys over a four-year period until 2001.

"Oh s—!" was the first expletive Baker remembers he uttered when he realized the magnitude of McPhatter's swindling of county money and betrayal of the Hoke board of commissioners and taxpayers

McPhatter is currently serving a seven-to-eight year prison term in the N.C. Department of Correction at its Wilmington facility for women. Although she pleaded not guilty, she later publicly apologized for her crime during a civil trial held to recoup bond moneys that paid for

the county's losses.

Baker said no one knew before he was the real "whistle-blower" because he was bound by confidentiality not to tell since he had to testify in the court trial of McPhatter. Also, no one had ever asked him of the circumstances — which many thought were accidental — of how the first \$5,000 check forged by McPhatter was discovered. Not until The News-Journal staff writer questioned him more closely three weeks ago, did his disclosure come out.

"My accounting firm blew the whistle on Bernice McPhatter," Baker said. "I know a lot of people were saying behind my back why did we not know what was going on."

"We did suspect something was definitely wrong, but we had to be able to prove it."

McPhatter's associate, fired Hoke finance director Shirley Rush, also pleaded guilty in 2005 to a lesser misdemeanor charge of violating auditors' rules as a county official. Be- (See WHISTLE BLOWER, page 8A)

This Week



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