

# The News-Journal

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75¢

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, April 25, 2007

## Mother makes first court appearance

### D.A. outlines pattern of alleged child neglect before son drowned in swimming pool

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

April Dru Jimmerson, accused of felony involuntary manslaughter and misdemeanor child abuse in the death of two-year-old son

Austin last July, is out on bond.

Jimmerson received a secured bond reduction last week from \$150,000 to \$25,000 at the request of her attorney.

Hoke District Attorney

Kristy M. Newton described the prelude to Austin's death during a first appearance in court for Jimmerson. The Lumber Bridge mom of four children entered the courtroom shackled and handcuffed. She made no com-

ments during the proceedings. Superior Court Judge Gregory Weeks presided over the hearing.

Newton told the court when neighbors witnessed Austin, he was usually naked or wearing only a diaper "ex-

tremely soiled." Newton also told of people who alleged Jimmerson was keeping her children "strapped in child enforced car seats" for hours in her home.

"On Ellis Road, which is down the road from where

they resided - one day before he was drowned - motorists, strangers had to stop and get Emma, 3, and Austin out of the street," Newton said. "A neighbor took the children back to the (See *NEGLECT*, page 4A)

## 2 chased, killed man, sheriff says

### Motive may have been grudge

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Two men have been arrested in the death of Hoke man who was gunned down after being chased while he drove along Highway 211.

Hoke resident Michael Freeman who was murdered last month was hired full-time by a Goodyear tire store in Fayetteville the day after he was buried, according to his sisters Jettie Hailey and Jeanette Freeman.

"They did not realize my brother had been slain during a high-speed chase," Jeanette said sadly. "He had been employed at the store part-time.



Avery

Blanks

"My brother was a fun-loving person, and I cannot imagine how anybody would have done something this brutal to him. He should not have died in this violent way.

"He left behind two young daughters and a stepdaughter who live in Southern Pines."

Described by his mother as a mama's boy and nicknamed Rabbit, Freeman was pursued by a gag of (See *ARREST*, page 5A)



Leanne Shepley at work at ACE Automotive in Raeford.

## Only female NASCAR mechanic in Hoke County means business

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

When Leanne Shepley is under the hood of a vehicle, she steers with a one track mind, diagnosing problems like a car-diologist.

As the only local female NASCAR technician, Leanne listens to engines purring and checks fluids on a daily basis at Ace Automotive in Raeford. She says she has come a long way since she studied welding courses at Hoke County High.

A 2003 graduate of Hoke High, Shepley is the daughter of insurance firm owner Clyde Shepley of Rockfish. Her professional goals led her to become an automotive technician rather than seek a career in nursing as initially planned.

"I have learned that a car has to be tested and diagnosed in order to know what the problem is - just like a doctor," Shepley said. "I am one of only three females out of 3,000 guys that graduated from the NASCAR Techni-

cal Institute in Mooresville last year."

Shepley said her first career offer came from NASCAR's famous Penske racing team after she graduated with honors from the NASCAR school with an automotive diploma.

"Believe me, I was flattered," she said. "I guess taking apart all those racing engines paid off."

"Working for NASCAR is the equivalent of working on the Oprah Winfrey show. You get bragging rights."

However, preferring to stay closer to home, Shepley accepted a position with the family owned Ace Automotive team at 319 North Bethel Road. It included an extra perk for Leanne, because boyfriend Joel Lerner, also a NASCAR institute grad and Hoke High graduate, accepted a job with ACE.

"I could do a little stuff back during high school, but I was never into cars," Leanne said. "I got my first job with a tire store in Fayetteville.

(See *MECHANIC*, page 8A)

### This Week



East Hoke sweeps West Hoke page 7A

Emergency team seeks volunteers page 8A

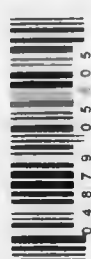
County honors diverse group page 1B

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## Museum paid off

The Raeford-Hoke Museum is now paid off and is debt-free, according to its board.

Chairperson Grace McDonald, and Joyce Monroe, past chairperson, accepted the deed after a \$250,000 mortgage was paid in full.

The Raeford-Hoke Museum was organized as a non-profit organization in 2001 under the direction of the late Bob Gentry.

(See *MUSEUM*, page 8A)

## Students narrowly escape bus fire

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Hoke school superintendent Dr. Freddie Williamson has ordered an investigation into the origin of a fire that destroyed a school bus early Monday morning after students on board narrowly escaped.

Hoke schools transporta-

tion director Robert Creech said sabotage was initially suspected because someone broke into the bus, which was parked at Rockfish Hoke Elementary School over the weekend. He said someone stole the bus keys, and the route map was missing. His office took another set of keys to the bus driver.

However, Hoke fire mar-

shal Major Freddy Johnson said the fire was a legitimate blaze caused by an apparent electrical short. He inspected the bus yesterday afternoon at the school bus garage.

Early on Monday, black smoke began filling the moving bus loaded with East Hoke Middle School students, who were evacuated by school (See *BUS FIRE*, page 4A)



Bus garage workers survey the damage from Monday's fire.

## Student charged with rape at school

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS  
Staff writer

Hoke Sheriff Hubert Peterkin has confirmed a female student at Hoke County High alleged another student raped her last month.

The alleged rape occurred on March 29 after hours on the campus, according to Peterkin. He said both (See *RAPE*, page 5A)

## Sheriff's office sets opening

Hoke Sheriff Hubert Peterkin, along with county officials, announces the grand opening and ribbon cutting for the new Hoke County Sheriff's Office on Friday at 11 a.m.

Dignitaries from the city and county have been invited to the special event scheduled at (See *OFFICE*, page 5A)

## The News-Journal

News Other stuff

By KEN MACDONALD  
Publisher

I was sipping Sprite at the cookout and waiting for the food to be released to the guests when suddenly I heard bagpipes in the distance.

I knew instantly it was Ian, because he and Maureen had spent the week as houseguests, and just the day before, I had heard him piping in our backyard, rousing the neighborhood and tormenting the dogs.

There were a couple hundred of us there for the pig picking, and I noted the puzzled looks on the faces of others as Ian walked slowly up the driveway playing "Highland Cathedral" or "Scotland the Brave."

"Silly people," I thought, "he's just killing time and trying to add some ambiance to this soiree."

It didn't occur to me he was asked to play the pipes.

The hosts - Rick Sandy and Kathy (See *OTHER STUFF*, page 8A)