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Families homeless after storm

Hurricane-force winds flatten mobile homes, damage more than 15

By Jason Beck
Staff Writer

Several families are now homeless after a violent storm ravaged a Hoke County mobile home community.

The storm destroyed at least five trailers completely, toppled trees onto others and knocked out windows around the Willow Trace Mobile Home Park.

"You see it on TV, but you never expect it to happen to you," said one of the stunned residents, while looking through the rubble.

According to Major Freddie Johnson, the county's emergency management director, the storm blew through Hoke County at about 8:30 Sunday evening. The National Weather Service issued a tornado warning shortly before the damage was inflicted here.

However, weather service officials believe straight-line winds and not a twister leveled the trailers.

"It was straight-line winds with wind gusts up to 85 mph or greater, which is actually category one hurricane wind speed," said Johnson, who was on the scene when meteorologists did a damage assessment. "The damage field is actually about three miles wide."

At least one of the homes was blown on top of its owner, sending her to the hospital. Rosetta Holliday didn't know how severe the thunderstorm was until her home of 26 years fell on her.

"I was hearing the hail, and it just came down on me," Holliday said the next day, after being treated and released from Cape Fear (See *STORM*, page 5A)



Officials say it wasn't a tornado but rather straight-line winds that destroyed and damaged mobile homes. One person was injured but returned the next day to salvage belongings. (Beck Photos)

Budget cuts may force local layoff of teachers

By Jason Beck
Staff Writer

In the midst of deep budget cuts, the Hoke County School System has been able to retain all of its teachers. But don't expect that trend to continue.

During last week's school board meeting, board of education members were briefed

on even greater state funding cuts on tap for this year and how those reductions would affect staffing here.

According to Dr. Freddie Williamson, the system's superintendent, Governor Beverly Purdue, is recommending deeper cuts that would equal to the loss of 15

teaching positions.

Best-case scenario for the system is if state representatives reject Purdue's proposed budget and keep the current budget, which is a \$1,650,406 reduction from previous years.

Worst case is Purdue's budget is adopted, which brings

an additional \$730,000 in cuts to the system.

"It creates a problem," Williamson told board members. "We have got to find where we would pull that money. We are running out of options to find money."

One option would be to waive the class size limit,

which would put a bigger strain on teachers.

Last year the school system made many cuts to deal with the \$1.6 million reduction in funding from the Department of Public Instruction. The greatest of those cuts was a reduction of all teachers' assistants pay to 75 percent, saving

\$750,000. Other cuts included \$400,000 from a low wealth program, \$100,000 from at-risk tutoring, \$150,000 from instructional supplies and \$50,000 from an academically gifted program.

Last year the system also lost its state funding for (See *TEACHERS*, page 6A)

This Week



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Community steps up to help stricken woman

By Jason Beck
Staff Writer

After initially wondering if she'd be given a second chance at life, 28-year-old Daniele Cooley should now be considered for a lung transplant.

With the help of the community, Cooley has raised more than the \$10,000 needed to place her on Duke Uni-

versity Hospital's transplant waiting list.

Still, the mother of two faces long odds and a financial burden that will weigh her down for the rest of her life.

Last month, when Cooley's mother Gisele Brown created a website to help raise money for the transplant, no one in the family knew people here



Daniele Cooley with children.

were so generous.

As of press time, the community has raised nearly \$20,000 to help Cooley, who has been diagnosed with Mixed Connective Tissue Disorder. The disease has robbed her of 75 percent of her lung capacity and she will eventually stop breathing altogether without a transplant.

Cooley has two children—a toddler and a kindergartner.

Cooley said she's been flattered by all of the community support, which included bake sales, car washes, plate sales and private donations.

"It's amazing — all of this for little old me," said Cooley, who is at home but (See *COOLEY*, page 6A)

Bottle maker's ribbon cutting celebrates new jobs

By Jason Beck
Staff Writer

While other communities are losing jobs, Hoke County chalked up another win last

week, officially opening its newest manufacturing facility and adding 50 well-paying jobs to the local economy.

Alpla, an Austrian based

company that produces plastic bottles, hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony Friday to celebrate its takeover of the 100,000 square foot facility

that used to house Unilever's aerosol division.

Alpla will produce bottles for Unilever's Suave, Caress and Axe products, manu-

factured only a few hundred yards away.

"We want to deliver the best products in the world with the (See *BOTTLES*, page 6A)

OTHER STUFF

"Whoomp! There it is!"
— Tag Team

By Ken MacDonald

Ten thousand grilled cheese sandwiches, a \$600 library fine and a short-lived teaching career later, my son has graduated. Again. But this time he has found his life's calling, and that revelation had my wife dancing around the house Friday singing the old classic, "Whoomp! There it is!" (I filmed it too, and she can be thankful this is a newspaper, not a medium for video.)

Maybe it's just because it's freshest in my

mind, but after steering, cajoling and threatening two children to adulthood, I think the hardest stage for a parent is that fabled period when you start shoving them over the edge of the nest — you hope you don't have to swat them away should they try to return, but of course you mainly just want to see that they don't drop like rocks to skid row. When they're tweens, you can take their TV time or ground them; when they're teens, you can take their licenses, but after that, there's an ungraceful dance of push and shove, give and take, joy and tears as they forge their way, and pick, (See *OTHER STUFF*, page 8A)



Workers produce plastic bottles for Unilever. (Beck photo)

