



## Schools will close for teacher rally

### More than 150 teachers ask to take leave to protest in Raleigh May 1

By CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

Hoke County Schools cancelled classes Wednesday, May 1 to allow local educators a chance to participate in the statewide rally. All schools except SandHoke Early College planned to close Wednesday. SandHoke was to remain on a regular schedule for students and staff. A total of 165 Hoke County teachers asked

to take leave on May 1 prior to spring break, causing administrators to evaluate the situation, according to school officials. "This decision was made after reviewing the number of Hoke County teachers who have requested to use personal leave to attend the NC Teacher Rally in Raleigh on May 1 as they advocate for better schools, stronger students, higher pay, and the respect deserved by all public educators," the school system wrote in a Facebook post notifying families of the

school closure. The school system also took other means to notify parents of the teacher workday. The day will be an optional teacher workday for teachers and staff. Students will not have school. They won't need to make up the time off, according to Superintendent Dr. Freddie Williamson. "Instruction is our top priority. Every decision we make begins with instruction in mind. (See TEACHER RALLY, page 4)



Teachers from Don Steed Elementary joined the rally in 2018. (File photo)

## Report card shows Hoke kids' struggles

By CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

Over half Hoke County's 22,000 children live in poverty, according to a report released from the nonprofit organization N.C. Child. Each year, N.C. Child compiles "report cards" for all 100 North Carolina counties, tracking factors that affect the health and wellbeing of children across the state. Hoke County's report card showed that many children face poverty, hunger and other issues that affect their quality of life.

Over 56 percent of all children in Hoke live in poor or low-income homes, and nearly a quarter may not get enough to eat on a regular basis. Four percent of children in Hoke County don't have health insurance, the report stated. Of the 22,252 children counted in Hoke's population, 34 percent – or about 7,500 – are under the age of six. Nearly 11 percent of babies born to Hoke parents have a low birth weight, and over 10 percent are born pre-term. About 73 percent of expecting mothers (See CHILDREN, page 8)

## Gaming center operator shot

### Three arrested for murder, one sought

Officers with the Hoke County Sheriff's Office have arrested three people and are seeking one other in connection with the murder of a man in Raeford last week. Deputies responded to the 7300 block of Turnpike Road around 10:33 p.m. Wednesday, April 24 in reference to a shots fired call. The officers located a shooting victim inside the building and later identified him as 40-year-old Mohammed Qasem Al-Otab. "The victim was being transported to Moore Regional Hospital when he died as a result of his injuries," the sheriff's office said

in a statement. "The motive appears to have been a robbery. The investigation is ongoing at this time." During the investigation, detectives identified four suspects wanted in connection with (See MURDER, page 5)



McArthur Cole

## DOT shifting two employees to Scotland County office

The North Carolina Department of Transportation plans to move one area of its local operations to a new facility in Scotland County, but Hoke's DOT maintenance office will stay open, officials said. NCDOT constructed a new facility, known as an equipment shop, in Scotland County. The agency will be moving a few employees from Hoke's office to the new location, according to NCDOT spokesman Aaron Moody.

"It made sense to consolidate the equipment shops for Scotland and Hoke. Essentially they're just moving two employees over from the Hoke equipment shop," Moody said. The maintenance yard at the Hoke NC-DOT office, which is located on Mockingbird Hill Road, will remain open and operating. "The maintenance yard in Hoke is not closing down," Moody said. (See DOT WORKERS, page 8)

## OTHER STUFF

By KEN MACDONALD

The movie "Mustang" from 2015 was so good I watched it again on Netflix and it put me in a teacher appreciation mood. I'm sure we can all name teachers who affected us, and our trajectories, or at least we can appreciate some for putting up with us. I'll admit, to my shame, that I didn't try very hard in school at the things teachers wanted me (See OTHER STUFF, page 10)



Believed to be "The Little Girl at the Fountain," Covington's "first distinguishing piece," wrote a newspaper. The famous sculptor Lorado Taft took an interest in this work. (Photo sent by Tom Covington)

## 'He says he's a farmer, the world will say he's an artist'

### Hoke self-taught sculptor got statewide attention

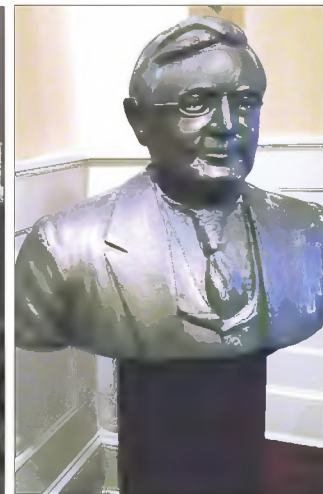
By KEN MACDONALD

famous poet John Charles McNeill's house at Spring Hill, outside Wagram. I was on the final stop of a months- (See SCULPTOR, page 2)

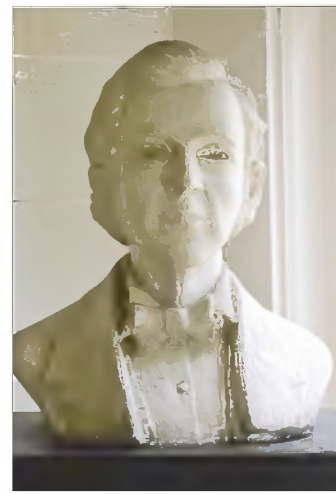
Wednesday afternoon, Calvin Newton led me around the grounds of



Covington at work.



W.G. Quackenbush



The identity of this man is unknown.

## Escaped inmate caught in Virginia

Authorities have captured an inmate who escaped from state custody in Hoke County last October. For six months, investigators tracked the whereabouts of Cul Priest Jones, 45, after Jones escaped from the Hoke Correctional Institution. Police officers in Roanoke Rapids and deputies with the Halifax County Sheriff's (See INMATE, page 4)



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