

Four indicted for Medicaid fraud

A Grand Jury indicted four people from Hoke County earlier this month for alleged Medicaid fraud, among other charges.

The United States District Court in Columbia, South Carolina indicted Tony Lee Covington, Priscilla Anderson Covington, Vanessa Covington McPhaul and Mary Covington Moses in connection with the case, according to

court documents. The felony charges include attempting and conspiracy to commit mail fraud, embezzlement of public money, property or records, money laundering – interstate commerce and making false statements relating to health care matters.

The four defendants are listed as executives of Preferred Care

Inc., a behavioral health provider offering services in North and South Carolina; and Saving Grace Outreach, a behavioral health provider offering services in South Carolina. The two healthcare services provided counseling to clients and billed Medicaid for the charges, according to court documents.

The indictment alleged that the

four defendants systematically overbilled Medicaid for services provided by the two behavioral health agencies. The defendants “knowingly and willfully did embezzle, steal, and convert to their own use, and the use of others, money in excess of \$1,000 belonging to the United States,” the documents stated.

The charges stem from Medic-

aid bills filed between Oct. 2014 and Feb. 2018. The defendants allegedly “criminally derived property” of at least \$4,393,583.78 in funds and monetary instruments.

The four defendants are also accused of using a portion of the illegally obtained funds to invest in business ventures in North (See *INDICTED*, page 5)

Dogs kill again in west

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

The morning after disabled veteran Robin Berry attended the first meeting of a committee formed to revamp the county's animal control ordinance, her son woke to find two loose dogs had torn apart nine of her goats.

Berry's livestock losses are the latest in a series of ongoing problems for farms in the Reservation Road area of Hoke County. In April, three loose dogs attacked a herd of (See *DOGS KILL*, page 10)

Shooting death investigated

A man was shot and killed in Hoke County earlier this month, and authorities are still investigating the circumstances of his death.

Christopher Michael Martin, 48, of Raeford was shot and killed May 3. The Hoke County Sheriff's Office (See *SHOOTING*, page 3)



Memorial Day celebration
Clockwise from left: Larry Long enjoys some shade, a member of the All Veteran Parachute Team jumps in; vendors ply their wares at the Rockfish Memorial Day celebration Saturday. The event, held at Brownie's on Lindsay Road, is the 11th for the community. (Catharin Shepard, Ed Clemente photos)

25 years ago Leandro case changed public education

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

“It was an effort to level the playing field,” Hoke County Board of Education member Hank Richards recalls.

It was 25 years ago this month when attorneys filed the ground-

breaking lawsuit alleging that North Carolina wasn't living up to its obligation to provide for public education, particularly for children in poor counties. Nearly a generation later, that one court case has brought millions of dollars in state funding to poor school districts across North Carolina and helped

cement the importance of pre-K programs for the state's children.

Over time the lawsuit came to be known as simply “the Leandro case,” named for Hoke County residents Kathy Leandro and her son who were among the original plaintiffs in the case.

“Kathy Leandro says she's tired

of Hoke County's public school students not getting what they deserve,” a News-Journal reporter wrote in May 1994.

The newspaper interviewed Leandro and fellow Hoke parent Steve Sunkel, two of the plaintiffs who joined forces with five school districts to sue the state over its

education funding practices. Leandro said at the time she was tired of seeing the lack of resources for local children.

“The parents are tired of providing everything the state's not providing. We have to work so hard in Hoke County for (See *LEANDRO*, page 5)

County staff trains for disasters

Shelters, radios, cots, blankets all beefed up

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

If disaster strikes Hoke County in the future, county staff are now better prepared for what they might face in the wake of a crisis while assisting Hoke residents.

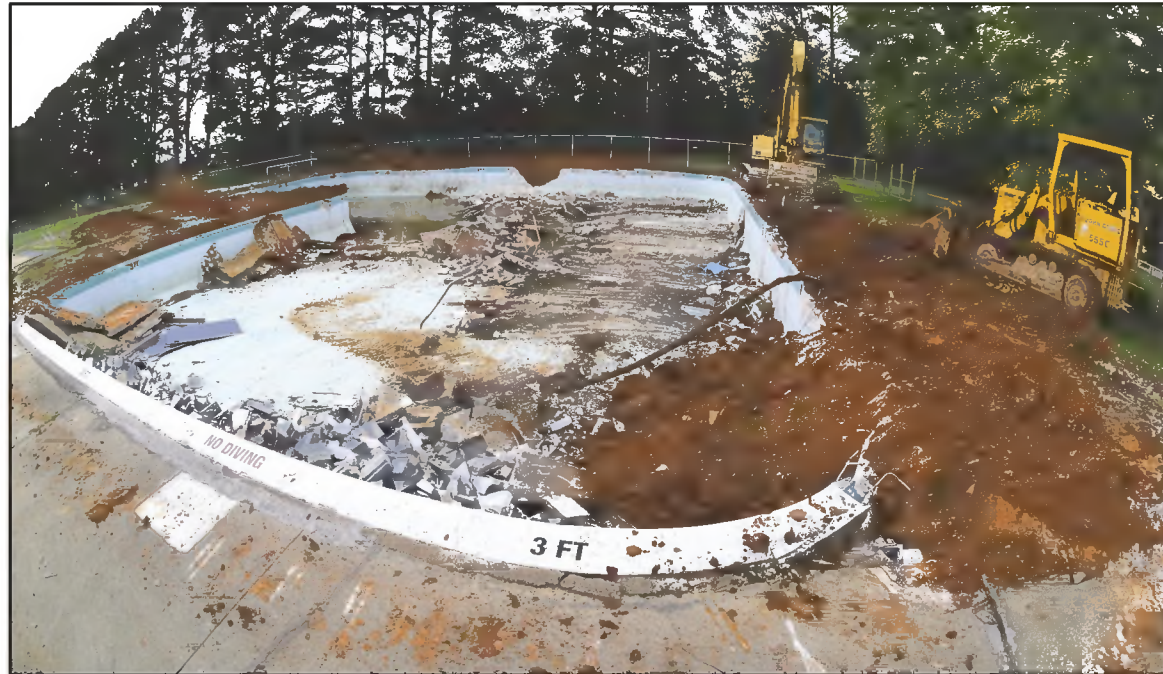
Hoke County employees took turns last week attending emergency management training that coached them in everything from how to operate phone banks to setting up and running a shelter. The training sessions, held at the Sandhills Community College Hoke campus, were a part of the county's efforts to be ready for disasters

that could present a threat to residents' safety.

Hoke County Emergency Coordinator Andrew Jacobs and Emergency Management Director Bryan Marley helped organize the training week. They've been busy working to prepare the county for any potential incidents, Jacobs said.

The county has needed to open public shelters twice in the last three years: once for Hurricane Matthew in 2016, and again for Hurricane Florence in 2018. Ever since Hurricane Florence, emergency management officials have been working to improve their stock of equipment, Jacobs said.

(See *TRAINING*, page 3)



Going, going...
The old Raeford Swimming Association pool is being filled in after years of declining membership and increased needs for repairs. Property owner Kel Crumpler, who lives next door, says he's filling in the pool and will build apartments out of the facility's changing rooms. (Ken MacDonald photo)



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