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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

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\$50 million in bonds okayed

Approval paves way for building rec center, refinancing projects

By CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

The Local Government Commission (LGC) of the North Carolina Department of State Treasurer announced this month that Hoke County received the Commission's approval to obtain up to \$50 million in limited obligation bonds.

The money will be used for two purposes:

building the county's new public swimming pool and recreation center, and paying off some existing county debt in order to save money on financing costs.

"Hoke County won approval to obtain \$50 million in limited obligation bonds to build the 53,000-square-foot James E. Leach Aquatic and Recreation Center, two basketball courts, ball fields and Parks and Recreation Department office space on U.S.

401 in East Hoke," a June 2 press release from the LGC stated.

The recreation center will also serve as the county's new primary emergency shelter in the event of a natural disaster. Hoke officials broke ground on the long-planned project in February.

Garvin Ferguson of the Hoke County Finance Office said the par amount – the face value of the limited obligation

bonds – came out to \$39,315,000. About \$20,495,000 of the money will go toward building the James A. Leach Aquatic and Recreation Center.

The county will pay off some existing debt using the other \$18,820,000. Specifically, according to LGC documents, the county will use the money to refund two 2007 United States Department of (See BUILDINGS, page 6)



Left: Gale Virgil dressed up to celebrate her 41 years of service in education. Above, Hoke County Schools honored 33 retirees from the school system at a luncheon last week. Some are not pictured. (Catharin Shepard photos)

Schools celebrate 33 retirees

By CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

Hoke County Schools honored more than 30 retirees at a luncheon last week, including several people who retired in 2020 but were unable to celebrate at the time due to the pandemic.

School principals and Board of Education members joined together

to recognize each retiree, share a story or reminisce about their time working together and present a token of appreciation on behalf of the school system.

Dr. Dana Chavis praised retiree John Fux, a longtime teacher and Career and Technical Education administrator with 27 years of service in education. Fux enjoys board games, classic rock concerts and

often reunites lost dogs with their owners – something that's happened frequently enough that his neighbors dubbed him "Doctor Doolittle," Chavis said. She wished him a happy retirement as he gets to spend more time with his grandchildren.

"John has given many years to the students of Hoke County High School, and to the community of (See RETIREES, page 8)

Benson takes reins as principal at Hoke High School

By CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

The Hoke County High School Bucks will welcome a new principal July 1, as Dr. Thomas Benson III steps in as the new chief administrator for the county's largest public school.

The Hoke County Board



Benson

of Education announced Benson's selection last week. Benson comes to the position from his most recent role serving as a federal programs officer

for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. He has more than 26 years of experience in public education, and previously worked at Hoke High as an assistant principal.

He also served as principal at Turlington Alternative School before going to work in Cumberland County, where he was principal of

Spring Lake Middle School and, later, at Westover High School.

Benson earned his bachelor's degree from Wingate University, which he attended on a football scholarship. He went on to earn master's degrees in education and school administration from Fayetteville State and UNC-Pembroke. He returned to Wing-

ate University to pursue a doctoral program, and completed his Doctor of Education degree in 2013.

Benson and his wife have lived in Hoke County for about 15 years. Their son is a recent graduate of SandHoke Early College High School, and their daughter attends a local middle school.

(See PRINCIPAL, page 6)

Summer school starts this week

By CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

After the "summer of COVID-19," comes summer school.

Hoke County Schools opened classroom doors Monday for the start of a state-mandated summer session that will run four days a week from June 14-July 29. Participating students will have Fridays off, and a weeklong break July 5-8.

North Carolina lawmakers passed legislation earlier

this year requiring all public schools to offer the summer session for at-risk children, in an effort to help students who may have fallen behind in critical learning areas due to the pandemic. The curriculum focuses on fundamentals like math, reading and science for lower grades, and credit recovery courses for high school students.

Teachers take attendance each day, and students are expected to be present and on time. All absences count toward the attendance policy,

and students who miss 36 hours, amounting to five days of instructional time, will be dropped from "Camp Hoke," summer school material for Hoke High parents said.

Elementary hours are 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m., middle and high school hours are 8:45 a.m.-4 p.m. The program consolidated several schools, for example, having students at West Hoke, McLaughlin and Upchurch Elementary attend West Hoke Elementary for the summer session.

(See SUMMER, page 6)



Clean Up Day

Volunteers paused for a photo Saturday before hitting the roads to clean up litter. The event was sponsored by Hoke County. (Catharin Shepard photo)

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