

# The News-Journal

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, August 18, 2021

## Board disqualifies mayor candidate Parker failed to prove he lives in Raeford, determination says

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

The Hoke County Board of Elections has disqualified a candidate from running for mayor of Raeford.

The board concluded that Christopher Parker, pastor of Abundant Life Ministries, didn't

produce sufficient evidence during a hearing to prove he meets the residency requirement to seek the office.

Parker appeared before the board August 5 in answer to a residency challenge filed by Raeford City Council incumbent Wayne Willis. Parker and an attorney made statements and answered

questions from the elections board and the board's lawyer, seeking to fulfill the burden of proof needed to prove his residency.

After hearing the arguments and deliberating in closed session, the Hoke County Board of Elections determined Parker didn't meet all of the requirements, according to an order

dated August 9.

To successfully prove residency a candidate must show by "a preponderance of the evidence of the record as a whole," that three things are true. "1. An actual abandonment of the first domicile, coupled with an intent not to return to the first domicile; 2. The acquisition of a new domicile by



Parker  
The board upheld the residency (See CANDIDATE, page 3)

actual residence at another place; and 3. The intent of making the newer domicile a permanent domicile," according to elections procedure.

## Hoke adds 5,000 people in 10 years Census shows county diversity

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

Hoke County added more than 5,000 residents over the last decade and the people who live here are a diverse population, according to data released last week by the United States Census Bureau.

Hoke County's population stood at 52,082 residents last year, making it the 50th most populous county out of North Carolina's 100 counties. Overall, Hoke grew by about 11 percent between 2010 and 2020. Ten years ago, Hoke's population stood at 46,952

— meaning the county has about 5,130 more residents now than it did then.

The population reported in the 2020 U.S. Census fell short of the 2019 estimate, which projected the number of Hoke residents at 55,949.

The county is diverse with a population of 37.8 percent White non-Hispanic, 31.5 percent Black non-Hispanic and 14.8 percent Hispanic, according to a breakdown of the numbers by Carolina Demography. Another 6.3 percent are multiracial.

(See CENSUS, page 6)

## Schools plan athletics with COVID in mind

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

The Hoke County Board of Education heard an update on the plan to return student athletes to play this fall. Hoke County athletics director Gary Brigman explained at the board's regular meeting last Tuesday that Hoke participates in the Sandhills conference, with a small shakeup in the schools local students compete against from other counties. The conference leaders re-

cently had a meeting to discuss getting back to play for the fall semester.

"We put some guidelines in place for our indoor sports and indoor activities. The focus was volleyball obviously, because volleyball is the one sport that we have that's indoors," he said.

The schools will implement some of the practices from last year, including a requirement that players and spectators wear a mask. Games will also have

(See ATHLETICS, page 3)

## Hoke High history-making coach, teacher Walworth dies



Walworth

The first coach to lead a Hoke High girls team in the sport of wrestling passed away suddenly last week.

Hoke High Head Wrestling Coach Vernon Walworth died Friday at the age of 59. Walworth was a nationally recognized pioneer coach in girls wrestling. For many years

he pushed for organization of the sport as its own athletic division in North Carolina.

With his guidance, the Bucks girls wrestling team was one of the first in the state recognized as separate from boys wrestling. The team made history by competing in the first Girls Wrestling Invitational at the Winston-Salem Fairgrounds in January 2019.

Under Walworth's leadership, in just a few short years the Bucks girls wrestling team went on to

(See COACH, page 3)



The family lost everything. (Social media photo)

## Family loses home in fire Firefighters rescued pets

Firefighters were able to rescue a family's pets from a house fire over the weekend, but the family was left with nowhere to go after the flames destroyed their home.

A fire broke out Saturday afternoon at a home in the Raeford Fields subdivision, located off of Rockfish Road. Fire departments responded to a call around 5:41 p.m. to put out the blaze, but the flames had already started showing on the

(See FIRE, page 4)



Firefighter Ryan Stephenson helped administer oxygen to pet cats rescued from a house fire in Raeford Fields. The pets were saved, but the house was a loss. (Contributed photo)

## Area hospitals strained by COVID

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

Local hospital systems report experiencing an increased number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19.

The area is seeing a "COVID surge," FirstHealth of the Carolinas said in a statement last week.

"FirstHealth's four hospitals are dealing with a sharp rise in

COVID-19 cases in recent weeks. On Thursday, 100 COVID-positive patients were being treated in hospitals across the FirstHealth system," FirstHealth officials announced.

FirstHealth Chief Medical Officer Dr. Jenifer Bruno said the hospital system is encouraging patients to only come to the emergency room if they're experiencing an emergency, and pointed to

other services available to care for patients' non-emergency needs.

"We have seen a dramatic increase in COVID-positive patients, and our hospitals and emergency departments are certainly feeling the strain of that rise," Bruno said in a statement.

Cape Fear Valley Health Chief Operations Officer Daniel Weatherly said the number of

(See COVID, page 4)

## County to increase park security

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

A week after two young men were killed at a popular county sports complex in an apparent drug-related shooting, the Hoke County Board of Commissioners talked ways to improve security at the park.

The county will be adding cameras to the complex to dis-

courage criminal activity, and commissioners spoke about possibly hiring a private security company for extra safety.

The county sports complex on Red Springs Road has a splash pad, a playground, a covered seating area, basketball court and multiple ball fields. It's fenced in with a gate left unlocked during operating hours, and has a separate fence around the splash pad.

It's a busy park, popular with local families and area sports teams looking for a place to practice, and it also plays host to community events like National Night Out.

Nakoya Maynor, 25 and Zyrique Grace, 22 were shot and killed August 9 in a shooting that started near the splash pad, according to the Hoke County Sheriff's Office. A third person was

(See SECURITY, page 4)

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