

# The News-Journal

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RAEFORD & HOKE COUNTY N.C.

Wednesday, August 25, 2021

## 3 die from COVID, 160 cases in week County among worst in state for number of hospitalizations

By CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

After months without a death due to the pandemic, Hoke County recently saw three more people die after testing positive for COVID-19.

So far 59 residents of the county have died after contracting

the virus, according to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. More than 5,700 people in Hoke have gotten COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic.

Hoke County Health Department Director Helene Edwards confirmed the three deaths. Two of them were unvaccinated

individuals who were hospitalized with the virus, she said in an email Monday. Details on the third recent death were not immediately available.

With hospitalizations and new infections rising, state health officials are still sounding the alarm about the highly contagious Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus.

Even fully vaccinated people living in areas of high community transmission should wear masks indoors, the CDC recommended.

As of Monday there were nearly 3,200 people hospitalized with COVID-19 in facilities across North Carolina. Of those hospitalized, nearly 800 were in intensive care units, according to the North

Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS). The numbers were a sharp increase over just a month ago, when about 800 people in the state were hospitalized with the virus.

Like the rest of the state, Hoke County is seeing more positive cases. At least 317 people in the (See COVID, page 4)



Makayla McLean, 10 years old, with some of her products. (ClamaFlauge photo)

## 'It's fun, I get to meet new people' Young drink-making entrepreneur authors book

Makayla McLean enjoys coming up with new recipes for fun drinks like lemonades and smoothies, and now she's sharing her favorite refreshments in a new book.

"Unique Drinks by Kay" is a book of drink recipes releasing this week by the local author, who is 10 years old and attends McLauchlin Elementary School.

Makayla is the daughter of culinary arts teacher and confectionary small business owner Lanice McLean.

"She grew up with me in the kitchen and she loves being in the kitchen creating new recipes and try-

ing out new items," her mother said.

Makayla started her lemonade business last year when the pandemic hit as something to do with her spare time. She began bottling and selling her own drink creations, making different flavors of lemonade in summer and cocoa bombs in winter. She uses fresh fruit in her products and takes orders on Facebook.

Makayla said her favorite lemonade flavors are peach, strawberry and watermelon.

"It's fun, I get to meet new people and it's really cool," she said of her business. "My mom and my grandma, they really inspired me to get

started, especially with my drinks. I really love making stuff in the kitchen."

The young author plans to launch her new book at an event this Saturday, August 28 from 3-5 p.m. at 104 Sweet Bay Court in Raeford. The books are priced at \$10.

Guests can bring their children to meet the author and get a copy of the book signed. There will be drink samples served and available to purchase.

For more information, see the Unique Drinks by Kay Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/UniqueDrinksByKay>.

## Hoke students return to class Smooth restart reported

By CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

For the first time since March 2020, Hoke County students from pre-kindergartners to high school seniors are back to in-person classes five days a week.

School started Monday for nearly all Hoke public school students. SandHoke Early College High School students started back earlier this month. Only about 125 of the district's estimated 9,000 students applied to participate in virtual learning due to a medical exemption for the fall semester.

It was the first time since Gov. Roy Cooper ordered schools shut down in March of last year at the start of the pandemic that local youth, teachers

and staff in all grade levels have all been on campus Monday through Friday.

For students whose families chose to keep them in remote learning only for the spring semester, it was the first time they set foot in a physical classroom in about 17 months.

The first day back went well, Hoke Schools Public Relations Director Meredith Bounds said.

"We had a great first day! It was wonderful to see so many of our students and staff back in the classroom. Overall, things went smoothly," she said in an email. "Of course, there are always going to be a few 'first-day hiccups' but most of those were resolved quickly and by the second day, have been worked out."

(See SCHOOL, page 6)

## State budget on track to fund courthouse

By CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

As lawmakers in Raleigh on both sides of the aisle begin negotiations on the state budget, the bill still includes \$30 million in funding to pay for a new Hoke County courthouse.

Hoke's state elected officials in the General Assembly, Democrats Sen. Ben Clark and Rep. Garland Pierce, voted to support the preliminary budget as it passed both the state Senate and state House of Representatives. The bill passed with a veto-proof majority. Discussions are getting underway among Republicans, Democrats, and Gov. Roy Cooper as to what exactly the final version of the bill will include.

Pierce said this week that he and Clark are among those who are working to negotiate the details of the budget.

"I committed myself to supporting the budget," he said.

Besides the funding for a new courthouse in Hoke, the draft bill also includes millions of dollars earmarked for projects in other counties Clark and Pierce represent. Clark's district includes part of Cumberland County, and Pierce's district includes Scotland County.

Pierce said he's hoping to be in a place to keep the area's needs at the forefront of discussions.

"There's a saying in Raleigh: if you're not at the table, you're on the menu," (See BUDGET, page 6)

## Principal publishes memoir

By CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

Hoke County High School Principal Dr. Thomas Benson III recently published a memoir of his life and journey in education.

Benson has been working on the book for the last four or five years, and was able to complete it during the pandemic. "A Legacy Created:

Memoir of a Boy from the South" recounts Benson's life experiences growing up in rural South Carolina, and how he persevered to build a career as an educator and mentor.

"It just goes back to my childhood and some of the difficulties that I endured in school. Having a learning disability, discrimination, things of that nature that I dealt

(See MEMOIR, page 5)



Benson



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