

# The News-Journal

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## Space, budget tight for courthouse Commission travels to Charlotte to hammer out details

By CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

Both the available space to build a new Hoke County Courthouse in downtown Raeford, and the state-funded grant money available to build it are going to be

tight as commissioners work out details of the project.

Commissioners will have to decide how to proceed after two board members heard concerns from stakeholders at a meeting last week, and after they talk about it again more in-depth during a retreat set for this Thursday in Charlotte.

Committee Chairman and Commissioner Harry Southerland and Commission Chairman Allen Thomas heard concerns from District Attorney Mike Hardin, public defender Tom McInnis and Hoke County Clerk of Court Evelyn McLeod about where things are going with the design for the courthouse.

The county has \$31 million in grant money from the state and about \$2.3 million added from local funds to build the new courthouse. However, now the county has to balance high building costs with the project budget, and work out what can and can't be included in the new facility while staying in that budget.

The district attorney said he was concerned a courthouse built to the current concept might not suit the local court system's needs long-term, simply because of lack of space.

"If we build a courthouse that's already obsolete in space that doesn't include everybody in that (See *COURTHOUSE*, page 6)



### Planting for the future in community forest

A 500-Year Future – Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H and other youth groups last week planted longleaf pine trees at the Hoke Community Forest. They put in the first of 70,000 of the native trees which can live 500 years or even more. See story, page 4. (Catharin Shepard photo)

## Legends of Hoke County

### Cobblers Allen and Wimzy Lundy

By CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

It was 92 years ago this month that Allen Lundy first came to Raeford to open his shop, following in the multi-generational footsteps of his family who worked in the shoe business.

Allen and Wimzy Lundy moved to Raeford and opened Lundy Shoe Shop on Elwood Avenue in December 1929.

They kept the doors open through the tough years of the Great Depression and World War II.

Lundy was a mainstay in the community for more than half a century, known for his eye for good workmanship and his steady

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# Planting for the future in Hoke community forest

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD  
Staff writer

The muddy ground made it a messy trek as children carried young longleaf pine trees and hoisted hole-diggers across a field next to Vass Road, but in 15 years or so, the people of Hoke County will start to see the results of their hard work.

About 40 youth, their troop leaders and other volunteers came out last Saturday, December 3 to help plant the very first longleaf pines that are part of reforestation efforts at the Hoke Community Forest.

The tract of land looks bare right now after the non-native trees were taken out and the ground churned up. If all goes well, by about 2037 the forest will be starting to look more like the original sandhill ecosystem that it was before a paper company

used the land for timber production. It will also be more of a welcoming environment for hikers and others hoping to enjoy a moment in nature.

By then, the tens of thousands of native longleaf pine trees that are being planted on the publicly-owned land will have had a chance to mature – and they could live for up to 500 years, according to forestry experts.

“It’s one of our longest-lived trees that we have,” Jesse Wimberley of the Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association (SPBA) said.

The SPBA, North Carolina Forest Service, Hoke County government and many other local and state organizations joined forces to host the educational exercise that gave the youth the chance to get their hands dirty and walk in the woods while helping a good cause.

The children got to visit different

stations to learn all about longleaf pines, the animals and plants of the Sandhills, the role that fire plays in the ecosystem and even careers in forestry. They also got to take home their own longleaf pine trees to plant.

The Hoke Community Forest includes about 532 acres of forest off of Vass Road. The nonprofit Conservation Fund purchased the land from owner International Paper Company, then worked to obtain grant funds to help Hoke County buy the \$1.3 million property in 2013.

The Hoke Community Forest has been called the first of its kind in the region. Local leaders created a steering committee to manage the property and make it more accessible for the community.

The committee stepped up forest management efforts at the property

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# Planting

*(Continued from page 4)*

over the past few years. Phase one of the work at the Hoke Community Forest involved removing some of the non-native trees and preparing the land for planting longleaf pines, Wimberly said.

Last weekend was the next, more hands-on step in the process.

“We’ve invited Girl Scouts, boy scouts, boys and girls clubs, 4-H, and today is the beginning of phase two. We’ve done our thinning, we’ve made \$280,000 for the county, that was a nice part of it. But now the second part of it is where the community is involved,” Wimberly said.

“Today is our kickoff of bringing the community out here. We had to do that thinning in a way that didn’t really allow a lot of participation from the community, but today we invite the community out to start putting this forest back.”

Most of the planting will have to be done by specialized equipment because of the sheer number of trees that are going into the ground: about 70,000 longleaf pines in total. But there were plenty on hand for the kids, Wimberly said.

“We’ve got over 1,000 trees out here that they can plant and we’re going to send them all home with a tree,” he said. “...We want people to leave this space with a new understanding, not only what goes on in the forest but their possibility to be part of that.”

The reforestation project isn’t costing the county any money directly. The group of stakeholders was able to secure funding assistance to buy the longleaf pines.

Though it raises the question, where do you even go to buy 70,000 pine trees? Specialized nurseries, Wimberly said, and the trees are already ordered.

“There are folks that that’s all they do,” he said.

After the youth helped plant the trees on the property, they had the chance to sign their names to a large banner that will be preserved for posterity.

“They’ll leave a legacy. I planted a tree here, I was part of putting this forest back,” Wimberly said.

Longleaf pines are a long-lived, but slow-growing tree. They look



This demonstration taught Scout groups all about how to plant longleaf pine trees, during phase two of the Hoke Community Forest’s management plan. The youth got their own pine tree to take home and plant. (Photo by Catharin Shepard)

like long, green grass needles when they’re first planted. The trees will stay in that “grass stage” for the first three years of their life cycle. After about 15 years they’ll be getting more height on them and more closely resemble the tall pines famous in North Carolina, experts explained during the education sessions.

People who live near the community forest, and those just passing through the area will likely be seeing smoke and fire in the forest in the future. Forestry management of longleaf pines includes intentionally setting fire to burn away litter – preventing more dangerous, out-of-control fires – and to encourage the trees to continue their natural life cycle.

County staff turned out to help set everything up for the day, and participants enjoyed free snacks and drinks. County Manager Letitia Edens and Commission Vice Chairman James Leach thanked the people who made it possible.

“They’ve done a wonderful job of making this happen and I’m grateful we’re in this partnership,” Edens said.

“This is a great opportunity for our youth and for all of us,” Leach said.