

# under the sun

## Chappell Relies On Gift Of Gab, Teamwork

BY SUSAN USHER

Brunswick County Commissioner Chris Chappell says he's always had a "gift of gab," even as a child growing up in the Myrtle Head section of Ash.

That ability came into play early, helping him claim a role on athletic teams at Waccamaw High School even after a bout with rheumatic fever as a seven-year-old took him out of school for six months and left him with a heart murmur, unable to dress out through his junior year of high school.

But one year, behind his parents' backs, he joined the Eagles basketball squad. He's been on one team or another ever since, moving from a Chicago Cubs farm team to the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners.

In his first game for Waccamaw, played against Nakina, he was high scorer. But Chappell's basketball career ended abruptly when the newspaper was delivered, bearing an account of the game.

A strong interest in sports remained, influencing subsequent decisions.

Chappell couldn't always rely that heavily on his gift of gab, however. Today he speaks slowly, in almost a drawl, pacing his words carefully, continuing to rely on the technique he used to overcome a childhood stutter. Only a trace of that stutter remains today, when he becomes excited and talks rapidly.

Once in his control, that gift of gab has been useful since his days as water and bat boy, figuring in his election to a two-year term on the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners and re-election in November 1984 to a four-year term. He also credits re-election to other factors: "I was always told to be able to defend your position and to try to be honest," said Chappell.

This year, as the only returning member of the board, he was also elected chairman of the five-member board, placing new demands on his "gift of gab" and experience working as a team.

Chappell campaigns continuously; he doesn't stop once elected. Remaining visible to the public once in office is a tip this political realist is quick to suggest to any official with an eye toward re-election. For instance, he recently spoke to two history/government classes at West Brunswick High School, something he enjoys. Chappell said he would get out more like that if he didn't work.

But the skill Chappell considers his best asset also can be a liability, he said.

"Probably my worst virtue as a county commissioner is that I want to help everybody. If you have a problem I want to help."

Once you tell someone you'll try to help, though, they get mad if you can't do it, he said. "It hurts when you have to go back and say it can't be done."

Lots of times those answers relate to one of his major frustrations with government: what he sees as the county's role as "whipping boy" for the state. The county is created by the state and is an arm of state government.

That relationship—especially when it comes to programs and regulations and the money to carry them out—leaves the commissioners often caught "between

what the public wants and what the state says you have to do," he said. "There's a lot we don't agree with."

For instance, he cites stricter septic tank regulations enacted by the state that he said he thinks make it more difficult and more costly to develop land in Brunswick County, for "the little person" who wants to subdivide a small tract for his children as well as the large developer.

Chappell said that when forced to choose, he tends to lean more toward both free enterprise and individual rights, such as a man's right to do with his property as he chooses, a sentiment reflected in his attitudes toward zoning and regulation of development.

While he is chairman of the county board this year, Chappell ran from District 1, which includes basically Shallotte and Waccamaw townships, two diverse entities with very different needs and prospects for the future.

He's expected to represent their interests on the board.

Other commissioners aren't in such a different position, he said. "Each of us have to represent the needs of our district and weigh those needs against the needs of the entire county."

Chappell said that representing the needs of both districts doesn't create a conflict "but a challenge" for him: "I have to understand both sides (of issues affecting the townships) so I can explain it."

Shallotte Township, where he makes his home in Calabash Acres, is undergoing rapid change with an emphasis on tourism, growth and development.

Change comes more slowly in Waccamaw Township—the rural, predominantly agricultural area where Chappell spent his childhood as the son of Jack and Eloise Simmons Chappell.

To help him stay on top of the needs of each township, he proposes to set up by summer an advisory committee for each, composed of a representative group of residents.

Meanwhile he said he tries to make sure the commissioners are working together.

"If we vote against each other, then we reunite behind our decision to work together for all the county."

Chappell rejected criticism leveled against him since assuming the chairmanship he has exercised "facilitator"-like tactics.

"It's not so. I'm more laid back. The board feels free to ask questions. My role since I've been there has been to guide them as to what has been done," he added.

The chairmanship has placed extra demands on him and the time he spends with his family, which includes his wife, the former Linda Benton, and daughter, Christy, 13, and Gwyn, 9.

Mrs. Chappell operates Linda's Beauty Des nearby, an occupation her husband has more than a passing acquaintance with.

After graduating from Waccamaw High School in 1966, he wanted to continue playing baseball. He had his chance with the old Border Belt, a semi-pro farm operation of the Chicago Cubs that included teams from

Brunswick and Colabus counties. Baseball was to dominate his spare time for the next 11 years.

He left SECC to attend barber college in Durham, coming back to the area to work in Whiteville, then New Hanover County as then with George "Buddy" Evans in Shallotte.

He kept playing baseball until 1973, when a serious game injury resulted in 20/60 vision in his left eye.

In the meantime he had met the woman he was to marry on a blind date. They were wed Valentine's Day 1971. A year later he went to work with her father, Earl, at Brown & Pot, on construction of the CP&L nuclear power plant at Southport.

Another year later and Benton, Chappell and his brother-in-law Tony were in business for themselves. That year Chris gave up his part-time farming on the homeplace for good. In 1978 they bought their first land for development purposes. Late last year they divided the construction part of the business, but still work together on development.

By '74 slowpitch ball had come to Brunswick County and Chappell traveled and played until 1981, giving it up only to enter politics.

Today he pursues his interest in sports vicariously. Both his daughters are cheerleaders; he attends as many of their games as he can.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

CHRIS CHAPPELL, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners, enjoys talking about his work with county government. Above, he chats with government students at West Brunswick High School. Politics isn't bad, he told them, it's just given a bad name because of a few of the people that get involved in it.

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## Things Have Changed In Four Years

(Continued From Page 4-A)

car? All the lots and roadsides are posted no parking.

A few of these real estate men had better get together and get a few lots down along the beach for people in all these little developments to park their cars. After all, that beach was put there by the good Lord for everyone to enjoy, not just those beachfront property owners who are being very selfish by insisting on posting signs for no parking.

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## Big Is Not Always Best

To the editor:

Congratulations to the Beacon and staffers on your most recent multiple press awards. Your hallmark in promulgation of community interest news warrants emulation and recognition by your peers in "general excellence."

To demonstrate reader continued support of recognized excellence, my remittance is included to insure no interruptions in the reading and learning pleasures derived from the Beacon.

I salute all of you for your deserved awards in professional journalism. You've proved again the creditability of the adage, "Big is not always best."

Charlie C. Searce Jr.  
Fayetteville

## Effort Obvious

To the editor:

I noted in the paper that you have been presented four awards. Let me assure you of my sincere admiration for persons such as yourselves who have obviously put forth a good deal

of time and effort in service to the community.

Dr. Victoria E. Webster  
Shallotte

## Newspaper Plays A Vital Role

To the editor:

Congratulations to you and your fine staff upon your four awards in the N.C. Press Association competition. They are truly deserved.

The awards prompt a couple of thoughts: first, Susan and Terry seem almost apologetic that they won an award based on your coverage of Hurricane Diana. They're being a bit modest, for certainly the contest judges recognized

your fine coverage in spite of the problems caused by that catastrophic event. Truly, you rose to the occasion and met the challenge.

Secondly, your first place award for general excellence is a fitting tribute to the effort you make week-by-week to cover important events in Brunswick County.

Your paper plays a vital role in highlighting each week those things which serve to make life better in Brunswick County. This is a necessary and vital role if this area is to grow in ways that do make life better.

Thomas S. Corbitt Jr.  
Director  
Brunswick Visitors Center  
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