

IN SUNSET BRIDGE CASE

Coast Guard Charges Tug Operator With Negligence

BY SUSAN USHER
The U.S. Coast Guard has charged the operator of a tugboat that rammed the Sunset Beach Bridge last month with three counts of negligent operation of a towing vessel.

Lt. James Carter, investigating officer for the Wilmington District Marine Safety Office, said a federal judge will hear evidence in the case Wednesday, March 6, at 9:30 a.m. at

the New Hanover County Courthouse in Wilmington.

Among those scheduled to testify are Sunset Beach Bridgetender Danny Hewett, Ocean Isle Beach Bridgetender Ruby Bellamy and Sunset Beach Police Chief William Hill.

The southbound tugboat *Angela M* out of Virginia Beach, Va., pushing a 65-foot barge loaded with pipe to Jacksonville, Fla., struck the bridge

on Saturday, Jan. 12, around 11:40 p.m. It knocked out the fender and three 17-foot sections of the bridge and damaged a fourth section, closing the bridge to vehicular traffic until the following Wednesday evening.

Jim Kelly of Virginia Beach, Va., was operating the tugboat, registered to Jim Williams, Sea Tow Inc., also of Virginia Beach.

The three counts against Kelly,

said Lt. Carter, relate to 1) a grounding that occurred north of the Ocean Isle Beach Bridge, 2) damage to the fender system of the Ocean Isle Beach Bridge and 3) damage to the Sunset Beach Bridge.

Based on the evidence presented, the judge will determine if the U.S. Coast Guard has proven negligence in any or all of the three counts.

The penalty levied is also deter-

mined by the judge, said Carter. He could, for instance, suspend the operator's license, pending six months' probation.

The N.C. Department of Transportation is awaiting the outcome of the U.S. Coast Guard investigation before initiating action to recover damages in the incident, indicated DOT spokesman Bill Jones.

The *Angela M* was the first of two

vehicles to strike the bridge in about a week's time. A U.S. Army landing craft utility boat struck the bridge on Jan. 21, in the same area damaged by the tug-barge. The bridge was closed temporarily for repairs.

Carter said his office is not investigating that incident now since it involved another federal agency; any further action would be taken by the U.S. Army.

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Seawall Builders Can Tap City Water At Holden

BY SUSAN USHER
Contractors building seawalls along the oceanfront at Holden Beach will be able to sink pilings using city water if they're willing to wait their turn for the one meter available.

They will also pay \$1.70 per 1,000 gallons rather than the regular water charge \$1.20 per 1,000 gallons under a motion made last Thursday morning by Jim Griffin.

Meeting in special session to discuss the land use plan, public accessways, hiring of a new policeman and the strand patrol, the board readily added Griffin's request to discuss "the east end and the emergency situation that exists down there" to the agenda. Then they approved his suggestion unanimously.

The one meter that works with the town's fire hydrants will be loaned

first-come, first-served based on the order in which applications were received. Presently the meter is in use at the Holden pavilion on the east end, where the old 332-foot wooden seawall is being replaced with a steel-reinforced concrete wall. The town had allowed use of city water there, at charge, because it has invested \$8,800 in the project to protect two streets and two public accessways.

In two day's time—Tuesday to Thursday—seven persons had applied for local CAMA permits to repair or construct seawalls following a winter storm last Monday night, said Building Inspector Dwight Carroll after the meeting. More applications were expected.

While Commissioner Jim Griffin estimated erosion of 20 to 25 feet in

some locations, Carroll said he knew of one location where a measured 12 feet was lost.

At the request of a homeowner seeking a seawall construction permit, on Monday he had measured the site. At 32 feet from the erosion scarp to the house foundation, it fell 12 feet short of qualifying for a permit. To be considered endangered the foundation must lie within 20 feet of the erosion scarp or the toe of the dune.

When Carroll measured again Tuesday morning, the location qualified.

Even though contractors will have to take turns using the meter, commissioners said they thought all property owners would have time to get their pilings jettied and have construction under way by March 1.

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Single Agency Will Serve County Seniors

BY SUSAN USHER
A new Brunswick County Department on Aging will begin operation in July under a plan approved by the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners Monday night.

"This is a way we can meet the needs of a large bloc segment of the population," said Commissioner James Poole.

The aging department is the second new department created by the commissioners this month. On Feb. 4 they pooled existing personnel and equipment to create a construction and maintenance office.

Also Monday, commissioners appointed a new county finance director after meeting behind closed doors for an hour on personnel, land acquisition and litigation. They took no action on land and legal matters.

In establishing the department on aging, commissioners agreed to hire

a department head in May, using county funds to pay the salary until July. State and federal funds are expected to pay the salary beginning July 1, indicated Linda Bedo, who administers programs for the aging for the Cape Fear Council of Governments. She will help the county establish the department.

The department's manager will report directly to commissioners and will work with the county's nutrition sites, home-delivered meals, chore and transportation services, home health care and legal aid services supported by Title III B and C federal programs. Many of those programs are now administered by the Brunswick County Department of Social Services. The department may also seek new or additional sources of funding for senior programming.

Ms. Bedo said that a separate ag-

ing department would put its first priority on senior citizens, which another agency possibly couldn't do, would have greater visibility and with its greater flexibility could help "fill in the gaps" in existing programs for Brunswick County's growing number of senior citizens. She estimated the number of elderly in the county would increase from the 6,763 counted in 1980 to 8,381 in 1990.

The trend both statewide and in the area is toward establishment of separate aging departments, she added.

She cautioned the department could become political because of the senior citizens lobby, that there would be some objections to making a change and that the department could become more costly.

"But all the cons may in reality benefit the senior citizens of the county," she added.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

WORKERS were driving the last pilings Thursday for a new seawall nearing completion at the Holden pavilion on the east end of Holden Beach, with backfilling to begin this week. The new steel-reinforced concrete structure replaces a wooden seawall built by John F. Holden in 1967. At least seven or eight other

seawalls should be under construction or repair by March 1, when new CAMA regulations barring permanent erosion control structures go into effect. In the meantime, special action of the Holden Beach Board of Commissioners will allow the seawall contractors to use city water, for a fee, to jet pilings.

Already Tops, Chamber Hopes To Increase Tourist Industry



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BIGNONIAN

BRUNSWICK TECHNICAL COLLEGE PRESIDENT Joseph Carter, right, accepted the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce's N.C. Oyster Festival award Friday night on behalf of the school. BTC provided an oyster cooker for the chamber's annual roast that was built by welding students. Presenting the award is chamber President Tripp Sloane, left.

BY TERRY POPE
Southern hospitality and beautiful golf courses are two ingredients the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce plans to emphasize in a travel guide designed to attract more tourists to the area.

According to figures released last week by the N.C. Department of Commerce, Brunswick County led the state last year in tourism income by collecting more than \$100 million, said Mason Anderson, a member of the chamber board of directors.

"In Brunswick County, travel and tourism take a second seat to nothing," Anderson said at the chambers' ninth annual membership meeting in Calabash Friday night. He added that the "dramatic increase" in tourism revenues shows what kind of job the chamber has done in the past nine years.

In 1976 the county collected \$4.9 million in tourism dollars, which jumped to \$19 million by 1980, he said. By 1983, the figure had risen to more than \$35 million and last year exceeded the \$100 million mark.

Even with such growth in tourism income, the chamber still hopes to bring more visitors to the area by starting a travel package in conjunction with travel agents and Piedmont Airlines.

Paul Himmelsbach, a Myrtle Beach publisher who owns Himmelsbach Communications, introduced two ideas at the meeting Friday for publishing travel magazines highlighting the South Brunswick Islands. The plans will be presented to the chamber board of directors for study.

Under the themes, "We Bring You Wide Smiles and Wide Beaches," and "We Bring You Wide Smiles and Wide Fairways," the magazines would act as travel guides to be placed in travel agent offices worldwide. The booklets would attempt to draw on Brunswick County's hospitality, beaches and golf courses, Himmelsbach said.

"You're not only developing a year round business," Himmelsbach said, "but you're developing an area that will really set you apart in the years

ahead."

Himmelsbach publishes six magazines in the Grand Strand area, including "On the Green," which features the Myrtle Beach area golf courses, and "On the Town" magazines for Charleston.

Developing a travel package to the Brunswick County area would also be favorable to Piedmont Airlines, said William McGee, senior vice-president for marketing. McGee was guest speaker at the banquet held at the Harbortown Seafood Restaurant.

Piedmont has become known as the "golfers airline" since it services airports in both Wilmington and Myrtle Beach, easily accessible to area golf courses, McGee said.

"We carry more golfers than most any other airline," he added. McGee estimated 300,000 golfers passed through the terminals at Myrtle Beach and Wilmington last year. That figure will increase to 350,000 golfers in 1985, he said.

"We're extremely interested in the promotion of tourism," McGee added. "Pleasure travel makes up an im-

portant part of Piedmont's revenues."

McGee said he was also interested in promoting more airline packages to the area for smaller conventions that may be held either in the South Brunswick Islands or the Grand Strand area.

Chamber President Tripp Sloane said area businessmen could also help promote the "southern hospitality" theme by wearing buttons saying, "We Have Wide Smiles."

Sloane said the chamber itself has also been growing in the past 2 1/2 years, from 120 members to 213 members. Travel writers featuring the area in national magazines have also helped increase the number of inquiries the chamber received last year by 50 percent.

In other business Friday night, the chamber presented its annual Presidential Award to Shalotte businessman Deedy White for providing the old site for the chamber office for five years.

A plaque will be given to White (See AWARDS, Page 2-A)