

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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This Non-Smoker Appreciates Sunset Ban

Reactions are probably divided at Sunset Beach over a town council decision to ban smoking at public gatherings at the town hall.

But I, for one, was glad to hear the news. As a nonsmoker with chronic bronchial problems, the last thing I care to get is somebody else's smoke in my face. You won't find an ashtray anywhere near my desk, though I don't go so far as to hang "no smoking" signs.

It's not that I have anything personal against smokers—my body just can't take it.

I grew up in a household that included two chainsmokers. I spent a lot of time emptying ashtrays and rolling down car windows, gagging as I went. My sensitivity to tobacco smoke developed rather early.

None of my friends or roommates in college or graduate school smoked and I've only dated one man who smoked—and that was only occasionally.

At the first newspaper where I worked, the only smoker in the news



Susan Usher

department was the editor-in-chief, and he had a room of his own with a door that shut. The rest of us, mercifully, were out in the open.

At the Associated Press state office in Raleigh, no one smoked cigarettes. Pipes and cigars were the rage in this male-dominated domain. On a warm, muggy day those cigars could make a healthy person throw up.

When I first came to work at The Beacon, the ratio of smokers to non-smokers was about even and I shared a poorly-ventilated newsroom with a smoker. Most days it didn't matter since we were out and about. But on Tuesdays, both of us would sit in the newsroom all day long, writing up Monday night meetings, breaking

news and community news that invariably doesn't arrive until just before deadline.

My throat would get scratchy, my eyes watery, my nose runny. By 2 p.m. involuntary tears were rolling steadily down my cheeks and onto the blotter on my desk. Throat lozenges, eye drops, Coricidin D, nothing kept back the tears if the cigarettes were going. Misery, sheer misery that only another non-smoker could understand.

These days the news room is a lot more comfortable—better ventilation, no smokers.

But sometimes I think that makes it all the harder to cover meetings in chambers where smoking is allowed.

There's nothing like settling in between two people who don't have cigarettes out, only to have them both light up a few minutes later—after all the seats upwind are claimed.

Or to have the entire row behind you light up simultaneously, without even asking out of politeness if the nonsmokers in the room mind.

Some smokers go out of their way to be nice about it—like Rep. David Redwine. He goes to such lengths to accommodate my overly-sensitive nose that it's almost embarrassing. But I appreciate it.

Then there are the folks who seem to take a perverse pleasure in lighting up in front of a non-smoker. They smile sideways as they puff, a glint of amusement in their eyes. This is great entertainment, the eyes seem to say.

Maybe for you, buster, but not for me.

However, I realize—from watching my parents as a child—that not smoking can be tough on the chainsmoker.

So, in a well-ventilated area I try to accommodate smokers—they have their rights too.

In general, though, I wish smoking was banned at gatherings in all public meeting places. That includes the public assembly building at Bolivia, commissioners' chambers and other town halls—especially those close little places like Calabash.

Sunset Beach: Welcome To The Country Club

If some at Sunset Beach were to have their way, only the privileged few would have access to the beaches or inlets of the county's southernmost community.

You can define "privileged few" as those who own property at Sunset Beach. These people would be the only ones allowed access.

That North Carolina's beaches belong to everyone—and should therefore be accessible to everyone—doesn't seem to matter to some of the decision-makers at Sunset Beach.

The town recently passed up an opportunity to combine its funds with the state to create parking for "day people," a word that has become—at least at Sunset Beach—synonymous with "unwelcome visitors."

It seems the town would rather spend its own money and none of the state's to maintain a "country club atmosphere," to make sure its select group of property owners doesn't have to rub elbows—or beach blankets—with those who only own property near the beach, not on it.

If all local beaches were to adopt the stance taken by Sunset Beach, it could change the entire real estate market in Brunswick County. No longer would we be able to boast of a particular subdivision's proximity to the ocean, to the opportunity for walks on the beach, surf fishing, sunning, shell collecting.

Fortunately, not every beach community in North Carolina feels as Sunset Beach does. Some towns think access is a good thing to provide, "almost a civic responsibility," Julia Shambough, shorefront access coordinator with the N.C. Division of Coastal Management, told Sunset Beach council members last week. Some go so far as to build bathhouses and welcome centers. And parking is the key ingredient in providing that access.

One Sunset Beach official has said that the right of the public to beach access doesn't mean the town has any responsibility whatsoever to provide it. In fact, one town board member said he was willing to wait until the state makes the town provide public access—and would then insist the state pay the full price tag since access was the state's idea in the first place.

One public official at Sunset Beach has suggested access isn't really restricted there at all. Visitors can simply put their boat in the water (where, one must wonder, since Sunset Beach doesn't have a public ramp and the one at Sea Trail is now private as well) and motor over to the beach.

Once there, however, the debate won't be over, because certain property owners claim their real estate extends to the mean low water line. If that argument holds, a would-be beachcomber couldn't pull a boat ashore even on low tide, much less spread a picnic lunch or sun on the beach. (The state's courts, however, have generally recognized mean high water as the most generous boundary line for private land ownership.)

North Carolina has a progressive Coastal Area Management Act, a management tool that tries to balance the needs and demands of the varied interests that use the coast. Maintaining that balance includes helping towns to plan for and to provide public access.

If the Coastal Resources Commission and N.C. Office of Coastal Management are successful in one of their latest efforts, that aid will expand in the future to include protection of the public's access to inlets as well.

Sunset Beach would do well to remember its place as a good Brunswick County citizen—and not bar the doors to its inland neighbors who have contributed to its excellent reputation as a beautiful beach to visit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It's Time To Scrutinize School Bus Safety Policies

To the editor:
 The four-year capital outlay budget approved by the Brunswick County Board of Education is a

positive step toward improving educational standards.

From these long-range plans, we see the board recognizes that

students are traveling too far, that buses need to be replaced, and that present conditions need improvements.

On May 6, two Brunswick County school buses wrecked. What will be done about present conditions which affect the safety of our children?

If we assume the attitude of one board member (well, no one was really hurt), will a child have to be killed before problems are recognized and corrected?

Changes must be made on the county level as well as on the state level. Already there is talk of state legislation to raise the minimum age of school bus drivers.

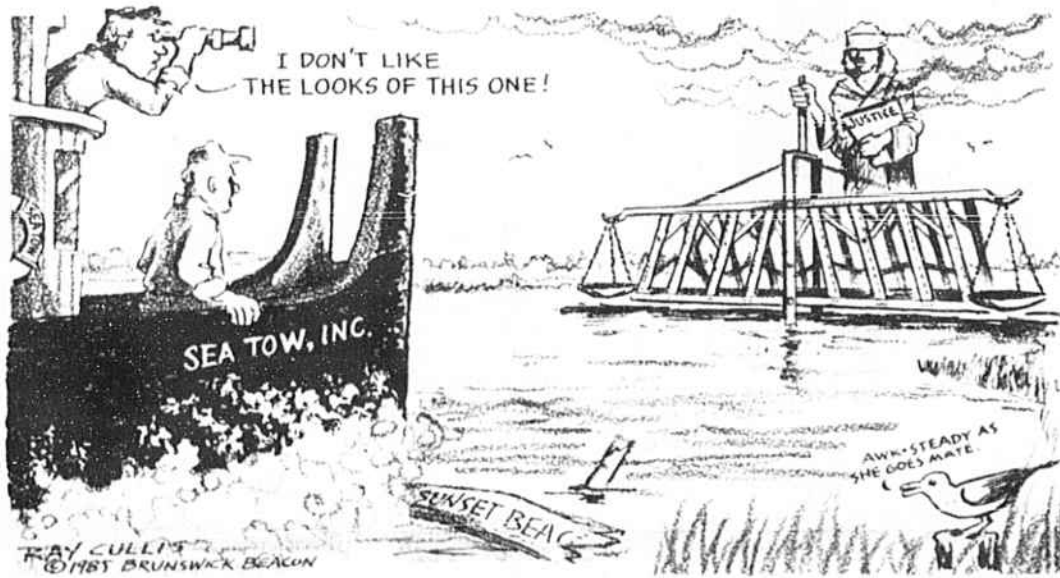
Wise county officials don't have to wait for state legislation. They can set county standards to include better safety policies and procedures.

What are the problems: 1) lengthy travel time 2) overcrowding 3) immature, unqualified drivers 4) unsafe buses 5) inefficient routes 6) unauthorized passengers 7) discipline. These basic problems lead to unsafe conditions. There are solutions!

Since the accidents, the school driveways have been filled with parents who are concerned about school bus safety.

Long-range planning is necessary, but now it is time to scrutinize school bus safety policies and procedures.

Judy Holden
 Holden Beach



They Still Get Lost At The County Complex

Question: How often does the deputy standing behind the counter at the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department get asked where another county department is located?

Answer: Very often. It seems some things never change. Getting lost at the Brunswick County Government Center in Bolivia is still a popular pastime for many residents or visitors. It would be interesting to calculate the number of people who enter the complex totally lost each day.

They're the ones that really stop at the stop signs instead of just slowing down and cruising on through the maze. They stop because they're trying to read the little white lettering on those tall brown signs with arrows pointing in every direction.

They're the ones that stop at every driveway and may even, by mistake,



Terry Pope

turn down that dirt road that leads to the rear of the county cafeteria where deliveries are made. They stop at every brown informational sign they come to, almost causing rear-end collisions with those who know exactly where they are going and can't waste a second in getting there.

Even though they have followed every arrow, have read every brown sign and have comfortably parked, they still end up at the sheriff's department asking a question that makes them feel silly, questions the deputies must be tired of answering by now.

"Is this the register of deeds office?" If you want to make yourself look really dumb, just enter the sheriff's department and ask a uniformed deputy if he can register your deed.

From behind the counter, a finger points toward the door. "Go out this door," the deputy answers.

The finger makes a crooked turn to the left. "Go down the sidewalk."

The finger makes more of a turn to the left. "Go down the side of this building."

Finally, the finger straightens. "Then go through the door and it's the second door on your right down the hallway."

The finger movements and patterned speech are well memorized by every deputy, detective and secretary in the department by now. If someone asks where the board of elections office is located, the finger points straight ahead, toward the tax department building across the parking lot.

"See where that blue car is parked at the side of that building? There's a door there that should have the board

of elections inside."

Lost drivers follow those brown signs and arrows around the complex, in a circle, until they finally find a place to park in front of the sheriff's department. After parking, they forget their direction of travel, they forget north from south, and immediately seek help from a deputy.

If you're going to get lost in Brunswick County, then getting lost in front of the sheriff's department seems like a convenient place.

Although the complex was constructed eight years ago, it is probably still the most modern building in Brunswick County. Hidden behind large berms planted with green vegetation and surrounded by pine thickets, the modern designed building set in such a rural environment as Bolivia really is surprising.

"Man, this place is scary," one young, lost man said in the parking lot after asking me for directions to the clerk of court's office last week. He had a pink traffic citation in his hand.

"It don't look real. This place does not look like it belongs in Brunswick County," he added, and laughed.

For those who now take the place for granted, they would probably be lost without their county complex.

Patient Praises Hospital Care

To the editor:
 As a recently-discharged patient at The Brunswick Hospital, I would like to publicly express my thanks to the entire nursing staff. They are constantly on the go and treatment is prompt and cheerful. I have been in the same hospital previously and have noticed the quality of care is constantly improving.

We are fortunate to have this hospital and its ever-improving staff in southeast Brunswick County.

My family doctor, James V. Mulholland, referred me to Dr. Charles E. Dinapoli for surgery and I was very impressed by his smooth, obvious expertise in planning, operating and post-operative care. I have to say many thanks to all and that we are lucky to have attracted such high quality skill in our area.

We would do well to support improvements to the conditions under which the nursing staff is struggling and the acquisition of equipment which will aid the doctors and technicians in diagnostic procedures and treatment.

Harry P. Rober
 Sunset Beach

Brief Comments

To the editor:
 This is certainly money well spent (subscription price). I appreciate very much your honest and fair reporting of the events of Holden Beach.

Marion Skinner Erath
 Jamestown

Great paper. Really enjoy your hard work.

D. Armfield
 Whitmire, S.C.

Thank you very much! Sold my house with one ad in the Beacon.

Helen S. White
 Holden Beach

Yes, please renew our paper. It's like having a part of home in Key West. We also get a laugh from reading it now and then.

Lorraine Phelps
 Key West, Fla.

Walking On The Beach

A late night stroll on the moonlit beach last week reminded me of the many kinds of walks you can take on the beach. The emphasis on this one had been to enjoy the cool night air and to get some always-needed exercise. Watching for "ghost-shapes" in the moonlight had made it into an awareness walk with surprises for the careful observer. Pieces of driftwood and odds and ends of shells looked quite different in the revealing beam of the flashlight!

I was reminded of how we must sensitize ourselves to be aware of what is happening around us. I've experienced this many times while driving along a highway and watching for birds or flowers. Focus in on hawks, for example, and see how many can be counted poised in treetops watching for field mice or rabbits. Probably you would miss the hawks completely if you had not first decided to become aware of their presence.



Bill Faver



PHOTO BY BILL FAVER
 AWARENESS OF BIRDS feeding along the beach may interest you in what they're eating and why they feed at the water's edge.

for a baby's ear or a scallop. Focus in on one kind of shell and see how you can almost overlook other kinds. Or oedie your beach walk will involve looking for different shapes or textures. Look for patterns made in the sand by wind and waves. And see the kinds of things that appear to you which otherwise would probably have been ignored.

Walking on the beach can be good exercise and lots of fun. Walking on the beach can also make you more aware and appreciative of the natural surroundings on our Brunswick County coast.

Try with shells on the beach. Look

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