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Beach Officer Prepares For Shallotte Chief's Position

BY TERRY POPE

After 23 years in law enforcement, Don Stovall is ready to teach, to share his knowledge with other officers in Shallotte. The assistant chief for Holden Beach since 1982 was hired by the Shallotte Board of Aldermen last Wednesday as the town's new police chief.

For Stovall, 47, moving to Shallotte will involve more than just packing up the family's belongings and finding a home within the town limits. The transition includes a change in duties, from road patrol sergeant to one of management and leadership. He's looking forward to the challenge.

"It won't be like I'm moving to a strange area surrounded by unfamiliar people," Stovall said. "I know most of the officers very well and I'm looking forward to getting out and meeting the people of Shallotte, the residents."

It was almost midnight last Wednesday when Stovall received a telephone call from Shallotte Mayor Beamon Hewett, who on the other end of the line offered a few congratulatory words on his appointment. Stovall readily accepted the position, but with sadness in having to leave the Holden Beach police force.

"They're a good group of people," Stovall said in his usual passive, pleasing voice. "I've really and thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it."

The 15-mile move to Shallotte will be shorter than his first move from High Point to Holden Beach three years ago. The new job also poses a different pace from the Holden Beach patrol. Stovall hopes to join the Shallotte department no later than July 8 to start working with the officers and getting used to the different environment, the traffic and year-round pace.

"I plan to spend time with each officer on their

respective shifts," Stovall said, "to have the opportunity to ride with them, get to know them and in turn let them teach me something."

While off duty, Stovall can usually be found out back at the family's Heritage Harbour home with a rod and reel in his hands. He enjoys fishing, the "serenity of the beach area," and his walks along the beach with Charley, a three-year-old mixed-breed, part-beagle, "when we can get her to go," he added.

His wife, Pam, is a legal secretary with an attorney's office in Shallotte. He has two children, Scott, 21 and Kevin, 15, who occasionally drive down from Stovall's hometown of Lexington to enjoy the beach.

"I just fish for whatever will bite, wherever I happen to be," Stovall said. "I just like going behind the house and fishing in the canal. A person can fish and ponder at the same time."

Stovall also enjoys target shooting and participating in firing range exercises at the Brunswick County Law Enforcement Association's range. Shooting and hunting happen to be two of his favorite hobbies, but since leaving Davidson County, Stovall doesn't get to hunt very often.

Stovall's father was a sheriff's deputy with Davidson County for 12 years. In 1962, Stovall entered law enforcement when he fulfilled a childhood dream and joined the High Point Police Department. He worked for three years on High Point's crime lab, conducting crime scene investigations and collecting evidence.

"A lot of young children or kids growing up say, 'I've always wanted to be an officer,'" Stovall said. "But the first year on the job will tell them if they're in the right profession. They'll encounter enough things in that first year that it will either encourage or discourage them from being an officer."

From 1967 to 1982, Stovall worked with the Davidson County Sheriff's Department, except for one period where he accepted a supervisor's position for the Pittsburg Plate Glass Co. in Lexington because it offered "a considerable difference in salary," he added.

"That's where I learned to work with people," Stovall said. He supervised a crew of 52 employees at the company that manufactured fiberglass raw materials.

"Sadly enough, law enforcement benefits are not that outstanding," he said. "In my opinion, that's why it takes a special breed of person to become a law officer. It has to be within a person to like that type of work. But once it's in your blood, it's there forever."

Although Stovall said his first year in law enforcement, while training at High Point, was a little rough he knew right away that he was in the right profession.

"I knew when I put the badge on that I'd love it," he said. "I never doubted it, that first year, that I was going to stay in that profession."

Law enforcement was quite a change from his first job as a 16-year-old in Lexington, where he would spend his weekends and after school washing tractor-trailer trucks for a local transport company. He was later promoted to the company's service line.

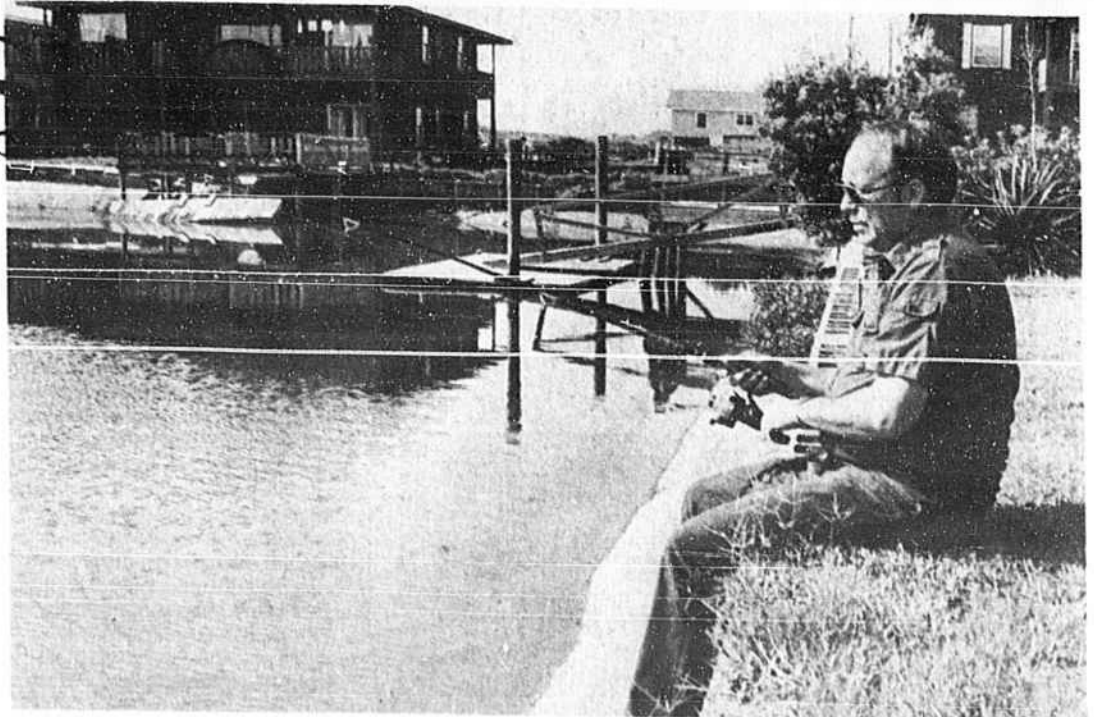
"Boy, I'd thought I'd really gotten a promotion when I got moved on the service line," he now recalls.

It is while thinking of the past that Stovall remembers the ambitions of his 21-year-old son, Scott, who wants to become a State Highway Patrol officer. He knows what Scott must be thinking, what must be going through his mind now, as he considers entering law enforcement.

"The biggest asset an officer can have is good common sense," Stovall said. "Common sense, personality and good judgment are three things you've got to have."

Those requirements are constantly tested in dealing with lost vacationers who can't find their cottage, speeding, fires on the beach, dog complaints, boisterous crowds or "anything nobody else knows how to handle, so they call the police department," he said.

"It can be anything from unlocking a car door to investigating a possible drowning," he said. "Or anything in between."



WHEN OFF DUTY, Don Stovall enjoys fishing behind his Heritage Harbour home on Holden Beach. The

23-year law enforcement veteran will become Shallotte's chief of police by July 8.

As Shallotte's police chief, Stovall said he hopes to bring stability to a department that has undergone three chief changes within a two-year period.

"My immediate plan is to do all I can to give the town a good chief and a good police department," he said. "We're going to give it the best we've got."



STOVALL and Charley, the family's mixed-breed pet, play around on the porch that overlooks the canal at their Holden Beach home.

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