

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Judge Made Right Move In Keeping Drug Fines

Four Winston-Salem men who pleaded guilty in 1983 to drug trafficking charges in Brunswick County got exactly what they deserved in Superior Court Monday morning—an authoritative "no" on a motion to have their \$3,000 to \$5,000 fines reduced.

Special Superior Court Judge Preston Cornelius weighed through the pleas from attorney Larry F. Habegger and found the true reason why the defendants felt their fines were "overly burdensome."

"Why shouldn't they pay? Because one got out of it?" Cornelius asked Habegger in as straightforward manner as possible.

Habegger was representing four men arrested in the 1980 DC-4 drug smuggling attempt at the Brunswick County Airport in which 9,500 pounds of marijuana was confiscated from an aircraft along with a supply of other dangerous drugs.

One of the original 18 defendants charged in the case had his fine reduced by another Superior Court judge last year after it was determined the fine was "overly burdensome" on the defendant.

For Kevin and Reginald Witherspoon, Jerry Wallace and Bernard Buey, the \$3,000 to \$5,000 fines imposed along with their six months active sentence also seemed a little "overly burdensome" since they are now maintaining minimum wage jobs, Habegger said. The defendants were not even in the courtroom Monday morning when their attorney made the pleas.

Consider how lenient the state has already been with each of the defendants.

Each was charged with six counts of conspiracy and trafficking for their role in the operation. If they had been convicted on all charges facing them, they could have been sentenced up to 90 years in prison and been fined up to \$150,000 each.

In a plea bargain agreement with District Attorney Michael Easley's office, the men pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy and was recommended for a lighter sentence after cooperating with authorities. Of their five-year sentences, only six months were actively served in prison.

Five years after their arrest and two years after sentencing, not one penny has been paid on the fines, Easley said. A youth selling lemonade on the street corner could do better.

When the \$14,000 in fines are paid, the money will go to the Brunswick County schools.

Judge Cornelius made a fair decision for all parties involved.

Taking Another Look At Jordan Lake

It was amazing a few years ago to see how man could take a natural valley in an area just outside of Chapel Hill and turn it into a lake.

As a student at UNC-Chapel Hill, Jordan Lake, or what was rapidly becoming the lake, was just in the process of being formed. What used to be a small stream, fields, trees and stumps for acres and acres was turned into a lake before man's very eyes.

It took a couple of years for the area just south of Chapel Hill along N.C. 64 to turn into a beautiful lake, stocked with bass, brim and filled with windsurfers, water skiers and weekend afternoon boaters. When the water source feeding into the lake area was first dammed, the water didn't look enticing enough for skiers or swimmers. In fact, it looked rather trashy.

On a recent return to Chapel Hill during my summer vacation, I pass-



Terry Pope

ed by Jordan Lake again where at two points the raised highway actually crosses two corners of the now beautiful lake. From the car windows, one can view all the action taking place below.

It has changed since those first days on Jordan Lake. For those who have passed by or visited the lake recently, it is evident that Jordan Lake has become a very popular recreational spot as well. When I stayed in Conner dorm as a student at Chapel Hill, the yard in front of the dormitory was called "Conner

Beach" by those who used the area for sunbathing, as a volleyball field or frisbee field.

Now, Chapel Hill has a real beach with real water. Last week, it was interesting to hear friends who live in Chapel Hill rant and rave about being able to take a ten minute drive to go water skiing.

There was also talk about "getting my own boat," such phrases I have also heard and used myself while staying at Holden Beach. The availability of a water source in the area of Chapel Hill has changed weekend plans for many residents.

But with the addition of water also comes the growth and other expectations we can also associate with the coast. While crossing the lake last week, I looked below and had to look twice at what I was actually seeing.

Rising up out of the water was what looked like a small mobile home. At first, I thought it was a camper on

back of a pick-up truck that may have gotten caught by the tide, but then there are no tides on a lake.

I looked again, and indeed it looked like a camper with windows, ceiling vents, aluminum siding and the works, only it was resting on floating devices instead of a pick-up truck.

Jordan Lake has floating homes, something the Holden Beach Planning and Zoning Board also addressed while preparing its land use plan last month.

With the addition of water also comes the stepped-up real estate market in the area, where homes and property that were once very, very rural are now very valuable lake-front resort areas that are specifically advertised on the market. No doubt there will be increased taxes and the like.

Water, whether salty-ocean or fresh lake water, has the power to change many things.

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Out Of Luck And Stuck By The 15th Tee

He was eight feet, nine inches, with big yellow eyes, a stubborn jawline and natural leather skin that was dark and mottled on top and a creamy pale yellow underneath.

But most of all he was afraid; you could see it in his eyes and in the way he huffed and tried to throw off the rope snare.

The reptile's luck had run out sometime Wednesday night. He was trapped, surrounded by curious bystanders eager to see a good-sized American alligator up close.

Making jokes about lizard handbags and lost golfballs, they stood by on the 15th tee with cameras ready as the wildlife officers approached with a noose attached to a stick. The snare that held the alligator was secured to a stake in the grass; the 'gator was



Susan Usher

dragged from the lake.

As the threesome worked to secure the 'gator's head, his jaws opened wide, but not wide enough. He was theirs, bound for a new home in the Lockwood Folly River—and all because someone had broken the No. 1 rule in coexistence with alligators: they fed him.

After this mistake, the saga ran its

inevitable course. He began losing his natural fear of people and instead began viewing them as a regular supply of tasty handouts.

After the Wildlife Resources Commission in Raleigh received a call early in the week, area Wildlife Officer Fred Taylor and Biologist Tommy Hughes trotted over to Brierwood Golf Course Tuesday evening to check the situation out. (Coincidentally, Hughes was scheduled to give a talk on alligators at the Shallotte Library that night.)

While none of the bystanders that evening look credit for feeding the fellow, one did call out. "He likes marshmallows!" The remark could have been fact or merely a reference to news articles about a South Carolina 'gator that confused his favorite marshmallows with a golf ball.

But one thing was certain, this 'gator had lost his outright fear of man. That was reason enough to move him from the golf course lake. When officers slapped the water to get the 'gator's interest, "he was so tame, he came right on over to us and gobbled up the light bread," Taylor said.

He was also smart. When he heard the sound of the trap, the 'gator backed off.

But, as Taylor noted, "'gators love chicken," and on Wednesday night, it finally took the bait, twisting the angle iron supports on the wooden trap and snapping the cane pole that linked it with the snare.

He was the third 'gator wildlife officers have moved in the county this year. As development encroaches more and more into the areas where alligators dwell, sightings increase along with requests to have them moved.

However, the Wildlife Resources Commission isn't in the 'gator moving business, Taylor says. Like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, its policy is to leave the creatures be unless they pose a threat to human safety or property. After all, they were here first.

Generally peaceful animals that eat turtles, frogs and snakes, alligators generally leave people alone unless provoked. But once in a fighting mood, they're awesome antagonists.

Luckily, Hughes says not a single alligator attack has ever been reported in North Carolina. Where problems exist, they've usually come about because of human intervention, as with the feeding of the Brierwood 'gator.

As it does humans, relocation causes a lot of stress for alligators. "He knows this lake and knows where the good places are to feed," explained Taylor. "Dropping him in Lockwood Folly River is like dropping me in New York City and saying 'survive'—with no place to stay, no job..."

The wildlife officers weren't the only folks who regretted the move.

"We would have liked to have kept him around," said Ed Shreve, a partner in the residential development adjoining the course.

The Oystercatcher

"Big, noisy, and conspicuous" is the description given the Oystercatcher by the Audubon Water Bird Guide. The chicken-sized birds are from 17 to 21 inches in size and have bold patterns of black, brown and white. Their feet are flesh to pink-colored, and their bills are red. A white wing patch is visible when they fly. A close-up view reveals orange-yellow eyes circled with red lines.

Oystercatchers are found from Massachusetts southward to Argentina and winter along the North Carolina coast and south. Large concentrations are found at the Cape Roman Wildlife Refuge in South Carolina. They live along sandy beaches, mud flats and edges of salt marshes. They are seldom found far from these areas where they feed on "coon" oysters, mussels, clams, cockles, crabs and other crustacea. They feed by inserting their large "oyster-knife" bill into the bivalve and cutting the muscles that hold the shells tight.

Feeding becomes an art in that the Oystercatchers must wade out at just the right time to catch the oysters open as the tide recedes or comes in. Even a slight touch or bump will cause the oysters to clamp together so the bird cannot insert its bill. These birds also feed on barnacles and snails and some marine worms.



Bill Faver

Nests are usually placed in shallow depressions and are sometimes lined with small bits of shells. Two to four spotted black-buff eggs are placed in this nest, and both male and female birds share in the incubation. Oystercatchers do not nest in colonies as do some other birds but do group together in large flocks for migration and during the winter. Unlike Willets, who will give their nest locations away by swoops and cries at an intruder, the Oystercatcher will fly away and wait for the intruder to leave. They do have a loud, distinctive "wheep, wheep, wheep" which helps in their identification.

Oystercatchers are good swimmers and divers and fly more like ducks than shorebirds. Their presence in our area adds to the variety of bird life we find along our coast. We are pleased that these "big, noisy and conspicuous" birds share the edge of the sea with us.



PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

OYSTERCATCHERS are large dark and white birds with red bills.

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