

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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This Christmas Tree Will Be 'Ours'



Susan Usher

Christmas trees are one of the things I like most about this holiday. Their fragrance and cheery lights bring a warmth and glow of hospitality to any home, to a family of any size.

Unlike most singles in my circle, I've always gone to what some people call "the trouble" of having a live Christmas tree. A small tree, usually, but one that sheds needles and pricks your fingers and sometimes falls over in the pot of dirt. Occasionally the best on the lot, but just as often a homely one that looked like it needed a warm spot for the holidays.

During the years when I owned my own home, I was lucky enough to have a balled tree with roots that

From a night of shopping to the scent of pine, cedar or fir, stories, people and places recalled by specific ornaments on the tree. Good times, happy times spent with people well-loved.

While dear friends and family members have shared in the glow of Christmas trees past, for many years now choosing the tree and often decorating it has been a task, however joyous, that was performed alone.

This year, for the first time, I won't be choosing a Christmas tree by myself.

I've recently agreed to share my life with a very special man, Don Eg-

bert of Long Beach, a planner with the county. We plan to be married in June and we're as excited about it as two late-bloomers can be.

On Saturday morning, we're going over to John Mintz's house to choose a tree. We'll be looking for a special one, because we hope this will be the first of many, many Christmases we share as a couple.

We're off to a late start, so our choices may be quite limited. Somehow, though, I suspect the trees will look better than they ever have before—even the scrawniest, most crooked or lopsided little tree of them all.

After all, it will be our tree.

County Should Learn From State Criticism

There are, or should be, a lot of red faces in county government over the negative reaction of the state Coastal Resources Commission to Brunswick County's land use plan update draft.

The rough draft was due in March, and several extensions were thereafter allowed the county planning department, so it is particularly embarrassing that the end product was cited by the Division of Coastal Management staff as one of the worst of the 17 plans submitted to them for review this fall. Especially since the planning department claims to have been working on it for a year and a half.

The chief problem with the plan is that the contents are updated very little from the 1981 version, despite dramatic changes and growth in the county. New issues the state says need to be addressed by such a plan, such as package treatment plants, were omitted.

The 36 pages of comments from 11 different state officials also revealed a wealth of detail is missing. Documentation of public involvement was not there (in fact, efforts to secure public input were called minimal), nor were explanations of maps, locations of urban areas, and locations of major traffic accident areas, to name only a few.

There is more: the omission of Bald Head Island's new status as a municipality, an inaccurate statement about the incompatibility of wildlife management and agriculture, and skimpy mention of the county feeling toward zoning.

Completely absent, said the CRC, are policy statements on tourism and beach access, energy facility development, coastal and estuarine water access, and redevelopment of developed areas. In fact, staff members said policy statements in general, which are used by the state in funding and permit decisions, "need much additional work." Most appear to have been lifted directly from the 1981 plan.

While some critical comments may be nit-picking or contradictory to each other, the overall picture drawn from these assessments is of a sloppy plan, hastily thrown together.

How did this happen over a period of 18 months? That isn't easy to determine, as Planning Director John Harvey won't discuss it with the press. Only speculation is possible.

It would be easy, but not entirely accurate to blame Harvey. The land use plan is a team effort of the planning board, to whom Harvey and his staff merely provide the research, expertise and language to translate into print the policies mandated by the board and approved by commissioners.

Harvey, then, takes his marching orders from the board and the commissioners, and they have kept him immersed in water system and utility board matters to the exclusion of most everything else.

Water decisions are highly visible, controversial and crucial, but not to the detriment of a land use plan. Its importance to future development in the county should prompt everyone concerned to make it a priority. Perhaps Harvey should have been more aggressive in insisting on this.

Such insistence should not have been necessary, however. Elected and appointed officials should have taken their ears off the public pulse and put time and energy into this document that would win few votes but would be of immeasurable future benefit to the county.

A rather astonishing lapse was the failure of the county to apply for grant funds to help write the update. We are the only county that did not take advantage of this opportunity, and CRC strongly suggests we do so at this point. It's hard to imagine why one would pass up the help.

Perhaps this chastisement by CRC will result in more attention to important issues by county officials. The wrong reaction to the criticisms is defensiveness and denial on the part of the planning board and commissioners. Let's admit we did a shoddy job and vow that hereafter we'll put a lot more planning into "planning."

Law Officers Deserve New Retirement Benefits

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the editor:
 Recently, some local government officials in North Carolina have expressed concern regarding new retirement benefits that were provided for local law enforcement officers by the 1986 session of the General Assembly.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you and the taxpayers of our state with accurate information about these benefits' cost-effectiveness to local government

and the important role they play in strengthening professional law enforcement.

The legislature approved two new benefits for local law officers:

- (1) a local government contribution to the Special Retirement Income Program for these officers;
- (2) a special separation allowance to officers who retire at age 55 with at least five years of service as a law enforcement officer or who retire at any age with 30 years service in local government, at least half of that in

law enforcement.

Some lobbyists have criticized the cost of these benefits to local government and called for their repeal in the 1987 legislative session. But that attitude is short-sighted.

One of the most serious problems facing sheriff's departments is high turnover. And high turnover is expensive for local governments.

We lose money when we hire a new officer, spend thousands of dollars training him and then watch him leave for a job with the State

Highway Patrol, State Bureau of Investigation, Alcohol Enforcement or private business.

The new benefit brings the retirement benefits of local law enforcement officers in line with those of state officers. This definitely will help reduce turnover—and the cost of law enforcement to local government.

In addition, a good retirement program—along with good pay—is one of the best tools we have to attract good people into law enforcement.

The separation allowance for retirement helps local government save money. An officer who retires is generally replaced by a new officer at a lower pay scale. The State Highway Patrol found that the special separation allowance saved it \$3 million.

So, instead of adding costs to local government, the new retirement benefits will prove to be cost-effective for them.

Some local government officials have also expressed concern that the Law Enforcement Officers' Retirement plan offers greater benefits than the plan for other local government employees. The N.C. Sheriff's Association and presidents of all of the state's law enforcement associations believe it is important to keep in mind that no other local employees put their lives on the line every day they go to work.

We believe the 1986 General Assembly acted wisely and responsibly in providing the additional retirement benefits. The benefits will enable North Carolina's 100 sheriff's departments and all local law enforcement agencies to do an even better job of providing professional law enforcement services at the lowest possible cost.

Howard Kramer
 Executive Director
 N.C. Sheriff's Assn.
 Raleigh

Birds Of The Past



Bill Faver

In 1861 a slate-splitter in Bavaria uncovered a slab or an incomplete skeleton of a feathered animal. Dr. Karl Haberlein acquired it and sold it to the British Museum. The fossil was named "Archaeopteryx lithographica" which means "the ancient winged creature of the stone for drawing." It is the oldest known bird and resembled reptiles of the same period with a long tail with 20 vertebrae but it had feathers.

Some 30 species of birds have been identified as belonging to the Cretaceous Period, some 135 to 70 million years ago. These belonged to a primitive family and were probably ancestral to the loons and grebes. Some may have resembled our terns, ibises, flamingos and cormorants.

The sea bottoms of the Cretaceous Period were raised up to form land some 70 million years ago to begin the Paleocene and Eocene Periods which lasted to 40 million years ago. Fifteen birds species have been identified and include some belonging to modern families—the cormorants, rails and sandpipers. During the Eocene Period birds began to be found in all parts of the world. Hawks, herons, vultures, anings,

geese and gulls have been found in fossilized material toward the end of this Period.

The Oligocene Period lasted from 40 to 25 million years ago and was a warm and dry time of mountain building. About 100 fossil birds have been identified from this Period and represent storks, kites, partridges, plovers, grouse, cuckoos, owls, swifts, gannets, falcons, limpkins and some near to larks and swallows.

The next period was from 25 to 11 million years ago and was named the Miocene. It was a warm period during which the Alps and Himalayas were formed. About 37 percent of the 250 Miocene birds belong to modern families, like the pelicans, ducks, oystercatchers, pigeons, parrots, wrens, crows and petrels.

The Pliocene Period extended from

11 million to 2 million years ago and accounted for 120 fossil species, 71 percent of which are the same as modern birds. The sandhill cranes, auks, cormorants, boobies, goldeneyes, godwits and ring-billed gulls are representatives.

The Pleistocene Period began about 2 million years ago at the beginning of the Ice Age. Plant and animal species were severely reduced during the Ice Age. Most of the large birds and animals became extinct during this Period. Fossil birds found in California at Rancho La Brea, thought to be 14 or 15,000 years old, were condors, turkeys, caracaras, storks and blackbirds. Some 120 species have been identified at the site and 22 of them are now extinct.

Since that first reptile species developed wings and later changed scales for feathers, birds have been developing and changing. Today an estimated 6,000 species of birds in the world claim that first bird as ancestor. The variety, the sizes, the colors, the songs, and the distribution all add excitement to birds in the environment. We should be pleased that many of these species share Brunswick County with us.

See The World, Have A Bagel!



Marjorie Megivern

If you catch a whiff of onion as you read this, it's just that a little of Manhattan still clings to my fingertips.

Thanksgiving week was the occasion of one of my favorite treats, a trip to the Big Apple, home of the perfect bagel, another of my favorite treats.

I brought home a double-wrapped bag of a dozen onion bagels, offending noses for miles around, and my suitcase and clothes still reek of them.

Bagels are only one of many highlights of my brief visit. There was a Broadway play, a Metropolitan Museum exhibit, dinner with friends, and Sunday worship at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the largest cathedral in the world.

But all those pale in significance to me beside the thrill of just walking the streets of this animated city. Every time I'm in New York City, I see the whole world pass by on any given street, at any time of day. Every imaginable skin color, shape

of face and eyes, national costume and language, come together under the eyes of Lady Liberty out in the harbor.

There is no behavior so bizarre as to get the attention of passersby. A glorious soprano voice suddenly soared above the street one night, which, it turned out, belonged to a pale brown youth striding through the crowds in military garb. On another corner a young man in an emerald and gold body suit was posing theatrically for a picture with his emerald and gold bicycle. Still further along, a girl and her boyfriend were engaged in a shouting match on the sidewalk.

To all this New Yorkers are oblivious. It is their daily fare, as is the juxtaposition of poverty and opulence. Gowns dripping with sequins hang from mannequins in a Fifth Avenue window, as ragged men approach window-shoppers, begging for coins.

It's an incredibly dirty city, from refuse-littered sidewalks to grimy, graffiti-baden subways. Even in a high-class restaurant, we shared a tabletop with a cockroach.

Yes, there's filth and noise and too many people—even though interesting ones, and the cost of rent, food and transportation is prohibitive by small-town standards.

But there is something else that transcends all that is wrong with this monstrous metropolis. It can't be summed up neatly, but it has to do with the Metropolitan Opera and Museum, the lights of Broadway that flicker on creative playwrights, the pastoral expanse of Central Park (in spite of muggers!), the steady stream of talented artists who are

pulled to Manhattan as to a magnet.

To be completely corny, this "something" has to do, most of all, with the melting-pot metaphor that is New York. The crowded sidewalks convey Liberty's words, "bring me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free..." There they are, in all colors and conditions, being stirred together. The resulting brew is strong stuff, a catalyst for rich thinking, artistic creation and achievement.

It's a close-up look at humanity that I get on New York streets, and somehow that invigorates and reassures me. I am deeply pleased with the diversity of this humanity, believing that as it is stirred together, each ingredient is flavored with the others.

Which brings me back to the potent reminder that came home in my suitcase. If even the bagels cling, surely that brush with other cultures will stay with me, too.

Thanks, New York. I love you!

Christmas Is Time For Sharing



Etta Smith

One of the best lessons I've ever learned about sharing happened one Christmas.

I was about 12 years old and my sister and brothers and I, like most middle class kids, had plenty of presents under our Christmas tree.

There was one family in the town where we lived that wasn't so fortunate, though. There were about eight children in the family and their father was unemployed.

Since they lived in the same direction as us, we used to walk home from school together. One day short-

kids' eyes immediately spotted our Christmas tree, with an abundance of gifts beneath it.

My mother, who was always trying to teach us about sharing, saw the kids looking at those presents hungrily and joined them beside the tree.

"Do you have lots of presents under your Christmas tree?" she asked them.

"No Ma'am," one of them replied, "My daddy says we don't have any money this year and Santa Claus might have to come late."

When we went into our house, these

kids' eyes immediately spotted our Christmas tree, with an abundance of gifts beneath it.

My mother, who was always trying to teach us about sharing, saw the kids looking at those presents hungrily and joined them beside the tree.

"Do you have lots of presents under your Christmas tree?" she asked them.

"No Ma'am," one of them replied, "My daddy says we don't have any money this year and Santa Claus might have to come late."

"Well," Mom said, "We have a lit-

tle surprise for you."

She told them that Santa had left some of their presents at our house and gave them each one of our gifts.

Well, our first instinct was to say no—but we definitely knew better.

And after seeing the joy on those kids' faces, it became clear to us that giving is what Christmas is all about.

I often think back on that Christmas, and that one small gesture my mother made. And the memory of that gesture always reminds me of the true meaning of Christmas.

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