

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Carter Brought Professional Touch To County Government

William Carter, who quickly became "Billy" to nearly everyone in Brunswick County, sat at his desk in the government complex exactly eight years ago and was interviewed by the Beacon.

Exuding confidence and strength, he talked about his philosophy of government, especially the role of county manager, which he had just been hired to fill.

He noted the importance of communication with department heads and the need for the manager to keep tight reins on their problems. In fact, early on he had forthrightly told commissioners the task they'd just assigned a new personnel study committee was properly his.

Carter asserted in that interview that most of his time should be spent on personnel and public relations.

He also spoke of the accelerated growth just getting underway in Brunswick County, and said its direction would depend as much on taxpayers as on government.

His most encouraging admission was that he was ignorant of county factionalism and politics. Having come directly from Bladen County, he was a refreshing new talent, without political ties or debts. His tenure was the first untinged with rumors or innuendos that one faction or another "owned" the county manager.

In the eight years that followed that interview, Carter took the county through hard growth decisions and some traumatic times. There were three hurricanes, a refinery dispute, agonizing attempts to create a regional water system, and redistricting of the county by the General Assembly, to name a few.

Some of the most severe difficulties have been in the arena of personnel. Carter has seen a sheriff indicted on drug-related charges and two social services directors leave under clouds of controversy. One of these directors dismissed an employee, setting off a personnel crisis that is only now being resolved after years of litigation. There was also the turbulent leave-taking of a health department director who took with him into private enterprise part of the departmental services.

These are only a few of the personnel problems that have plagued Brunswick County under a manager who insisted most of his attention would go in this direction.

But Billy Carter has loosened the reins of authority since that early pronouncement, giving department heads considerable autonomy. Heaven knows, he's had his hands full with getting water to the county and devising a budget that could keep up with runaway growth.

And in the handling of these two critical matters, he's done remarkably well. Continuing to distance himself from politics, his management of the water problem has been one of hands-on, persistent work, first to finalize a regional water system, then to guide the creation of one for the county.

And in the sensitive area of budget, Carter has educated commissioners and the public as to the nature of this beast and firmly kept revenues in line with the expenditures of a burgeoning economy.

So, if he has not succeeded in keeping departmental personnel problems under his scrutiny, he has run a tight ship in regard to department budgets.

And, true to his word that April day in 1979, he has maintained good public relations. Always accessible, he has been patient, thorough, and responsive to the media, giving at least the impression of openness and honesty. While not universally popular with commissioners, he has made no overt enemies, and created no unfavorable publicity for himself or the county.

Billy Carter has given Brunswick County so much of his time and energy, beyond the call of duty, that he is now faced with semi-retirement for reasons of health. Medical problems have plagued him through much of his tenure, but haven't kept him from putting in a good many 14-hour days. His personnel director says he has never, in any year, used all his available vacation days.

We need to recognize the burden of this office and the professional way in which our retiring manager has carried that burden. He'll be a hard act to follow.

Thanks, Billy! We wish you well.

Teen Suicide: There Is Help Out There

Several years ago a competitor in a local student speech contest spoke about teenage suicide. More specifically, she wondered why there seemed to be no where locally for a kid in trouble to turn.

During a bout of depression she had contemplated taking her own life. A few months earlier, a friend of hers had committed suicide. Suddenly, it seemed like a real option. But she didn't really want to die; a part of her was reaching out for help, dropping hints here and there.

When we think of someone suicidal, we tend to think of loners, underachievers, people on the fringe, unconnected.

But this was a bright, talented beautiful young girl admired by elders and peers alike. She seemed to have everything in the world going for her. But, inside, she felt like a failure, unable to live up to others' expectations or her own. When she mentioned how she felt, people didn't take her seriously. She should thank her lucky stars to be so lucky, they said, making her feel even worse.

What she needed was someone who could really listen, who would understand what she was going through. When she needed them most, this girl didn't know about the few resources that were available to her.

"Why wasn't there someone to call?" she later asked, her voice catching at the memory of how she had felt that long, lonely night.

Fortunately, she had a strong Christian background and a friend who did hear her quiet pleas for help that under other circumstances might have gone unnoticed.

Memories of her anguish and frustration came to mind about a month ago, just before this recent rash of teen suicides. My sister Jean



Susan Usher

called from her home in Greenfield, Indiana. It had been a bad week for the kids at the high school, she said. Along with some other things, a boy in my nephew Tony's class had committed suicide. A ninth grader had decided he didn't want to live any more. Tony, she said, was handling it OK.

And I hoped very much that was the case.

There are a lot more kids out there like these youngsters. In one recent two-week period, says Trish Brown, child/youth psychologist at Southeastern Mental Health's center at the county complex, she heard from five young suicidal callers, all of whom were referred for long-term treatment.

The recent rash of teen suicides may be partly the reason for the high number of calls, but recent springlike weather could also be a factor. Suicides tend to peak in spring, perhaps, suggests one Brynn Marr Hospital physician, because all the signs of renewed life can make a troubled person feel more out of touch with the world.

A study by the Centers for Disease Control show that suicide among teenagers and young adults is increasing—up 40 percent among those 15 to 24 years of age during the years 1970-1980—the equivalent of the entire population of Raleigh.

Why suicide? It's rarely any one

reason, says Brown, but a combination. Some common concerns she hears include these: not being understood by their family; not getting along with the family; problems with peers or boyfriend/girlfriend; not doing well in school; having a friend who's committed suicide or attempted suicide; low self-esteem, feeling bad about themselves, lack of confidence; feelings of desperation, of having no other choice—that to die would be easier than to face what they must face.

For parents, teachers and friends who are worried that a teenager may be having suicidal thoughts, Dr. Joseph Colligan at Brynn Marr notes major warning signs:

- statements revealing a wish to die;
- actual threats;
- sudden changes in behavior;
- depression (crying, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, hopelessness);
- final arrangements, such as giving away possessions.

And if you are having suicidal or self-destructive thoughts, the resources ARE out there. Get professional help.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, there's a toll-free hotline service in Wilmington. CRISIS LINE, as its called, offers crisis intervention and counseling to residents of Brunswick, Pender and New Hanover counties. The free number is 1-800-672-2903.

A private hospital in Jacksonville, Brynn Marr, has a similar free community service called HELPLINE, 1-800-822-9507.

There's also help closer by, notes Brown. You can talk to a school counselor, teacher or nurse.

Or call the nearest hospital, she said, where a social worker is usually on duty who can deal with the

emergency and make a good referral for more help. Or, she said, "if they feel an impulse to kill themselves they can simply show up at any emergency room and say, 'I don't feel safe with myself' and be put on a 24-hour suicide watch," followed by referrals for counseling.

The local hospital best equipped to deal with suicidal tendencies is New Hanover Memorial Hospital, which has a psychiatric floor and can provide more than short-term emergency care.

Someone considering suicide can also call Trish's office (253-4485 during weekday business hours or the CRISIS LINE number at other times). Or they check the Yellow Pages of area telephone books under headings such as counseling, services (psycho)therapists, psychologists for a private counseling service.

The family pastor is another option; many pastors are trained in counseling. If afraid your own pastor might be too judgemental or critical, then a friend's pastor might be a better choice. You don't have to be a member of the church to call, she said.

Brown also has advice for teenagers on what to do if a friend mentions the possibility of committing suicide: ALWAYS take it seriously, she said, and get help.

"They should go to a adult they can talk to—even it means breaking the confidence of that friend," she advised. "Sometimes that's the best thing they can do for a friend."

If the talk isn't taken seriously and the friend later commits suicide, she added, "the guilt they feel afterward is enough to trigger their own suicidal thoughts. It's a guilt they'll have to live with for a long, long time."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Better Way Needed To Elect Representatives

To the editor:

I want to piggy-back on your editorial, "Keep 'Em On Their Toes," about going back to two-year terms for Holden Beach commissioners.

As your reporters who attend 12 monthly meetings know, there are relatively few citizens (like three) interested enough to sit through the agenda with any regularity. Other citizens attend when their particular interests may be affected, and it's not unusual for them to leave as soon as that particular item is disposed of.

As you know, commissioners are provided with a folder of background information before each meeting. Using that file for basic orientation, commissioners may wish to check further (whether it is to talk with friends, review other sources, visit the site, whatever) to help find a reasonable answer to the problem.

Further, experience is helpful in knowing where to check, understanding what you hear, judging how

reliable a source may be, etc. And the source may have reservations about reviewing the detail again, and again, with each new commissioner.

So, "citizens who participate," (your definition) can "throw the rascals out" after two years, and we try again. New candidates (using 20/20 hindsight) get their prime support from neighbors and friends. They also deliver their message in a couple of minutes at the "Meet the Candidates" forum and in a few paragraphs in the Beacon, and they can visit registered voters, if they know who they are.

In my opinion, there must be a better way to elect our representatives. One approach would be to have public meetings where citizens could question what is being done—or not being done. With such background, candidates could develop their positions regarding particular issues and, at a town meeting, tell how they would go about resolving them.

With a better election process, I

think we'd be more likely to elect two/three "good" commissioners for four years, than five for two years. And when we do elect a "lemon," make some lemonade.

John M. Clarke
Holden Beach

Not His Fault

To the editor:

Dear Southportites, Oak Islanders and Boiling Spring Lakers:

I love your part of the county. I have good friends in your part of the county. I was born in your part of the county. Why folks, I studied county history in your part of the county. Don't believe me? Ask Miz Susie Carson.

Shucks, as a lil ole tyke I caught sand fiddlers on the Southport waterfront, and as a bigger lil ole tyke I pulled spot nets and hunted loggerheads on Oak Island. Whewee! As a big ole tyke I done some heavy

courtin' down by the Pretty Pond fore it come Boiling Spring Lakes.

Don't chew me out. Chew out ole Ed Harper. I swan he gits everthing at the Pilot that what does the other papers. Tell ya what—ones that want the Vietnam Memorial piece—call ole Eddie Sweatt at the Beacon.

Spit in my hand—cross my heart, hope da die, 'ats' the truth!

Jess Parker
Brunswick County
Veteran Service Officer

Help Preserve Endangered Species

To the editor:

Probably no one would want to be like the men who shot the last See LETTERS, Page 5-A

Address Gives A Reason To Hope



Bill Faver

sion. The sky seems more down to earth, and it is almost as though you have developed another eye—one that reveals new mysteries and delights that have always been close at hand. When someone comes fresh to a serious appreciation of birds and their environment, I suspect they also find in themselves an improved

appreciation of manner and civility in human affairs.

Al Burt calls for us to measure progress in more ways that just numbers. He feels we need to alook for positive things and remember numbers are not the last word. We need to pay more attention to the concept of sense of place and show a greater commitment of belonging and caring for that place. Our urban lives must be fashioned so we don't lose touch with the natural. Living and growing things must be a part of our experience. Without these, Burt says, "we develop problems of the spirit and hopelessness."

He continues, "Each Floridian needs a friend like we had in Biddy the heron, and each Floridian needs to hear the Sandhill Cranes

yodel . . . and each Floridian needs a little chapel of the sky . . . where the Ibises come rushing over at sunset. Not everyone can have these exact things, but in Florida everybody can find something . . . With that, maybe we could get away from the preoccupation with numbers and concentrate on values. With that, maybe there would be a better appreciation of the spirit and soul of natural Florida. And with that, maybe we would not have to work so hard to find reasons to hope."

If we will substitute Brunswick County for Florida in his speech, these good words have a lot to say to us. Perhaps we can learn from others what happens and how we can save the good things as we move along the roads of progress.

Last Week's Trial Brought Out Importance Of Media's Role

Last week I learned something about the sometimes itchy role the media plays in covering an issue.

I was subpoenaed to testify in court for a defendant whom I had written an article about while I was employed at another newspaper.

Following the trial another newspaper reporter remarked, "We did all the research for this case." She and I also wondered if maybe the local media were also on trial.

It was a relatively minor incident that brought on the defendant's arrest and subsequent trial. But there was one thing that set it apart from the many similar cases that judges



Etta Smith

hear everyday—the defendant was running for public office at the time the incident occurred.

During the trial the only evidence presented to the court was the numerous newspaper accounts of the incident. Every reporter within a 50-mile radius had been called to

testify as to who told whom what.

The defendant was eventually acquitted of the charges. But during the trial both the prosecuting attorney and the defendant's attorney relied solely on media accounts of the incident. The defendant's attorney claimed the incident was deliberately instigated for the purpose of creating a media event.

After hearing testimony from both sides of the issue, it would have been hard not to agree with that attorney.

It's not that unusual for certain groups or persons to attempt to use the media. Terrorists have been do-

ing it for years. In order to get the attention of the world through television and front-page headlines they threaten lives.

In this case the testimony from both sides indicated the same thing—that by attracting media attention persons on one side of the issue hoped to make a point about a larger issue that exists in that community, racial tensions.

I don't regret having covered the story. A public figure was involved and the public needed to know if this person's ability to be fair and honest was in question.

But from now on I'll always question the reasons why a group or individual actively seeks publicity in this type of situation.

The local media in that area did what it should have done—it kept the public informed about the facts without distorting them. The three newspapers and one television station that covered the event talked to people on both sides of the issue and presented both sides when reporting it.

The fact that we reported the incident didn't change the larger issue, but it did focus more attention to it.

After the trial the other reporters and I found ourselves thinking more about the larger issue than the actual incident that we had reported.

We wondered if by reporting the incident we fanned the flames of racial tension in that community. And we pondered what the consequences would have been had we chosen not to report it.

I feel like we did what we should have. We didn't create or change the racial attitudes in that county. We simply presented the facts and left it up to the public and the court to decide who was right or wrong.