

Two 'White Tide' Defendants Get Fines, Active Sentences

Two defendants from last year's investigative grand jury drug probe in Brunswick County were sentenced to fines and active prison terms last week.

Judge F. Gordon Battle of Hillsboro sentenced Mark A. Berry, 29, of Sugarloaf, Fla., and Darrell Craven Stephens, 25, of Hallsboro, last Thursday in Brunswick County Superior Court.

The pair were among 48 indicted on drug trafficking charges last April in

"Operation White Tide," which was the second special grand jury investigation in the county and state. Both men's sentences were continued from last June when they entered guilty pleas through plea arrangements.

Berry—a Brunswick County native—pleaded guilty to two counts of conspiracy to traffic in more than 28 grams of cocaine, four counts of trafficking in more than 28 grams of cocaine, conspiracy to traffic in more

than 400 grams of cocaine, and three counts of trafficking in more than 400 grams of cocaine.

Stephens pleaded guilty to conspiracy to traffic in more than 28 grams of cocaine, trafficking in more than 28 grams of cocaine, conspiracy to traffic in more than 200 grams of cocaine, and two counts of trafficking in more than 200 grams of cocaine.

According to the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office, Berry was sentenced last Thursday to a \$10,000

fine and 12-year prison term; Stephens, to a \$5,000 fine and six-year prison term. Both were recommended for work release.

Until Battle found that both men had supplied "substantial assistance" to drug investigators, Berry faced a mandatory minimum prison sentence of 238 years, while Stephens faced at least 56 years in prison, court records show. State drug trafficking laws allow a judge to hand down a more lenient sentence if

a defendant has assisted the state.

According to the clerk of court's office, Judge Battle also heard the following cases during the Jan. 3 through 5 term of Brunswick County Superior Court:

•Robin McKeithan Deason, guilty plea, misdemeanor possession of stolen property, two-year suspended sentence, three years of supervised probation, \$250 fine, court costs, \$75 restitution to prosecuting witnesses and \$450 attorney fees.

•Laura Sue Weaver, guilty plea, misdemeanor possession of stolen property, two-year suspended sentence, three years of supervised probation to be changed to unsupervised probation upon payment of \$250 fine, court costs and \$75 restitution to prosecuting witnesses.

•Wayne Moore, guilty plea, breaking, entering and larceny, three-year prison term, credit time served awaiting trial, work release recommended (See DEFENDANTS, Page 2-A)

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PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR Bobby Jones (left, foreground) and Commissioner Benny Ludlum (second from right) engage in a heated exchange last Thursday over the handling of discretionary park

funds. Also pictured are (from left) Commission Chairman Frankie Rabon, Finance Director Lithia Hahn, County Attorney David Clegg, Commissioner Kelly Holden and County Manager John T. Smith.

Vote Leaves Sunset Beach Annexation Issue In Limbo For One More Month

BY SUSAN USHER

A 3-2 vote by the Sunset Beach Town Council Monday night leaves the fate of a divisive annexation proposal undecided until the board meets again on Feb. 6.

Mayor Mason Barber kept the debate alive when he broke a 2-2 tie vote on whether the town should extend its corporate limits eastward along a strip extending east to the Seaside intersection of N.C. 179 and N.C. 904, then north up N.C. 904 to encompass the proposed site of a shopping center.

For the annexation to have gone through on the five-member council's first vote, a 4-1 tally would have been required, Town Administrator Linda Fluegel said. However, when the issue comes to a second vote next month, a 3-2 margin is all that is needed to decide the question one way or the other.

With his tie-breaking vote Monday, Mayor Barber joined Council members Edward Gore Sr. and Mary Katherine Griffith in voting for the annexation of an estimated 114 acres of commercial property, tracts owned by Sea Trail Corporation, Long Bay Associates and Pope & Pope.

Council members Al Odorn and Minnie Hunt voted against the proposal. In a prepared statement made during the public hearing that preceded the vote, Hunt termed the proposition as "the most important land use issue since the first land use plan for Sunset Beach was written in 1976," and said it is "an insult to 10 years of land use planning."

Absent was Councilwoman Kathy Hill Peed, who may well hold the deciding hand when the issue comes to a second vote.

Contacted Tuesday, the councilwoman said she had been out of town Monday night and that she preferred not to comment on how she would have voted had she been present or how she might vote if present at the next meeting.

"I've got a month to think about it and to make a decision that I can live with," she said. "Nothing is cast in stone at this point."

Contrary to a rumor circulating in the town, Peed said her position regarding the annexation issue is unrelated to the seafood market operated on the causeway by her husband, which she said in any event would not be seriously affected by a grocery store proposed for the area.

She said, "My husband has always told me to vote my conscience."

Town Hall Packed
An audience of more than 75 people squeezed into the town hall meeting room Monday night for the public hearing on the proposed annexation. At least 10 others were left standing outside because all seats were taken.

Flashlights in hand, town police directed parking and allowed additional people to enter the meeting

room as those inside left.

Ms. Fluegel said it was the largest crowd to date to attend a town meeting of this type.

A show of hands indicated that those who attended the hour-long hearing almost to a person favored the annexation.

Arguments Marshaled

About 14 people spoke during the hour-long hearing. Except for Councilwoman Hunt and Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association President Albert Wells, all spoke in favor of the annexation.

Convenient location of a planned Food Lion grocery store was chief among the advantages outlined by supporters. Developers of the project have said that Food Lion will not commit to locating in the shopping center unless it can sell beer and wine. Since the unincorporated area of the county is "dry," the site must be part of a town with an ABC board in order to obtain an ABC license.

Comments by the first speaker, Julia Thomas of Sea Trail community, were typical. She said the disadvantages of annexation would be outweighed by advantages such as increased property and sales taxes, convenient shopping for tourists and permanent residents, especially the elderly, as well as the opportunity for the town to have a say in how the commercial area is developed.

The project would also direct traffic congestion away from the access area to the island, she suggested.

Bill Jones presented a list of 81 town voters who when surveyed said they favored the annexation, while Sea Trail resident Melvin McBride presented a petition with signatures of 71 supporters.

Citing expected growth in the area, Mason Anderson, who has business interests in Sunset Beach, said the issue isn't a question of whether the proposed area would be commercially developed. Rather, he said, the issue is whether or not the town would be "part of that process rather than an obstacle."

At the request of Planning Board member Bud Scramton, Mayor Barber read a letter from the town planning board supporting the annexation as being "in the town's best interest."

The letter states that in the planning board's opinion the development would not change the town's essentially single-family, residential character, and that it would be good for the town to be able to regulate the appearance and orderly development of the town's "gateway," the area surrounding the N.C. 904/N.C. 179 intersection.

However, a resolution adopted Saturday by directors of the Sunset (See ANNEXATION, Page 2-A)

Purchase Order Policy Is Approved; Discretionary Accounts May Be Axed

BY RAHN ADAMS

At the prompting of a newly-elected board member, Brunswick County Commissioners last week adopted what had been an informal policy on purchase orders—one that commissioners accused themselves of violating in the past through the use of discretionary Parks and Recreation funds.

In turn, Commission Chairman Frankie Rabon indicated that the board may delete the discretionary accounts in the next fiscal year. "I think possibly at budget time we'll take a close look at it and consider doing away with the discretionary funds," Rabon told the Beacon last Thursday.

The board's unanimous approval of a formal policy on purchasing and contracting guidelines—proposed by new Commissioner Kelly Holden—came last Thursday morning during the second of two day-long work sessions attended by all five commissioners.

The policy spells out that county department heads must follow state bidding laws on construction and repair projects costing more than \$50,000 and equipment purchases worth more than \$20,000. They also must obtain informal bids on lesser expenditures that exceed \$1,000, even if the guidelines conflict with the wishes of individual commissioners in any particular project.

"The signature of one or more members of the Board of Commissioners on any purchase order shall not be construed to be in any way permission to avoid strict compliance with the letter of, or spirit of, these guidelines," the policy states.

The guidelines also set out that "any employee who knowingly violates the provisions of this

"It (discretionary park funds) has been nothing but abused over the past years, and I'm ready for it to be changed."

—Bobby Jones
Parks and Rec. Director

memorandum shall be subject to disciplinary action . . ." In requesting the policy, Holden pointed out that even state law prescribes no punitive measures for bidding law violations.

Holden's proposal was in answer to a recent controversy over three Parks and Recreation purchase orders authorized in November by lame duck Commissioners Chris Chappell and Jim Poole. The orders, which were promptly cancelled by County Manager John T. Smith, were for the same local construction company to do \$81,500 in paving work at Shalotte, Waccamaw and Smithville Township District Parks.

When questioned about the matter by the entire board last week, Smith defended the Parks and Recreation staff, who he said had been instructed by Chappell and Poole to obtain the paving work and to backdate the orders to appear that they weren't "spur of the moment" requests.

Accusations Made

During discussion last Wednesday of Holden's proposal, which had been tabled from the Jan. 3 commissioners' meeting, Commissioner Benny Ludlum admitted that the county has violated bidding regulations in the past.

"We just shove it under the table

and go on," Ludlum said, indicating that the board has been made aware of questionable Parks and Recreation projects before.

After taking exception to Ludlum's remark at Wednesday's work session, Commissioner Grace Beasley last Thursday defended Parks and Recreation's handling of the current Northwest Park project. Although Parks and Recreation Director Bobby Jones said he did not seek informal bids on certain park work, he said Ms. Beasley has never specified which vendors he should use for goods or services.

Jones said he bypassed the informal bidding process "because of the time frame . . . I was told to get the park built, period." As a result, the county has had to obtain two grant extensions, to meet the requirements of a two-year, \$140,000 state grant that was received in early 1985.

According to Finance Director Lithia Hahn, up to \$280,000 has been spent so far on Northwest Park, which is expected to open this spring. Admitting that there have been cost overruns, Jones told commissioners that the average cost for the county's other district parks was between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

Also last Thursday, Rabon charged that Ludlum misused his discretion (See DISCRETIONARY, Page 2-A)

Woman Dies In Shooting At Hale Swamp Road Home

BY RAHN ADAMS

Local and state lawmen Tuesday continued their investigation of an early-morning shooting Monday that claimed a Shalotte woman's life.

The victim was identified as Cheryl Lynn Hill, 23, of Mulberry Street, according to Brunswick County Sheriff's Det. Gary Shay.

Sheriff John C. Davis said Tuesday no determination had been made concerning the exact nature of the

shooting. "We're just treating it as a 'death by gunshot wound' at this time," Davis said. "There are some questions about it."

The shooting was reported Monday at 2:30 a.m. by Joseph E. Hill from his mobile home on Hale Swamp Road. Hill is no relation to the victim, Shay said.

According to a report on file at the sheriff's department, Hill told officers that he was in his living room

when he heard a gunshot. He said he ran into a bedroom and found Ms. Hill lying injured on the bed.

The man said Ms. Hill, who was bleeding from the wound, told him to call the rescue squad. He went next door and asked a neighbor to call for help, the report states. Shay said the victim died in the bedroom before assistance arrived.

An autopsy performed Monday at the regional medical examiner's of-

fice in Jacksonville indicated that the woman bled to death, Shay said.

Ms. Hill suffered a single 12-gauge shotgun wound to her left thigh, rupturing her femoral artery, the detective said. Sheriff Davis said officers found a shotgun at the scene.

The shooting was under investigation Tuesday by the sheriff's department and the SBI. No charges or arrests were reported as of late Tuesday afternoon.

Residents will vote on a proposed amendment to the town charter whereby the form of government would switch from the existing mayor/council format to a council/manager format. The town would then be able to employ a town manager who would have more administrative powers than the current town administrator.

The board will continue its consideration of another mailer during a special meeting slated for Jan. 23 at 10 a.m.

The Holden Beach referendum, meanwhile, is the third consecutive special election planned for a local municipality which has run into problems.

In November, Shalotte held an illegal alcoholic beverage election which was later rescheduled for Feb. 7.

Voters in Calabash were the victims of a mixup in the 1987 general election. In addition to the regular town council election, they were supposed to vote on water system assessments, but the issue was never passed on to the proper election authorities for scheduling of a vote.