

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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How The Crack War Continues To Grow

On a Sunday evening last May, a Charlotte police officer made a routine stop on N.C. 130 west, which makes its way to West Brunswick High School.

The driver had been weaving on the highway, driving across the double yellow lines and pulling the steering wheel back sharply. The trailing officer decided to make a routine traffic stop for driving left of center.

After pulling to the side of the road, the 37-year-old driver decided to step out of his 1977 Thunderbird to assist the officer with the stop. When you leave your vehicle like that, it gives the impression that you're willing to cooperate with officers, that you have nothing to hide. However, when the driver opened his door, a medicine bottle fell onto the ground.

And what followed was the driver's arrest, prosecution, sentencing and yet a second arrest for possession of crack cocaine, all in a seven-month period. It is a case too typical for our society to call it an unusual one.

Inside the medicine bottle were 29 pieces of crack cocaine. Following a search of the vehicle, it was revealed the driver also had in his possession another medicine bottle containing four pieces of crack and \$1,200 in cash.

The crack was valued at \$3,300, a good week's pay. By order of a Superior Court judge, the money confiscated has been given to the Brunswick County Schools, as is the procedure with all money or property seized in drug cases.

There is hope that some good can be achieved by solving a drug case, that perhaps drug prevention materials can be purchased to teach school children to say no to drugs.

Terry Pope



When a judge orders drug offenders to enroll in a substance abuse program, you hope that it's going to change some lives. You have faith in the system, that defendants who either need to undergo rehabilitation or else be taken off of the streets forever will choose to seek treatment. That way, they will avoid becoming a burden to taxpayers who must pay the price for incarceration.

Crack is a crystallized form of cocaine that is either free-based or injected. In Forsyth County last year, a judge was arrested after making a purchase of crack cocaine from a neighborhood crack house, where drug dealers are known to set up store for selling their merchandise.

It is so widespread and so difficult for officers to get a handle on the crack problem facing the nation, not just Brunswick County.

A drug smuggling operation once involved U-Haul trucks and fishing vessels strategically timed to bring in bales of marijuana to remote landings. But fighting the crack war is different.

Any car can be packing thousands of dollars worth of illegal cocaine and yet pass virtually unnoticed. An estimated less than one tenth of 1 percent of illegal drugs are confiscated nationwide.

Here, after receiving an anonymous tip, detectives showed back

up on the 37-year-old's doorstep just two weeks after he was given a suspended sentence in Brunswick County Superior Court in December. Inside the mobile home, they allegedly found 28 hits of crack cocaine, each piece wrapped in an aluminum foil packet, and valued at \$3,000.

It's back to court again for the stressed officers and the defendant in this case. It's a never-ending cycle.

Having lived the quiet life of a Brunswick County resident, I was shocked when 10 years ago I stood in front of a hamburger stand at Times Square in New York City and all around on the street were these voices advertising, "Coke or smoke." Uniformed police officers

were just a few steps away, standing on each corner.

"How 'bout you, man? Coke or smoke?" one guy approached my friend, who nervously searched for a way to stay cool while rejecting the offer.

"Not me! I'm from North Carolina!" he replied.

"I'll never forget that. 'I'm from North Carolina!' What a response. We laughed about that one for years."

The guy just looked at us like we were from Mars.

But that's how we saw our home then. As though Brunswick County was a million miles away, immune from these thugs who stalked the streets selling drugs like popcorn at a football game.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Article On Sunny Point Replete With Inaccuracies

To the editor:

This letter is to express my alarm and deep concern over the contents of an article on the editorial page of the Jan. 10 edition of *The Brunswick Beacon* written by Terry Pope.

The article, entitled "Fighting Mini-Wars Here on the Homefront," is replete with inaccuracies, speculation and exaggerations. I feel I would be remiss in my responsibility if I did not question the intent if not the integrity of the reporter and the paper's editorial staff in the publication of this type of unsubstantiated information.

My greatest concern is that the security procedures at Sunny Point

would be discussed at all. In particular, I'm deeply concerned that someone would print information on such a sensitive subject gotten from a third party that had never been verified with responsible officials from the organization involved.

Nothing in Mr. Pope's article concerning Sunny Point had been coordinated in any manner with Sunny Point officials to substantiate its accuracy. Such laxity is not only contradictory to good reporting standards but harmful. I shouldn't have to remind you that irresponsible reporting needlessly excites the public.

(See LETTERS, Following Page)

There's Nothing To Lose Through Open Interviews

Brunswick County Commissioners were to conduct open interviews this week of five applicants for the county manager's post.

The move is an unusual one in Brunswick County, where voters have become accustomed to hasty decisions made behind closed doors, often without consideration of accepted procedures.

Conducting the interviews in open, if handled well, could increase the level of public trust in the board and its ability to make decisions. That's probably exactly why the new board opted for this approach, given the previous board's sad record in hiring decisions.

The new ground rule means that county commissioners aren't likely to be playing political games or asking questions that shouldn't be asked even in a closed interview. On the other hand, we must hope the open setting won't keep board members—or applicants—from asking the questions that need to be asked by each.

Also, there's always the chance that the public isn't really seeing the entire interview process. At this point we don't know if any board members have made other, private contact with applicants and resolved questions they have of a more sensitive or political nature. We may never know.

The interviews are open, which means the public will be reaching independent conclusions about who the best candidate might be. Commissioners need to remember that it is their responsibility to hire the county manager, not anyone else's.

A real plus for the open session is that observers will gain a better understanding of the goals the commissioners have in mind for Brunswick County for the next several years, their understanding of the board-manager relationship, and the type of manager they would like to work with. Still, one must admit, this could have been addressed with a good flow of communication between the board and public.

Both board members and public will get to see how the would-be managers handle themselves in a highly-visible, high-stress situation, how well they deal with newspeople and the public.

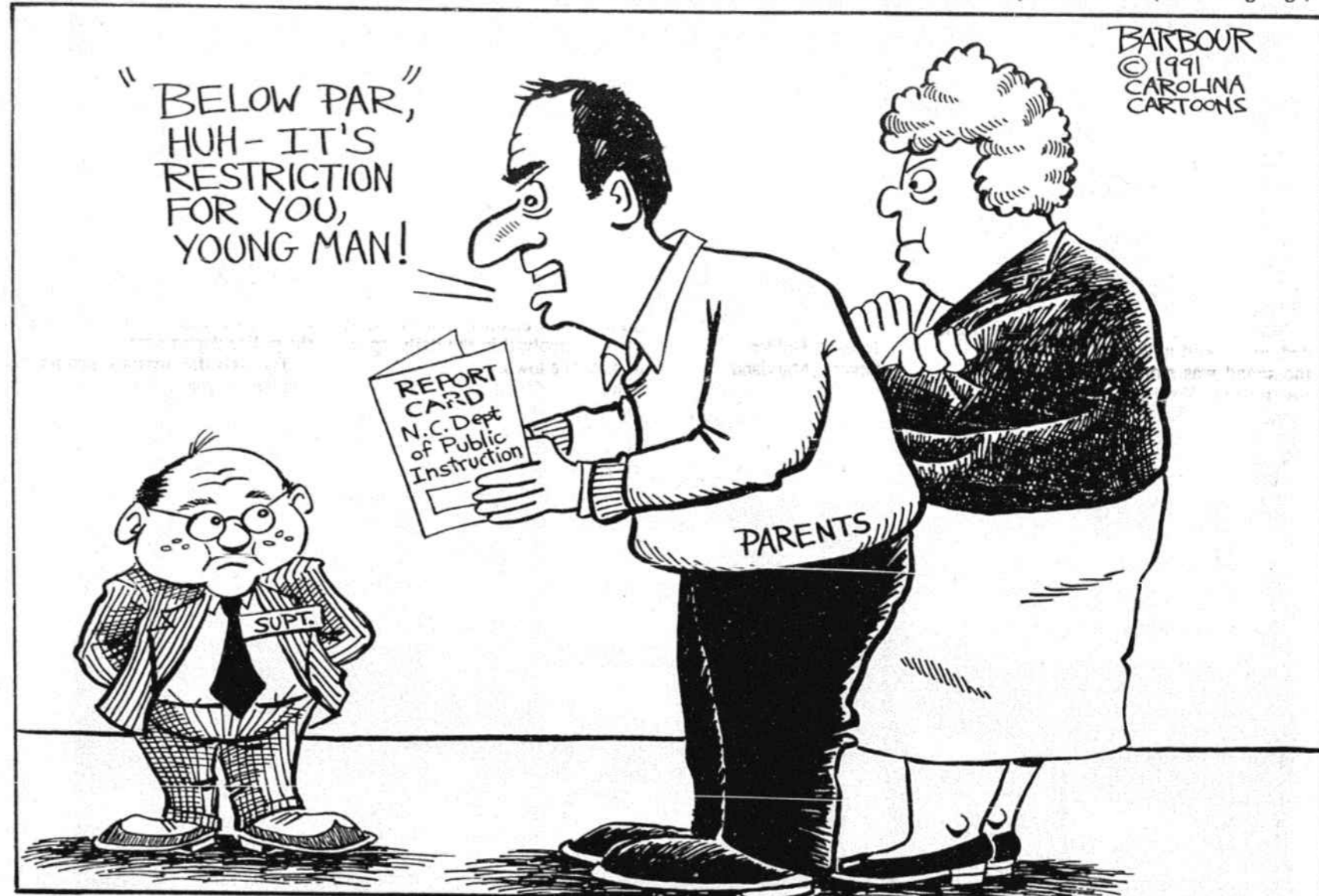
Kelly Holden, chairman of the board, is right in saying that dealing with the public comes with the manager's job and that professional, qualified applicants shouldn't feel threatened about the open interviews. He could have compared it to commissioners participating in candidates' forums, but didn't.

Some candidates, however, might have reason for their present employer not to know they are seeking other employment, and withdraw from consideration.

There's also the potential for applicants, or board members themselves, to "play" to the disseminators of the news and the public, to say what they think people want to hear, rather than what they actually believe. In any case, by its very nature, the session will be part job interview and part performance.

Even with those negatives, the commissioners should be applauded for their effort to bring more openness to their decision-making process.

Brunswick County has little to lose from the experiment, and much to gain.



We Need Solutions, Not Excuses

Susan Usher



I've spent pieces of two days looking over the state's "report card" on all school systems in the state.

Based on the information in this inch-and-a-half-thick document, some school systems do a lot more than others with the fiscal, physical and human resources available to them. The "best" systems—those whose students were performing at the highest levels on standardized tests, etc., weren't necessarily those with the best socioeconomic indicators.

Generally, though, a system has a jump start if the parents of its students are 1) literate; 2) living in the same household with the kids; 3) making a living above poverty level.

Just out of curiosity I looked in the state manual to see how Person County fared. That's the county where my in-laws live. Don and I have a good impression of the place based on our visits just three or four times a year. Person lies north of Durham County, next to the Virginia state line and not far below the Blue Ridge Parkway. Rolling hills, red clay, no beaches.

The results of the comparison surprised and angered me. I want to know what they're doing differently from us and if it could work here.

Person County's school system has about 5,180 students, compared to our 8,408. It has one high school, compared to our three, which probably affects the kinds of courses it offers to senior high students.

In 1989 Person Schools spent the equivalent of \$790 in local funds per student, compared to our \$719, and \$3,696 in total funds, compared to our \$3,599.

The system had an average of 16 students per classroom teacher, compared to our 17 and the statewide average of 18. Of those teachers, 23 percent had graduate degrees, while 24 percent of ours did. Statewide the average ran 30 percent. Teachers received an average local supplement in Person of \$533, compared to our average supplement of \$985 and the state's average of \$789.

Their student body included 37 percent blacks, compared to our 27 percent and the state's 32 percent. Like us and the rest of the state, the study body also included a few

American Indians and Hispanics.

Six percent of their students were identified as gifted compared to 5 percent in Brunswick and 6 percent statewide. Another 12 percent were considered handicapped, compared to 10 percent here and 12 percent statewide.

I was surprised to see that Person has 21 percent of its students receiving compensatory education, compared to 10 percent in Brunswick and 12 percent statewide. One-third of the students receive free- or reduced-price lunches, compared to 40 percent in Brunswick and 37 percent statewide.

Calculated on the basis of the parents of students taking the California Achievement Tests in three grades, 22 percent of the parents of Person County students lacked a high school diploma, compared to 15 percent in Brunswick County.

And look at this: Person has a larger number of female heads-of-household than Brunswick, about the same percent of two-parent households, more overcrowded housing, more overcrowded housing. We rank about the same in the percent of families living below the poverty level, though the median household income is slightly higher in Person—\$13,652 compared to \$12,883 here. Per capita personal income there averages \$5,424 compared to \$5,321 here.

A similar percentage of residents of the two counties have college degrees (slightly less than the state average), but a smaller percentage of Person County residents have completed some post-high school education (less than four years of

additional schooling). The state average for parents without a high school diploma is just below 50 percent. Person's runs just above that; Brunswick, a shade below.

Now you tell me what makes the difference. Brunswick County scored below par when compared to school systems of similar demographics, socioeconomic background, etc. In fact Brunswick County came out near the bottom no matter how the state measured.

But Person County was another story. Even with slight disadvantage on its "index of advantage" (minus 1 compared to Brunswick's 4 on a scale of -40 to 40), it was recognized for notable achievement in three curriculum areas: science, social studies and math.

Brunswick County, with an index of advantage of 4, was rated as below par when compared to systems in similar circumstances. It wasn't notable in any curriculum area based on this study. I was told that recent turmoil at the school board/central office level was most likely to blame. Maybe, but I don't buy that as a reason. It may not even be a good excuse.

In overall achievement Person County was rated above par. In terms of student achievement it reached or passed all state averages: in graduates completing N.C. Scholars Program courses and courses required for admission to campuses in the University of North Carolina system, in students earning five or more units per year towards graduation and in average daily attendance.

Brunswick County was rated below par in overall achievement. Our county met the statewide attendance average and exceeded the state average in only one area: students earning credits toward graduation.

In Person County last year 114 students enrolled in advanced placement classes and took 157 AP exams. In Brunswick County, the larger of the two systems, only 39 students were enrolled in one or more AP classes. They took only 47 exams.

Person County students scored an average of 776 on the SAT in 1989, compared to Brunswick County's 784. In 1990, Person's average score was up to 821, compared to 796 in Brunswick. Of course, we don't have a profile of how many and which students were tested. And that could make a lot of difference.

The paperwork doesn't show it and it would take some research to prove it, but I think three things are important in accounting for the difference:

1) How we use the resources we have. A few nights ago the county school board spent \$2,000 to help pay one teacher's way to Russia and another \$1,500 for two teachers to make a presentation at a Boston conference. Both would have been nice gestures if the Brunswick County Schools were rolling in money.

But back at home other classroom teachers are begging in the community for money and supplies and initiating mandated new pro-

grams in their classrooms with inadequate in-service training.

When the Brunswick County Educational Foundation surveyed schools to see what they needed money for, administrators and teachers were begging for basic supplies and equipment. That same \$3,500 spent on three people last week could have bought a nice computer for a classroom, or enough software for several classrooms. It could have bought a lot of books to support the system's latest fad in reading and language arts instruction. It could have paid for a lot of in-service instruction time for teachers trying to use new programs in their classrooms.

2) Leadership and decision-making or the lack of it. We blame the Brunswick County Board of Education for a great deal. Much of that blame is deserved. They set the tone and direction for the entire school system. If they don't know where the school system's going, the rest of us don't either. But a board can only make good decisions if it gets good information from its central office staff. That hasn't been happening, but I don't know whether it's because board members haven't been asking the right questions or because staff members don't know the answers.

3) Expectations. If we don't expect enough from students, from parents or from educators, we certainly won't get it. When you reward mediocrity, then that's exactly what you receive—just more of it.

I'm tired of hearing lame excuses. I want to see some action. How about you?