

# Fire Victim Remains In Serious Condition

BY THE NEWS STAFF

A Shallotte woman who escaped from a burning automobile outside her home Sunday night was recovering Tuesday at the N.C. Jaycees Burn Center at UNC Hospital in Chapel Hill from second- and first-degree burns.

Betty Harrelson, of Bluff Drive, was in serious condition, said UNC Hospital spokeswoman Barbara Projan. Serious condition means the patient is acutely ill and that vital signs may be unstable and not within normal limits.

Mrs. Harrelson, a longtime employee of Security Savings & Loan in Shallotte, is the wife of Shallotte Alderman Wilton Harrelson.

"The burns aren't quite as extensive as anticipated," her son, Larry Harrelson, also of Shallotte, said Monday morning. "She's in pretty good condition, considering everything, and she's very lucky. She got herself out before the worst part of the fire."

Tuesday afternoon, Kit Jackson, an employee at Harrelson's and family friend, said Mrs. Harrelson's condition remained guarded, but "very encouraging".

"She isn't talking and she is on a ventilator, but she is responding to the family through smiles and blinking of her eyes," said Mrs. Jackson, whose husband Ray was among Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad members who responded to the fire. Mrs. Harrelson was taken first to The Brunswick Hospital, then transferred to the Burn Center.

Tuesday the medical staff dropped its estimate of the extent of burns from 40 percent of her body to about 21 percent, said Mrs. Jackson.

Mrs. Harrelson sustained first-degree burns—the equivalent of a severe sunburn—on her face and hands, and more serious, second-degree burns on her back.

Mrs. Harrelson had left the house Sunday night to visit a neighbor. She was apparently backing her Dodge Dynasty sedan from the carport, tucked into the slope slightly below and to one side of their home, when the car rolled backward over an embankment and caught fire.

"She was very lucky to get out of



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER  
**BETTY HARRELSON** sustained serious burns, but escaped from her car after it rolled off an embankment and burst into flames. All that remained of the car was a gray metal shell.

the car," said Shallotte Police Chief Rodney Gause. He said the wall, bulkheaded with timbers, is about eight feet high.

The car landed with the rear bumper on the ground and the front wheels resting against the top of the embankment.

"We don't know what happened," said Larry Harrelson. "For whatever reason, it seems the car backed off the embankment and the gas tank ruptured. Nobody knows but her, and she may or may not be able to recall it."

He said Jack Soles, a neighbor and an employee of Harrelson's Farm and Garden Center, was passing the house at around 8:15 p.m. when he saw the Harrelsons' car engulfed in flames. Soles stopped and alerted Wilton Harrelson, who was inside the house and unaware of the fire, then went to find out if Mrs. Harrelson had gone to the neighbor's house on foot. She had never arrived.

Emergency fire and rescue units were on their way when Harrelson found his wife lying in brush approximately 15 feet from the car, and in shock.

Gause said police aren't sure if snow or ice was a contributing factor in the accident. The fire is still under investigation.

Along with rescue volunteers, about a dozen firefighters from the Shallotte and Civitown departments responded and quickly brought the fire under control, said Shallotte VFD Captain Tony Hewett.

With underbrush soaked from recent rainfall and snow, the fire did not spread beyond the immediate vicinity of the car.

The gas tank tore loose from the car as it went over the embankment, spilling gasoline. Hewett speculated that wiring from the fuel pump or

tail lights may have touched the gasoline and started the blaze.

Mrs. Jackson said Mr. Harrelson is doing well after the shock of discovering his wife at the fire, with the Burn Center staff keeping an eye on his blood pressure.

"As well-loved and well-thought of as they are in this community," said Mrs. Jackson, "there has been a lot of concern expressed and a lot of prayers going up."

"We're very thankful...God was with her, there is no doubt in our minds," she continued. "With Jack Soles going by—God had his hand in all of it."

"She's going to make it; she's a survivor."

Because of the potential for infection, cards but no flowers are allowed in patients' rooms at the N.C. Jaycees Burn Center, UNC Hospital, Manning Drive, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

## Milder Weather Anticipated

After last week's Arctic blast of snow and below-normal temperatures along the Brunswick County coast, weather conditions should begin a "mellowing out pattern," local meteorologist Jackson Canady said Tuesday.

He said he expects temperatures to be in the mid 50s during the day and in the mid 30s at night, with only about a half inch of rain predicted to fall.

Canady said it's not likely more snow should fall, and that temperatures should begin a "recuperating" pattern of more seasonal conditions. "Nothing extremely cold or hot," he predicted.

For the period of Jan. 14 through Jan. 20, Canady reported a maximum daytime high temperature of 68 degrees, recorded Jan. 14. The minimum evening low temperature was 20 degrees, on Jan. 17.

The average daytime high was 51 degrees and the average evening low was 32 degrees, for a daily average temperature of 41 degrees. Canady said that reading is four degrees below average for this time of year.

Canady measured 1.12 inches of liquid precipitation at his Shallotte Point home. The two inches of snow he recorded was transferred to measure an extra .20 of an inch of rain once it melted, he said.

## Building Up At Beaches

(Continued From Page 1-A)

Precise counts were not available from the Town of Shallotte, but it too saw no let-up in construction during 1991.

"There's been a lot of building in Shallotte this year," said Albert Hughes, the town's building inspector. "It's not been a dry year at all."

Hughes said 1991 was an "above average" year for both commercial and residential building.

Although exact figures are not available, Hughes estimated that 25 to 30 new homes were built in town, mostly in Brierwood Estates.

Several new businesses also located in Shallotte in 1991, including Brunswick Bowling Center, Advance Auto Parts and Moviemax. Construction of a new Wal-Mart is under way at the north end of town.

Shallotte Presbyterian Church and the NAPA store both constructed new buildings along U.S. 17.

A Handee Hugo's convenience store was built at the intersection of the U.S. 17 bypass and N.C. 130 West. The state built its new welcome center and rest area on the east side of the bypass.

Holden Beach Building Inspector Dwight Carroll said 1991 was a typical year for new home construction there, despite a sagging economy.

Carroll said 59 single-family homes valued at \$4.25 million were built on the island last year. "That's about normal, maybe a little bit above normal," he said.

Four duplexes valued at \$288,552 were constructed during the year, and Carroll issued 116 per-

mits for alterations valued at nearly \$700,000.

During 1990, Holden Beach issued permits for 42 single-family homes valued at \$3.04 million.

Six homes and two duplexes on Holden Beach were relocated or demolished last year under the Upton-Jones provisions of the National Flood Insurance Program, Carroll said.

At Sunset Beach, permits for 76 single-family homes valued at \$5,648,721 were issued last year, an increase over 1990, reported Town Administrator Linda Fluegel. Permits were also issued for one business valued at \$220,000 and five duplexes worth \$566,685, for a total valuation of \$6.4 million in new construction.

In 1990, the town issued permits for 59 single-family homes and nine permits for 40 multi-family units. No dollar amounts were available for 1990.

At Ocean Isle Beach, new home construction remained steady for 1991, Building Inspector Druiced Roberson reported.

The town issued permits for 32 single-family homes worth \$4.02 million last year compared to permits for 35 homes for an estimated \$3.6 million in 1990.

Inspectors issued 219 total permits within the town for \$5.8 million, including permits for three new businesses.

Within the Ocean Isle's new ETA, permits for seven single-family homes worth \$428,192 were issued along with one mobile home permit.

## Shallotte Balks At Request To Fund DOT Meeting

BY DOUG RUTTER

The Town of Shallotte won't help pay for a meeting of the state Board of Transportation planned in Brunswick County this spring.

Aldermen voted unanimously Tuesday night against contributing \$750 to help pay for a meeting of the state board April 30 and May 1 at Sunset Beach.

Shallotte board members Roney Cheers and David Gause said the money wasn't included in the town's budget for this fiscal year.

Brunswick County Travel Package, a group created by the county's two chambers of commerce to promote travel and tourism here, has asked area towns to donate \$750 each.

Mayor Sarah Tripp said she had mixed feeling about local municipalities helping pay for the meeting, which will cost an estimated \$14,800.

"I think it would be an honor to have them here," she said. "Some of them have probably never been this far."

Mayor Tripp said the meeting would give local leaders a good chance to show transportation officials the need for overpasses where U.S. 17 intersects N.C. 130 West in Shallotte and N.C. 904 at Grissettown.

Aldermen Wilton Harrelson and Morris Hall were absent from the

town board meeting Tuesday night.

Mrs. Tripp said they both told her they were in favor of holding the meeting in Brunswick County, but didn't want town funds paying for it.

Hall was vacationing in Florida this week, and Harrelson was in Chapel Hill where his wife is being treated at the burn center at UNC Hospital.

Also rejected Tuesday night was a proposal to increase the annual privilege license fees paid by owners of laundries, dry cleaners and hat blocking establishments.

The town board was considering increasing the fees from \$25 to \$50 per year as allowed under a recent change in state law.

But aldermen said this week they didn't like the idea of "singling out" certain types of businesses for increases.

The town already charges the maximum fee allowed by state law for other types of privilege licenses.

### Other Business

In other business Tuesday, aldermen:

- Approved a change in the acreage fee ordinance, as recommended by the town planning board. Added was a paragraph allowing owners of land developed for "public recreational uses" that don't need water and/or sewer service to pay \$20 per acre. The new provision will apply to land in town and land outside town that

has been submitted to the board for annexation. The rate varies for other types of land usage.

■ Voted to retain Brock, Padgett and Chandler of Shallotte as auditors for the town for the 1991-92 fiscal year. The cost of the audit will be based on hourly rates ranging from \$18 to \$65 per hour. As part of the agreement, the firm will not raise its rates for at least three years.

■ Approved three tax releases totaling \$136 for property that was taxed but wasn't located in the town limits. The board tabled a request from John Ward to refund \$2,110 in 1989 and

1990 taxes that he claims should not have been charged under the "farm use" exemption. The county has already granted the exemption.

■ Tabled adoption of a mutual aid contract for the fire department until questions about the town's liability insurance coverage can be answered. The contract would allow the Shallotte department to assist other departments and vice-versa. It also would ensure that the department would continue to receive \$13,000 annually from the county. The board plans to hold a special meeting before the signing deadline of Jan. 30.

## Federal Court Indicts High

(Continued From Page 1-A)

legedly received \$150,000 for the store, of which \$50,000 was given in cash. It also accuses High of paying a cash fee to the person who introduced Winters as a potential buyer and of being told that Winters was having tax problems.

After High received a grand jury subpoena to testify, he called Winters "to concoct a story to tell the Grand Jury," the indictment states.

According to the IRS affidavit, a review of the Winters' financial records shows the couple made expenditures of approximately \$300,000 in excess of all reported legitimate sources of income between January 1987 and December

1989. Investigators say they have identified in excess of 30 financial transactions conducted by the couple since January 1987 that were made to avoid filing claims with the IRS.

A second count accuses High of submitting a false witness voucher for his Nov. 26 appearance before the grand jury in Greensboro, claiming reimbursements for mileage and expenses of \$291.15. The voucher listed expenses of \$39.90 for lodging for one night "whereas in truth and in fact as he then well knew, he did not incur the said expense for lodging," the indictment reads.

A court date has not been set for High's case, said Jackie Bracey, public affairs officer for the IRS district office in Greensboro.

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