

# Modern 'Revenuers' Seize Properties For Drug Taxes

**BY LYNN CARLSON**  
Federal "revenuers" may have been the nemesis of old-time moonshiners, but they had nothing on modern-day state revenue agents charged with collecting the taxes owed on illegal drugs.  
Take the case of a Rockingham couple recently busted with 1,642 grams (about 3.6 pounds) of cocaine.  
In addition to losing inherited property on Oak Island—a trailer off Long Beach Road, a lot on Long Beach and a commercial building on Yaupon Beach—they face controlled substance and income taxes of nearly \$1.2 million levied on the drugs and the profits believed to have been made off them.  
The substance tax alone will accrue interest at a rate of \$2,200 per month on principal of \$328,400. For good measure, the state tacked on another \$689,307 in assessed income tax on the proceeds and liens, and state agents continue to look for assets to sell.

Although the arrest of James E. and Judy L. Treece took place in Richmond County last April, Brunswick County and the state will profit under a law which penalizes those possessing illegal drugs for failure to have the substances tax stamped in much the same manner as liquor or cigarettes.  
And Charles Raines, Brunswick County's revenue agent in the N.C. Department of Revenue office in Shallotte, can prove that such stamps are really available. He has one in his wallet, given him to prove to a local judge that drug tax stamps exist.  
"No, no one has come to the state looking to buy tax stamps to put on the marijuana or cocaine they're planning to sell, but theoretically that's what they're for," Raines says with a laugh. "Nobody's purchased a stamp yet until after they've gotten caught."  
Those arrested on drug possession or distribution charges are immediately assessed taxes on the sub-

stances—\$200 per gram on cocaine. The total tax is due within 48 hours of assessment, and if payment is not made in that time, the tax is doubled and interest begins to accrue.  
The funds collected from the sale of property seized for unpaid taxes are divided between the law enforcement agencies involved in the bust and the Department of Revenue. Law enforcement gets 75 percent.  
It's a double bind that has criminals and some defense attorneys crying foul, but Raines likes the program because it pumps funds into law enforcement and, he hopes, serves as a deterrent to drug dealing.  
"We just want people to know how much it can cost them (to possess or deal drugs)," Raines said. The Treeces, after paying \$179,000—\$54,000 collected from the Brunswick properties and \$125,000 from a trailer park and some trucks and cars they owned in Richmond County—still haven't made a sig-

nificant dent in their tax debt.  
The tax liability is strictly a civil one, Raines adds; it is separate from fines levied in criminal court and can be enforced even on those found innocent of selling drugs.  
"The fact that they possessed them and didn't have a tax stamp is the point," he explained, adding that a person acquitted of drug charges has 30 days to file protest against the civil tax liability.  
The revenue department has recently begun appointing designated drug enforcement officers in each region of the state to do nothing but collect drug taxes. The southeastern quadrant's Wilmington-based officer, Mike Duke, gets about five new cases a day, according to Raines.  
As for the Treeces, Raines says they "certainly could use a letter from Ed McMahon declaring them the winner of the \$10 million American Family sweepstakes."  
Of course, if they did, Raines or some other "revenuer" would be there to greet them.



**CHARLES RAINES**, local agent for the N.C. Department of Revenue, shows a check for \$10,140 to the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department for helping securing Oak Island properties seized after a Richmond County drug arrest. More funds are expected as the revenue department disposes of the properties. Raines is also holding an authentic marijuana tax stamp.

# Shallotte Merchants Seek Change In Town's New Garbage Policy

**BY DOUG RUTTER**  
Four Shallotte merchants appeared before the town board Tuesday night seeking a change in the new commercial trash pickup policy that took effect Monday.  
Leading the contingent was businessman Beamon Hewett, a former mayor of Shallotte, who said it isn't fair to make merchants pay for trash pickup when residents get it for free.  
Aldermen took no action but promised to consider Hewett's suggestion that merchants and residents pay for removal of their own garbage. "Let everybody pay the bill for what they accumulate," he re-

commended.  
Under the new three-year contract with waste hauler Chambers of South Carolina, the town pays for pickup of one 90-gallon trash cart per week at each residence and business.  
Any merchant who generates more trash than the cart can hold must work out a pickup plan with Chambers. Those business owners get credit for the 90-gallon cart on their bill from the sanitation company.  
The new policy is a major shift from the old policy, and it has drawn criticism from merchants. Shallotte

used to pay for pickup of up to 16 cubic yards of commercial trash per week.  
But town officials said that policy had to be changed because the town was paying more for trash pickup at some businesses than it was receiving from them in taxes.  
"I know the system we have has some imperfections in it," Alderman Wilton Harrelson told the business owners Tuesday. "I know the system we had was ridiculous."  
Starting with the new fiscal year in July, Hewett said everyone should start paying for their own trash pickup. "I'm paying for my own. You're

paying for your own. That's the way it works," he explained.  
Hewett said making everyone pay their own garbage bill would allow the town to cut the tax rate by 12 cents—from 47 cents per \$100 of valuation to 35 cents.  
In the meantime, he suggested the town continue paying for commercial trash pickup through the end of June since the money is already budgeted.  
"The businesses in this town are in a depression. We're past recession," Hewett said. "You're going to see the merchants folding in this town."  
Jo Ann Simmons, who runs a hardware store, was among the merchants who supported Hewett's proposal. She said businesses promote growth in Shallotte and generate sales tax to help pay for services.  
"The merchants are a part of the town and without the merchants you wouldn't have a town," she said. "You need us as bad as we need you."  
Alderman Paul Wayne Reeves sided with the merchants and recommended that the town spring for once-a-week commercial pickup through the end of the fiscal year.  
Reeves said the town has more than enough money budgeted (\$120,000) to pay for the trash pickup. In the meantime, he said the town and business owners could work out a new policy that treats everyone fairly.  
But other board members said they didn't want to make any deci-

sions on the issue Tuesday night. They said they wanted time to think about Hewett's suggestion.  
"I think everyone has an open mind," Harrelson said. "It's something that's going to have to be worked out."  
Alderman Roney Cheers said if the town board and merchants work together, there's a "good possibility" they can work out a plan that will please most people.  
Merchants said Tuesday they didn't realize the town had been losing money under the old commercial trash policy. They said the problem could have been avoided if the board had brought it to their attention earlier.  
"I suspect it was a fault on both sides—on the merchants' side and the town's side," Mayor Pro Tem David Gause said.  
Since the new trash policy was announced, merchants said they have reduced the amount of trash pickup they were receiving when the town was paying. Now they're using the smallest containers they can.  
Hewett said the town used to pay \$661 per year for his trash pickup. Now that he'll be paying, the service has been cut so it will only cost \$150 per year.  
Harrelson said there was no incentive under the old system to conserve dumpster space because the town paid for everything.  
Mayor Sarah Tripp did not attend Tuesday's meeting due to an illness in the family, said Gause.

help pay for rings for West Brunswick High School's state championship football team.  
Aldermen approved the contribution Tuesday night pending research by Town Attorney Mark Lewis to determine if it is legal. Board members agreed to make the donation following a 30-minute executive session.  
Howard Benton requested the money on behalf of the West Brunswick Athletic Booster Club. "We hate to go back to the merchants," he said. "We're always hitting the merchants."  
Benton said the club has raised approximately \$4,000 of the \$6,000 it needs to buy the 41 rings for players and coaches. The rings will be presented at a banquet later this winter at Sea Trail Plantation.  
The Trojans won the 1992 state 2-A football championship Dec. 12. It was the school's first state football championship and first state title in any sport in 17 years.

# Final Sewer Report Due Soon; Higher Funding Rank Sought

**BY LYNN CARLSON**  
Engineering consultants studying the need for a sewer system to serve Sunset Beach and Calabash have "just about finished" their final environmental report and will appear before the county health board on Monday to discuss their findings.  
Joseph Tombro of Powell Associates of North Myrtle Beach said the report will be submitted to the town council by the end of next week, the last step before the next public hearing is scheduled on the issue.  
Tombro also said he and fellow engineer Jim Billups last week sent an update to the N.C. Department of Environmental Management seeking a higher ranking for the towns on the state's funding list. He told council at its January meeting that, with formation of the South Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority, the towns could "darn near come in first or second" on the state's funding list for fiscal year 1994 because of the extra priority points assigned for forming a "management entity" to seek grants and loans for the system.  
Tombro has told council and citizens' groups that the \$25 to \$30 million system can be funded through loans and grants and that its construction debt can be retired through user fees he estimates at \$18 per month for each single-family home.  
Billups will be meeting with DEM officials to lobby for the towns to be placed on the 1993 funding list, since some high-ranked towns on the list are not in a financial position to pursuing their systems this year, Tombro said.  
The Sunset Beach Citizens

Advisory Board, appointed by Mayor Mason Barber to represent residents of different areas of town on the sewer issue, has established a mailing address to receive "comments, questions and concerns" from residents and property owners. Its address is P.O. Box 6460, South Brunswick Station, Sunset Beach NC 29469.  
Tombro told the board Monday that the advisory board has asked Powell Associates to respond to citizens' questions and that only six responses have been received to an informational bulletin sent to 2,000 property owners last month.  
"Two of the letters were of a positive nature that required no response," Tombro reported in a Feb. 1 letter to Barber. "Two...were negative, of which one had no legible signature nor return address. Two...had questions and concerns that I have addressed by letter..."  
**Land Plan Hearing**  
Though no date was set for the sewer hearing, council scheduled a public hearing on the final draft of its Coastal Area Management Act land use plan for Monday, Feb. 15, at 7 p.m. in the town hall.  
The draft plan has been studied by the state coastal management office, which made suggestions for minor changes. The changes will be reflected in the document to be discussed in the public hearing, Planning Board Chairman Richard Good told the board.  
**Work Session Set**  
A work session of the town council and planning board was scheduled for Feb. 18 at 9:30 a.m. to discuss six amendments the planning group has recommended to the

town's zoning and subdivision ordinances.  
The amendments to be discussed include landscaping requirements for commercial ventures containing five or more business establishments; requirements for buffers and for yards in which buffers are required; site development plans for commercial or professional property in some zones; permitted uses in the mainland residential 1 zoning area; stormwater control on properties less than 1 acre; and minimum parking requirements.  
Work session are informal meetings in which town officials discuss issues without taking official action. They are open to the public.  
**Other Business**  
In other business, the board praised the work of the town's 42-member Beautification Committee and accepted its design for a three-by-five-foot town flag based on the design of the Sunset Beach Police Department patch.  
Council agreed to order a large flag to be flown on special occasions and to investigate the possibility of purchasing smaller flags to sell to townspeople. The design includes a logo with the sea, sun and a gull on a deep blue background.  
Councilman Bud Scramton was drafted to study the feasibility of the town's renting a chipper and hiring an operator to periodically mulch residents' yard waste. Yard debris can no longer be collected in the town's garbage pick-up or placed in the county landfill.  
Scramton said other towns, including Burlington, Vermont, and Southport, have successful yard waste recycling programs.

Donation Approved  
Shallotte plans to donate \$500 to

# Calabash EMS Answers 45 Calls

The Calabash Emergency Medical Service answered 45 calls in December, President Kathy Morfit reported at the group's Jan. 25 board of directors meeting.  
In the absence of Chief Mark Christy, Morfit said the squad worked 161.5 hours and traveled 1,667 miles. Of those calls, 19 were made in Calabash, six in Sunset Beach and 20 elsewhere.



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