

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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No One But Log Truckers Can Prevent The Next Accident

"This is the kind of call that gives you nightmares," one rescue worker said at the scene of Friday's collision between a Brunswick County school bus and a logging truck on U.S. 17.

Fifteen students and the bus driver were injured when the log truck's jackknifed trailer slammed into the rear of the bus as the truck driver swerved in an attempt to avoid the crash. Two girls seated in the right rear seat were seriously hurt. Melanie Fields is home and recuperating, while Amanda Scoggins remains at Duke University Hospital with massive leg and pelvic injuries, having undergone 8½ hours of surgery to fix the breaks to her legs and currently resting before facing pelvic surgery later this week. The driver of the truck which hit them faces charges of failing to reduce speed to avoid a collision.

No one connected to such an accident really escapes unharmed. The students, in addition to their cuts, bruises and soreness, will surely experience a degree of insecurity about riding school buses in the future. Their parents, teachers and school administrators will be even more uneasy. And although they will be forever thankful that no lives were lost, it will be difficult for them to shake the worst-case scenario in their minds.

It was the second accident in eight days on U.S. 17 involving passenger vehicles and logging trucks, and in both the potential for tragedy infinitely exceeded the reality. On March 11, a Fayetteville couple attempting to make a left turn near the state line also had a brush with doom when a logging truck barreled up behind them too quickly to stop. The log truck spilled its load on to their pickup, pinning them inside their vehicle for an hour until they could be freed with the Jaws of Life. And again, although the victims were treated and released from the hospital, it is not likely they were truly unscathed. The terror of such an experience is bound to leave an indelible mark.

It has been more than a year since a third logging truck accident claimed the life of a local businessman and a high school co-ed. The scene of that wreck was at U.S. 17 and N.C. 130, at a spot between the two most recent accidents. That time the logging truck was also at fault, having run the stoplight.

There is nothing the bus driver could have done to prevent Friday's accident; and there's nothing anyone but the drivers of big rigs like those log trucks can do to prevent the next one. In the meantime, Brunswick Countians should remain aware that until its four-laning is complete, U.S. 17 will continue to be perilous, with impatient drivers trying to make up in the completed sections the time they think they've lost in the bottlenecks.

A fund has been set up for Amanda Scoggins at the main branch of United Carolina Bank in Shallotte. Call Judy Flint at the bank if you can help.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hold Referenda In Districts Before Splitting Calabash

To the editor:
 The (Calabash Board of Commissioners') resolution condemning Senator R.C. Soles' effort to split Calabash as "not in the best interest of Calabash" is as arrogant as the Soles resolution.

The Carolina Shores Property Owners Association survey in District 2 shows a majority of the Carolina Shores residents favor incorporating as a separate entity. To my knowledge, no such survey was taken in District 1.

If the commissioners have a problem with this, I suggest they authorize a referendum in both Districts 1 and 2 before they proceed with what they arrogantly deem to be in the best interest of Calabash.

Let their constituents determine what is the future course of Calabash.

Ed Jacobs
 Calabash

Emergency Workers Labored Admirably

To the editor:
 I would like to take this means to commend all the emergency personnel who labored so admirably during the "Storm of '93."

Brunswick Electric crews were out even before the storm ended, and our power was restored as quickly as was humanly possible. Volunteer firefighters were on duty at all times. Off-duty police officers reported for duty on their own initiative and gave their time to the town.

The N.C. Department of Transportation sent its workers in to assist in the restoration of bridge service to the island of Sunset Beach. In order to do that, winds had to decrease to less than 30 miles per hour, and the tide had to be of sufficient depth to help float the pontoon bridge. Mean-

time, DOT crews stood by with a truck to salt the ice that had accumulated on the bridge, and with a road grader to sweep the causeway of debris to ensure safe passage. It was a well-coordinated effort.

I would like to give special mention to Officer Joseph Chic, an off-duty policeman and volunteer fireman in our district, as well as emergency medical technician. When word came that the bridge could no longer be locked in place and would have to be tied back immediately—and that the cross arm was broken—he took a firetruck to the island to block the causeway to any traffic attempting to cross and to be available for emergencies. He was uniquely qualified for this task. He was there during the storm and remained at his post for ten hours until the bridge was in service again.

I personally saw and talked with some of these people, and their one thought was the safety and welfare of others. It was a gratifying experience to see such selfless service, and we can count ourselves fortunate to be in an area where we have such dedicated people.

Mayor Mason Barber
 Sunset Beach

(More Letters, Following Page)

Write Us

The Beacon welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. Under no circumstances will unsigned letters be printed. Letters should be legible. We reserve the right to edit libelous comments. Address letters to The Brunswick Beacon, P. O. Box 2558, Shallote, N. C. 28459.

We Won't Soon Forget Big Storm Of '93

Much was made last week of the 100 or so cars with day visitors stranded on Sunset Beach when the bridge was tied off on such short notice during the Big Winter Storm of 1993, or as Jackson Canady's dubbed it, "the El Nino No No."

But there people on the other side of the bridge, on the mainland who, for one reason or another, needed to get back to the island. There was little reason to want to be there; the island was without electricity, the causeway overwashed and travel hazardous.

Saturday afternoon I got the picture I'd come for—wind-bent palms, waterway whitecaps and a tied-off bridge, and was about to leave when I noticed people sitting inside Alan and Peggy Russ' Island Cafe, even though the lights were off and a "CLOSED" sign hung on the door. It had become a haven from the storm for the temporarily homeless.

Huddling inside in strained camaraderie were 20 to 25 men, women and children who earlier that morning had been on the island and now could not get back. While mostly cheerful, you could tell the situation was beginning to wear on them all. Feeling helpless and out of control can be very stressful.

With such miserable weather in the forecast, I had assumed most people had 1) not come to the beach for the weekend or 2) left the beach for the weekend. Wrong in both cases.

Susan Usher



es. Sunset Beach Policeman H.L. Macon said island occupancy was about one-third, including many property owners, some golfers and some college students down on spring break. Then there were the day visitors drawn by brief bouts of sunshine or the compelling power of the sea during a storm.

A stranger opened the cafe door. When I asked if Alan was there, he looked at me blankly and said, "Who?"

But there were Alan and Peggy, playing host and hostess and waiting out the storm with the rest of the crowd. They could have gone home, but didn't want to turn out their guests, some of whom had been with them for hours.

Someone had seen me talking to the policeman or a DOT employee because the first question when I walked in was full of hope and to the point: "Are they going to open up the bridge?"

They played cards and watched

card tricks, talked about themselves and the storm, read the newspaper, listened to the ACC Tournament on Walkman-type radios—and took turns using the wall pay telephone to keep in touch with family members or group members still on the island. Their composure, their attitudes depended in part of their personal situations. Some had a few smiles left; some were getting ill and out of sorts. Still they all waited.

Missing persons. That's why most of them hadn't given up and gone back upstate or to a motel. They had been caught off guard by the storm, never anticipating conditions could become so severe so quickly.

George Jones and his nephew, Ernie Beck, had left for George's store that morning and couldn't get back across the waterway. George's wife, Mary, was at home on the island alone. Ernie was serious when he told me, "This is very frustrating."

David Peters was visiting from England as part of a golf foursome that included several New Yorkers. He and two of his three golfing companions left the island at mid-morning for a late breakfast, not aware of any need for concern. When they cruised back to the bridge at 12:30, it had just been tied off, with No. 4 of their foursome still on the island. Their only link, the telephone.

"We have the car and he has the

clothes. He's stuck over there with no food and no electricity."

"Does this happen often?" Peters asked, a general question encompassing the bridge closing, storm and power outage. "What do I call this? A severe winter storm? That doesn't sound bad enough. Why not a winter hurricane?"

His going vacation in shambles, Peters seemed anxious to be off a day earlier than scheduled, even if it meant returning to New York and blizzard conditions.

But for two couples from Winston-Salem, Saturday provided meat for family stories for years to come.

John and Meta Lofton and Sam and Mary Ceile Ogburn, island property owners who had rambled out in one car for the morning, were cheerfully telling war stories and making plans to spend the night at a Whiteville motel, then return Sunday for the other car and their belongings. They had already spent two hours at a hospitable Shallotte restaurant, with an offer of space to bunk down for the night if needed.

"This has given us lots to talk about and saved our husbands a lot of money," quipped Meta Lofton. "This is something we'll tell our grandchildren about."

The Big Winter Storm of 1993. It gave us lots to talk about, and to think about.



Shot At Clegg Hits County In The Foot

Whatever you choose to believe about the circumstances surrounding the resignation of County Manager/Attorney David Clegg, you can be sure of one thing. Brunswick County will suffer because of it.

As a reporter for various newspapers over the years, I have worked with the managers of seven North Carolina counties.

David Clegg stood out as the most intelligent, the most eloquent, the most dedicated and, I believe, the most principled county official I have encountered in a career field overflowing with uninspired bureaucrats, blatant opportunists and spineless "yes" men.

Unfortunately, that seems to be the nature of the profession. County managers know that they "serve at the pleasure of the board" and can be dismissed at any time or for any reason. So to survive, most managers keep a finger in the political wind, a packed suitcase under the bed and one eye on the classified ads.

Most county managers are motivated primarily by the need to make their board of commissioners look good to the voters who put them in office.

If the board got elected by promising a lot of jobs to a lot of people, the county manager who wants to keep his own job might arrange his hiring priorities accordingly.

If certain contractors were vocal supporters of the elected board, it might behoove the manager to give special consideration to those companies when drawing up bid packages for public works projects.

Some county managers thrive in such conditions. Because some are barely qualified (if that) for the position. They are hired simply because they know the right people or say the right things at the job interview. They know they will have a job as

Eric Carison



long as they do what the board needs done to stay in office.

After that, who cares? There are 99 other counties and hundreds of municipalities in North Carolina. Most have new board members every two years. The successful county manager merely needs to please most commissioners most of the time.

David Clegg was a rare exception. He was charming and flamboyant and clever and witty and he cared more about what was good for Brunswick County than what was good for the Brunswick County commissioners. That was his undoing.

Unlike most county managers, Clegg could afford to be himself and not compromise under political pressure. Because he didn't need the job. Most will admit that he was smarter than any of the board members he served. And everyone knew he could resign one day and go to work somewhere else the next.

The five commissioners who hired him were all Republicans. They recognized Clegg's qualifications and gave him the job, knowing that he was a Democrat and a strong supporter of then-candidate and now Governor Jim Hunt.

This made for an unusual relationship that might best be described as "creative tension." Clegg sometimes disagreed openly with board decisions and frequently gave the commissioners advice they didn't want to hear.

Former Chairman Kelly Holden says that on more than one occasion he and Clegg squared off and yelled at each other over some controversial issue. But the two men had the utmost respect for each other. Clegg accepted the commissioners' authority in setting policy and they stayed out of the day-to-day business of running county government.

The new majority on the board took office with marching orders from the Democratic Party leadership to get rid of David Clegg. Because he aligned himself more with those active in the state party than with the local good old boys, whom he openly disdained.

When the public expressed outrage over the plan to oust Clegg, the new commissioners backed off and let him stay on. But never once did they publicly seek his advice; not as an attorney nor as someone with nine years experience in Brunswick County administration.

As a result the rookie board members made numerous parliamentary (and arguably policy) mistakes in their first three months of directionless governing.

Then the Democrat commissioners tried to drive a wedge between Clegg, his employees and the public by prohibiting him from filling any "non-essential" positions. Department heads loudly complained that the resulting delay in hiring seriously undermined services, program continuity and morale, especially in the departments of health and social services.

Meanwhile, Democratic Party Chairman Bill Stanley called reporters to feed them a story he thought would discredit Clegg. The report was based on statistics obtained through a questionnaire sent to County Finance Officer Luthia Hahn.

To keep its source a secret, the letter was signed by a Brunswick

County resident. But its true author forgot to erase the computer notation at the top of the second page that read "Stanley to Hahn."

Now Stanley admits with brazen arrogance that the pressure to fire Clegg was "just politics." But only a fool could fail to see that those kind of politics will cause Brunswick County nothing but harm.

David Clegg was one of Governor Hunt's most active local fundraisers and supporters. Brunswick County would have benefited significantly by having an administrator whose phone calls were sure to be returned by the folks in Raleigh.

Instead, we will be known as the county whose own party turned on one of the governor's allies.

Hunt is not one to forget his friends. In his early runs for office, Hunt's campaign manager in Dare County was an enthusiastic but unsophisticated young construction company owner named Marc Basnight.

After the election, Basnight was appointed to the N.C. Board of Transportation. Dare County saw the re-paving of N.C. 12 to Hatteras, the five-lane widening of U.S. 158 and the construction of two new bridges, a state historic site and the multi-million-dollar Wanchese Seafood Industrial Park.

Today Basnight continues to look after Dare County's interests as President Pro-Tem of the N.C. Senate and one of Hunt's closest political allies.

On March 15, the day after David Clegg resigned, state officials determined that Brunswick had suffered the most damage of any North Carolina county in the previous weekend's winter storm.

Was I the only one who noticed that when the governor took a helicopter ride to get a first-hand look at the damage, he flew over Dare County?