

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Budget Presents Challenge For County Commissioners

The budget proposal submitted by Interim County Manager John Harvey holds enough surprises and packs enough wallop to be forever known as the "Monday Massacre" if it passes substantially intact.

Whether that's likely is anyone's guess. Harvey's budget letter to the county commissioners is sometimes logical, other times confounding. His explanations of it in interviews are, too.

On one hand, Harvey seems to have the admirable intent to streamline the management structure, grouping related services and putting them under managers who should be the best qualified for those types of supervision. He appears to be making a sincere attempt to relieve some bureaucratic bloat, though a budget proposal including a 10-percent tax increase can hardly be termed an economic purgative.

On the other hand, there are areas of extreme illogic. Not least among them is the recommendation to dissolve the library board, an all-volunteer panel which has no independent power to spend money, has never sought a stipend for its service and has performed diligently and thoughtfully in its first year of existence.

In one breath, Harvey professes to make changes in the county administrator's office as a professional courtesy to its next inhabitant. In the next, he refers to two women in his employ, both recommended for dismissal, in terms devoid of professionalism and courtesy—as "that one who belly-dances in a Greek restaurant in Wilmington" and "that blonde gal."

Perhaps most trying, and most telling, is Harvey's reference to the existence of "subliminal" policy directives and "ongoing" county policy. This exposes the absence of the well-understood county government mission which is the foremost responsibility of the board of commissioners. Policy can only be "ongoing" in a system where the bureaucracy is calling the shots. References such as these reveal that while such a budget may serve to eliminate a measure of fiscal waste, it is more than happenstance that some commissioners' personal and political adversaries will follow that waste down the chute.

Harvey's recommendations present this board of commissioners with its greatest challenge to date. To show Brunswick County's citizens what its mission and agenda really are. To establish that it is capable of exhibiting a positive direction, making decisions based on the greater public interest, and doing as well as undoing.

Do The Fishermen Care?

The newly-formed Brunswick County Environmental Coalition sponsored a public meeting last week on the status of efforts to clean up pollution in Lockwood Folly River.

The coalition was well-represented at the meeting. Federal, state and local officials were there to talk about what they've done and plan to do in the future to help the improve the river's water quality.

Conspicuous in their absence were Brunswick County's commercial and recreational fishermen, the people who have the most to gain if Lockwood Folly is cleaned up and the most to lose if it isn't.

Local commercial fishermen have never been shy about expressing their opinions on regulations and issues that affect their livelihood. But fishermen were remarkably scarce at last week's meeting.

Surely, government employees won't lose sleep over the troubled Lockwood Folly if the people who need it most, the fishermen, aren't concerned enough to attend a two-hour meeting. Based on what was said at that meeting, it's not too late to turn the tide on bacterial pollution and save one of the state's most productive fishing and shellfishing areas.

If local fishermen are truly worried about losing the Lockwood Folly River forever, they need to get involved before it's too late.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thanks To School's Talented, Tireless Volunteers

To the editor:

As the 1992-93 school year comes to a close, the parents and staff of Union Elementary School would like to express their appreciation for all the support given to the school by the many volunteers and the Executive PTO Committee.

The volunteer program was coordinated by Patricia Poulos, with participation by more than 150 parents and other members of the community. The PTO Executive Committee, under the direction of president Sam Edwards, coordinated and moved to completion many successful projects that have greatly benefited the school this year.

One of the major projects of the PTO was the improvement of the playground. The playground was completely redesigned. Fundraisers were

conducted to install new playground equipment and to furnish the school with a new sign.

Many thanks go to these talented and tireless volunteers of Union Elementary School: Sam Edwards, president; Dennis Earp, vice president; Judy Clayton, secretary; and Ellen Massey, treasurer.

There were numerous other projects that were spearheaded by concerned and interested parents. Dennis Earp and his wife Esther kept school spirit alive with the set-up and care of the campus aquarium and the T-shirt sales.

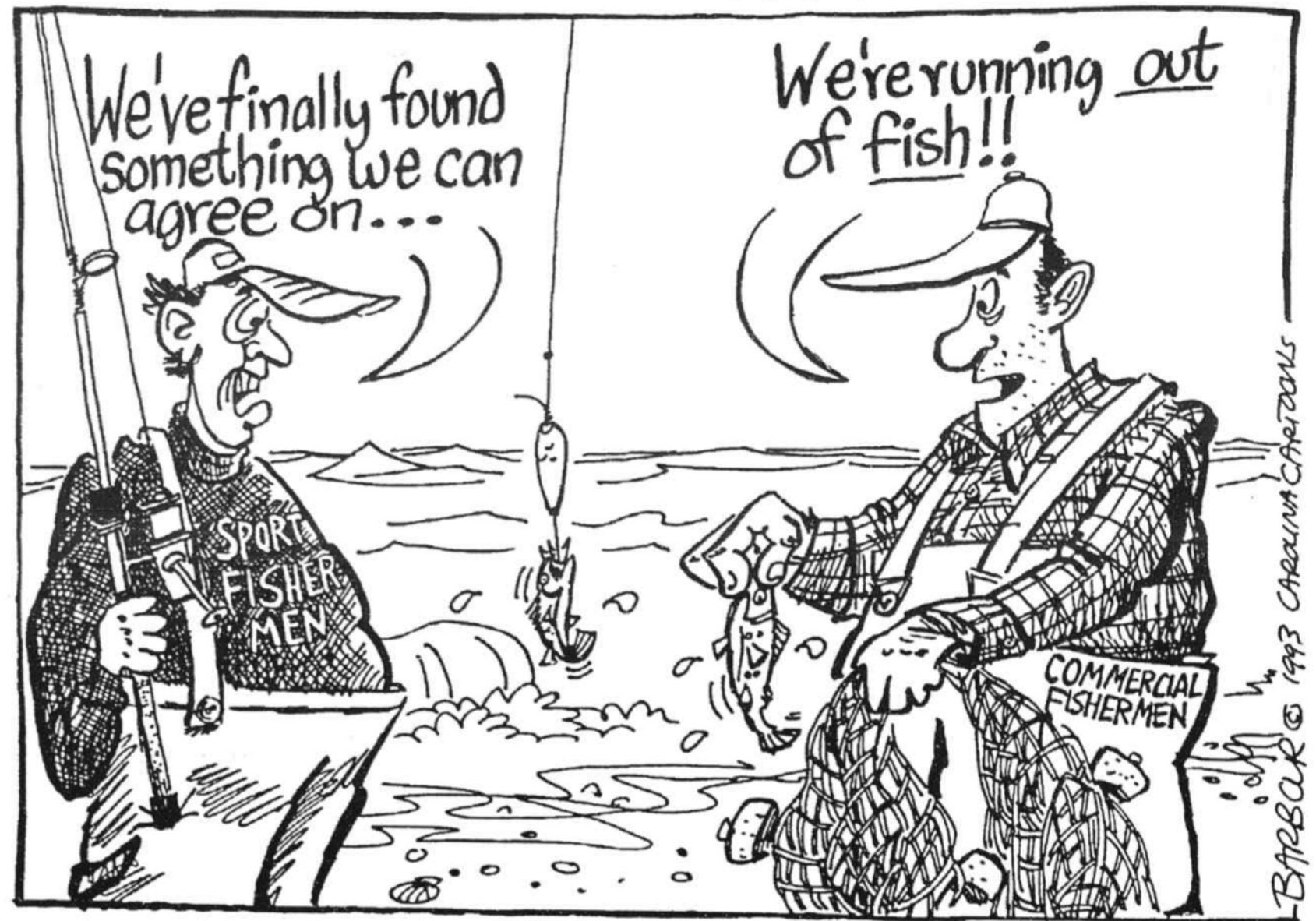
Connie Davis was instrumental in the organization of the first annual "Night of the Stars" talent show. Due to the time and energy put forth by Dina Gause and her committee, "Spring Fling"

was not only enjoyable, but a financial success. Our many thanks go out to these volunteers and our local merchants for their contributions in support of the school.

At the May 4 PTO meeting, new members of the executive committee were installed. They are Robin Gaskins, president; Debbie Bennett, vice president; Vivian Jordan, secretary; and Herbie Ward, treasurer. This committee will be surveying parents and teachers within the next few weeks. This input will serve to facilitate goal-setting by the 1993-94 Union Elementary School PTO.

Zelphia Grissett, Principal
 Robin Gaskins, PTO President

(MORE LETTERS, FOLLOWING PAGE)



Doers Or Whiners: Which Do We Choose?

Most of us respond to challenges in one of two ways: We adopt a can-do leader's approach and make a direct tackle, or we adopt a "woe-is-me" attitude, whining as we fade into the doormat.

Challenges abound, of course, they're the stuff of life. It's how we respond to them that matters.

Leaders abound as well, people who rise to challenges and gain a following of doers. Recently I've come upon several good examples of how individuals and communities can face common challenges: parenting, tourism development and revitalization of a mouldering Main Street.

At last Thursday's DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) graduation at Shallotte Middle School, Superintendent Ralph Johnston and DARE Officer Ronald Hewett could have been talking to any adult, because we are all role models for the young people we know. But they were talking to the most important role models a child can have: his or her parents.

Their message was simple: "Parents, you are the future for these children. They listen to what you say. They watch what you do. They want to be what you are."

What an incredible responsibility! A reminder ought to be on the bathroom mirror or refrigerator door of every home. Somewhere where parents can see it easily when making decisions, before they take the easy way out and do it themselves rather than teach their kid how to as-

Susan Usher



sume a new responsibility, before they buckle in and say "yes" to outrageous requests, for fear of losing their child as a buddy. Anytime they might forget that love sometimes requires being tough.

Dick Trammell, director of the North Carolina Travel Division, talked up another type of leadership in a telephone conversation last week. He'd like to see Brunswick County tourism and promotional groups take the lead in facilitating a regional (multi-county, not multi-town) approach to promoting tourism. Right now about the only regional effort that I'm aware of is the Southeastern Welcome Center out at the bypass.

But that first effort could be the groundwork for more working together. Trammell's idea is that two or more of our southern coastal counties should pool their resources, collaborate, to promote the larger area as a whole. Once they're hooked on the region, then various service providers (food, lodging, recreation, etc.) can compete for their business. It's an approach several mountain areas are taking, such as High Country Hosts in the Boone

area.

Trammell believes this kind of effort can result in longer stays in an area and repeat visitations and more business for everyone!

A third example is the little (population around 3,000) town of Viroqua, Wisconsin, whose business community generally had a loser mentality and was stagnating in a pool of self pity after a tough two decades in the 1970s and 1980s—even before learning that a major discount store was about to locate there. The four-block-long downtown business district had a dingy, rundown look, as though nobody cared. There was little unity, with merchants, town officials and professionals each going their own way—and often griping at and about each other. They moaned about high unemployment and welfare rates and low per capita income, taxes and all the usual things.

When news of the discounter came, some businesses closed up shop even before the store's doors were open, or soon after, in an almost self-fulfilling prophecy of doom.

Others, under the leadership of can-do optimists, set about seeing what they could do to stay in business in the face of a major threat. They found that working together was to their great advantage.

To quote an article on what happened next, the discounter, it appeared, "had been a wake-up call for Viroqua, a benefactor-motivator in wolf's clothing."

Retailers found if they reposi-

tioned their merchandise mix in the right niches, beefed up customer service and repair service departments, liberalized return policies, held more joint promotions and advertising campaigns, held more aggressive sales, and took a lower profit on certain price-sensitive items, they could not only survive, but even move ahead in spite of the new competition.

It wasn't easy and it didn't happen overnight, but the community learned to work together, calling on Wisconsin's state Main Street program (North Carolina has one too) for help in examining itself, setting goals, visualizing what should be downtown Viroqua's future. Then they set about raising the \$150,000 they needed to prove they meant business and did it in three months. Needless to say, they put that same commitment into their other efforts and were soon recognized as a Main Street town.

A local bank helped establish a low-interest loan pool for financing restorations, numerous types of downtown business promotions were organized. Over the next two years, 13 businesses were restored, new businesses opened and others expanded, and the number of jobs in town increased by a significant percentage. The tiny community, now confident and cohesive, is now raising money for a community arena for fairs, festivals and shows, and for a community fitness center.

No more talking like a quitter. No more "woe is me." Who says it can't be done?

In Defense Of Roadside Landmarks, Main Streets People Can See

It's almost more than I can bear. The Leaning Tower of Little River is gone, and the SS Belville is on her way down.

If the arbiters of taste and the builders of interstate highways have their way, there won't be a good roadside landmark left in this region—or at least one that anybody from out of town will see.

I understand that some of those newcomers to Little River thought the Leaning Tower was tacky. Well, of course it was, but that doesn't mean it deserved to die.

I'd be willing to bet that some of these tastemongers, before they settled here in the Sunbelt, were among those who rally to the defense of South of the Border every time South Carolina tries to regulate billboards.

"Herb and I pass through your area on I-95 several times a year, and we find those signs quite amus-

Lynn Carlson



ing—a delightful diversion when we're out of the range of cigarette outlets and Jimmy Carter fireworks stands."

Yeah, boy. "Sleep Weeth Pedro, Amigo" IS one of the great crack-ups.

In all fairness, it was the March 13 storm, and not the arbiters, that caused the partial sinking of the Belville; its plaintive "BABY PLEASE COME HOME" graffiti is now underwater, so you can be sure it's just a matter of time until you'll

look out over that memorable Belville skyline and find she's nothing more than a memory.

Roadside landmarks are important. In addition to giving one a sense of the familiar and a feeling of continuity, they serve another purpose. If you're on your way from here to Wilmington, your kids know when they see the Belville that you're almost there, so they can avoid asking a 34th time. Now that the leaning tower is gone, you'll have to get all the way to the new bungee arch before they'll stop asking how much farther it is to Myrtle Beach.

When I was a child, I knew when I saw the old cotton press on Highway 38 near Latta that we were halfway between Cheraw, S.C., and the beach. I knew when I saw the big shed with the slice of watermelon painted on the side that we were halfway to Charlotte.

People I met at the beach who lived in Charlotte told me they knew they were halfway there when they stopped for cheeseburgers at the J & K Grill in Cheraw.

It is not until I see the Simp's BBQ sign in Creswell that I know I'm within striking distance of the Outer Banks (and getting close to the Last Chance Texaco at the foot of the Alligator River bridge, final pitstop for at least 35 miles).

I know I'm in Tidewater, Virginia when I pass the Jesus Is Lord Steakhouse outside Chesapeake.

If the arbiters don't take it all away, the interstates will. I may be all alone in this, but I like to get to know towns by their main streets and not by the French Fry Alley out at the exit ramp.

Imagine driving from Wilson to Benson on I-95, then turning around and coming back on 301.

On the way there, you'd pass ramps leading to, and billboards advertising, Holiday Inn, Best Western, Shoney's, McDonald's—all the no-surprise sameness you'd expect on a piece of highway specifically designed to keep you from having to stop and take a look around.

I used to book banquets and tour buses at a Best Western off one of those ramps during a miserable but brief stint in a town that shall remain nameless. The motel was owned by a Kuwairi dermatologist from Cincinnati who had never laid eyes on the place.

On your way back, you'd get a feel for what once was—funky little family-owned motor courts with jazzy neon signs, and real roadside diners that probably had great Brunswick stew and some kind of dessert that was their very own specialty. It's all gone now, the diners closed and the motels turned into

the kinds of places you probably wouldn't stop at. But don't you miss them like they were?

I used to have to make the trip regularly from Hendersonville to Hickory. When I had passengers, I'd just hop on the interstate and take a mental nap until the trip was done.

But when I was going it alone, I'd take 64 East, through the Edneyville apple orchards, past the tacky tourist traps and backed-up traffic in Chimney Rock, around Lake Lure, winding into the foothills from Rutherfordton to Valdese to Icard to Hickory, paying attention to what was growing in the fields, looking at people working in their yards, passing court-houses and fire stations and country stores.

And feeling like a person with a place and some time, rather than just another hamster on a wheel.