

IF NECESSARY JOHNSTON WILL TAKE THE HEAT LATER!

Superintendent Of Schools Vows To Do What He Believes Is Right

BY SUSAN USHER

Facing perhaps his toughest decision since taking the job last fall, Brunswick County Superintendent of Schools Ralph Johnston told chamber of commerce members Tuesday morning he intends to hold firm to his principles, whatever the consequences.

"I'd rather do what I believe is right and let the chips fall where they may," he said. "I believe that if I do what is right, there will be enough people who will stand with me and support me."

If after doing what he thinks is best, "they want to crucify me, then so be it."

Speaking at the South Brunswick Island Chamber of Commerce's second small business breakfast meeting of the year, the superintendent said he had spent his first nine months here trying to build a foundation for excellence in education "on rock" rather than "on sand," as in the past, by developing with the school board and staff a common vision, a set of goals and a plan of action, along with the student discipline and personnel policies and procedures needed as the basis for future changes.

Johnston tied his remarks to the business community's interest in and need for a good education system—as an essential in producing a good work force and in making the quality of life in Brunswick County more attractive: "People do not want to come to live and work in Brunswick County unless there are good schools."

He warned that while the county is "running out of time" to make the changes needed, that there are "no quick fixes."

"To achieve excellence requires change, but change in a county like Brunswick (a former fishing and farming community) will come slower," he said, and quality education will require the setting of new priorities.

"What we care about shows," he said, "and something can be conspicuous in its absence."

It matters that families value education, he suggested, because what children learn at home during their preschool years "sets the tone for all else that happens."

While the first nine months of his administration have concentrated on foundations, with the selection—possibly today (Thursday)—of an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, that focus will shift to the classroom.



SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS Ralph Johnston (center) listens intently to United Carolina Bank employees Robbie Davis (left) and Glenn Humbert (right) following a breakfast talk to South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce members at Brierwood Clubhouse in Shallotte.

"This will probably be the toughest decision I've made in Brunswick County," Johnston said. Since teaching and curriculum are the "heart" of what the school system is about, he continued, "This is the most critical position that will be filled, in my opinion it is more critical than the superintendent's."

"My commitment to you is to bring in the most qualified person."

Johnston has interviewed seven candidates for the slot, five from outside the county system and two from within, and as of Tuesday was still doing a final check of background and references. Tonight he planned to present just one name for the school board to approve or disapprove, rather than a choice of several.

His frustration apparent, Johnston told the group, "We simply must hire the best people, not hire someone because they are our brother or our sister or be a good employment agency and hire only Brunswick County people."

Johnston didn't hesitate in describing his last two months in

Brunswick County as "the toughest I've ever experienced." During that period the pressures of unexpected budget constraints, intensive lobbying by special interest groups regarding hiring practices, and other factors influenced plans to reorganize system personnel and to institute a system of lead teachers.

Hiring two new principals from outside the system and shifting a black principal from Lincoln Primary School to the central office sparked opposition from the black community and renewed concern that the schools do not have an

"proper mix" of role models.

His talk liberally sprinkled with Biblical references, Johnston said that while Brunswick County has educators who are dedicated to doing a good job, he said, what they may have lacked in the past is a leader with a vision—and that "a people without a vision shall perish."

"Maybe that's why Ralph Johnston is here," he said, to help give their efforts focus and direction.

Among his goals: to get educators in the county's three districts talking and working together more closely,

and to encourage taking a systematic approaches to conflict resolution and building consensus.

"If we let rivalries and personal

agendas get in the way, then we will always be Brunswick County (as people now envision it)," he said. "I expect more."

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Group Sets Bahamas Mission

Thirty-two Brunswick County residents leave Wednesday, July 7, for a weeklong mission trip to Freeport, Bahamas.

Organized by Ocean View Pentecostal Freewill Baptist Church, the group is drawn from Ocean View, Lettice Grove Primitive Free Will Baptist Church, New Life Assembly and several other churches.

While in the Bahamas, said Dwarka Ramphal, pastor of Ocean View, the group will present puppet shows and a musical ministry at Calvary Temple Assembly of God Church and at Fellowship Union Baptist Church in Freeport.

These churches will observe the Bahamas Independence Anniversary Celebration Sunday, July 11, with Ramphal as the guest speaker at these services.

VFD Plans Breakfast

The Shallotte Point Volunteer Fire Department will hold a breakfast July 10 at the fire house on Pigott Road.

From 8-11 a.m., diners can choose from pancakes and sausage; sausage, eggs and grits; or ham biscuits.

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