

# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

Edward M. Sweatt and Carolyn H. Sweatt.....Publishers  
 Edward M. Sweatt.....Editor  
 Lynn S. Carlson.....Managing Editor  
 Susan Usher.....News Editor  
 Doug Rutter.....Sports Editor  
 Eric Carlson.....Staff Writer  
 Peggy Earwood.....Office Manager  
 Carolyn H. Sweatt.....Advertising Director  
 Timberly Adams, Cecelia Gore  
 and Linda Cheers.....Advertising Representatives  
 Dorothy Brennan and Brenda Clemmons Moore...Graphic Artists  
 William Manning.....Pressman  
 Lonnie Sprinkle.....Assistant Pressman  
 Tammie Henderson.....Photo Technician  
 Phoebe Clemmons and Frances Sweatt.....Circulation

PAGE 4-A, THURSDAY, JULY 8, 1993

## Bad Bill Would Hurt Towns

A proposal in the N.C. General Assembly to set uniform occupancy tax rules would have a devastating impact on South Brunswick Islands beach communities who use those funds to keep their property taxes stable and pay for important projects of their choosing. Occupancy taxes at Ocean Isle and Sunset beaches represent approximately \$300,000 a year in revenue for those towns. Holden Beach collects more than \$200,000.

House Bill 800 would require all towns with an occupancy tax of 3 percent or less to use at least two-thirds of that revenue to promote travel and tourism and the remainder for tourism-related expenditures. Towns with occupancy taxes greater than 3 percent would be required to use all revenues above the 3 percent to construct, operate and market convention or meeting facilities. Where the occupancy tax revenue is more than \$200,000, the tax would have to be remitted to a local tourism promotion agency who would determine how the money would be spent.

Currently, the three beach towns use occupancy tax revenue to fund a variety of activities, including promoting tourism through donations to the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce. In addition, Ocean Isle Beach puts about \$100,000 a year in a beach renourishment fund, a wise practice apparently approved of not only by the citizens as well as the town board. Holden Beach is using occupancy tax money to construct sidewalks, an amenity for tourists and residents alike.

Citizens who want their property taxes to remain stable—and who believe the use of occupancy tax funds should continue to be decided at the local level to fill local needs—should speak out against this bad bill.

## Welfare Reform Effort Rationale Is Worth Hearing

Welfare reform is popular these days, with the Clinton Democratic administration even coming on board.

But reform isn't new. States have been trying various approaches to ensure that welfare helps those not able to help themselves, typically because of disability and/or or extreme poverty.

North Carolina is among those states involved in reform, as it implements JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training). JOBS offers most welfare recipients a great opportunity to begin turning their lives and attitudes around through education, job training and related services.

The program is based on the premise that most people who receive welfare checks would rather earn paychecks, and when a participant begins earning a check, their family's benefits aren't cut off right away, but over a period of about two years, as the family increases its self-sufficiency.

However, not all welfare recipients would prefer a paycheck, perhaps because they've known no other way of living or because the daily grind of poverty and its associated ills has undermined and drained their life force.

So there are "sticks," sanctions that Brunswick County's Department of Social Services will be using more this year: Refuse or quit a job, or otherwise not participate and your family could see its benefits cut or eliminated for one or more months.

Sound harsh? Hey, it's nothing compared to what some other states are doing. In Wisconsin, benefits are also cut for mothers who bear more children than they can support. (The state also forces fathers to care for their wards and requires recipients to get job training.)

Maryland is moving into newer frontiers, tying benefits to other types of behavior considered "responsible" by society. What would you say to a parent who doesn't make sure a child gets basic health care services that the state subsidizes? Since March, Maryland's answer is to cut benefits by the same amount health care is subsidized, up to 7 percent of their check, or a maximum of \$25. The same thing happens if the state learns that school-age children are not attending school at least 80 percent of the time.

Why? The rationale discussed in an article by John Carlyle in The John Locke Foundation Inc.'s "Carolina Journal," merits a hearing. He writes, "The rationale for such punitive measures is self-evident. A good education is the surest route out of poverty—so when parents are negligent in ensuring a proper education for their children, they are cruelly condemning them to a life no better, if not worse, than their own."

"In addition," he writes, "the government has every right to ensure that the public's tax dollars are not subsidizing irresponsible behavior, the consequences of which are an additional financial burden on future generations of taxpayers."

The writer would like to see North Carolina embark on a similar reform effort based on encouraging self-sufficiency over dependency, beyond JOBS. It's an idea worth considering.

### Taking Care Of Your Own

Hopefully, the pride in being able to provide—however minimally—for one's family would make a difference, offer some incentive. And I know from firsthand experience that it sets a good example and teaches important values to other family members.

Throughout most of my childhood, our family would have easily qualified for public assistance, but my mother was too proud to apply for it, with lunch tickets at school the only exception in later years. It helped that she was smart and had been brought up not afraid of hard work. She passed on her belief in the work ethic to her children. She never felt anyone—especially the government—owed us anything.

She worked two and sometimes three jobs in order to pay the bills. Late at night she'd still be going hard, sewing or cleaning or balancing the household accounts. That pattern continued even after us girls were old enough to get summer jobs working in tobacco or waiting tables, and even after my mother became ill with cancer.

It would have been much easier for her to just give up and let the government do it. Instead, no job was too good for her.

She waited tables before the tourists came, when a good tip from a local was a nickel or a dime. She surveyed by telephone and door-to-door for an opinion polling company, sold insurance, worked behind the counter of a drugstore, worked at the school store and school lunchroom, sewed in a factory—any honest labor she could find. Her favorite job was her last, as a teacher's aide. Her unfulfilled dream had been to be a teacher.

Despite a backbreaking schedule, she still put a healthy breakfast on the table every morning, helped us kids with our homework, and made sure we got to school and knew that education was important.

I'm a Democrat and considered a "liberal" by some. But welfare reform? You bet I'm interested in it.

Susan Usher



# A July 4 Lesson In Dependence

July 4 is more than Independence Day for us. It's the anniversary of Paul's accident.

Eric and I met our friend Paul when we were in the restaurant business in Hendersonville. He was an optometrist practicing in the same shopping center. He was a single guy, a newcomer and, like us, trying to find friends while working six days a week in a town full of retirees.

We started spending our Sundays together hiking or driving in the mountains, either way getting lost, thanks to Paul.

He'd say things like, "Wait, turn here, because I went down this road/trail one time before, and there's this incredible field of wildflowers." We would turn and eventually—very eventually—end up overlooking a graveyard for rusted out household appliances.

"Paul took us down the flower road" came to mean among our friends that we listened to some knucklehead idea of his, though we should have known better.

One weekend we were all participants in a gigantic grown-ups' "camporee" in Pisgah National Forest, and everyone was supposed to bring a dish for the communal supper. Paul brought a dish, all right—a

Lynn Carlson



Pyrex casserole with an unopened box of pearl tapioca in it.

Another time, he called me from the neighborhood supermarket on his way to our house for dinner to ask if he could bring a friend. I asked him to pick up another bunch of broccoli while he was there. "Is that the stuff that looks like a brain?" he asked.

"Ah, no, Paul, that's the stuff that looks like a tree. Cauliflower looks like a brain."

The amazing thing about it was that you couldn't get mad at Paul—at least not for long. His ideas were always so innocently conceived; he just had a different kind of a world view and a tendency, when not at work, to leave the details to others. Besides, he was interesting, well-read and fun to talk to. He'd spent time in Tanzania and Costa Rica and took a trip to Prague just weeks be-

fore the fall of Communism. He had strong, and almost always unique, opinions on lots of issues.

That adventurous spirit had left him with some scars. He had a monorail on one leg from an old bicycle accident. And that tendency toward...well, goofiness, made him the target of merciless razzing among our friends. He came to call himself St. Paul the Persecuted.

Three Fourth of July ago, Paul didn't get back from a camping trip at Whitewater Falls in time to make our party. A phone call the next morning informed us it was because he had slipped while having his picture taken, falling 70 feet and landing in the water below.

He was so far in the wilderness, it had taken his companions two hours to hike out and call for help. The rescue helicopter had lifted him 600 feet in a basket. He was alive in the neuro/trauma unit at Memorial Mission in Asheville, but it didn't look good. He was in a coma.

For two weeks we made our pilgrimages to that creepiest kind of hospital ward. His doctors said any type of stimulation might bring him back, so we brought music tapes and encouraged his mother to tune in "All Things Considered" on the ra-

dio every day at 5, just as Paul had done every day we had known him.

We talked to him, touched him, told him we loved him and became woozy at the sight of him so still with his teeth broken and a tracheotomy tube in his throat.

About a week after the fall the neurologist told his parents not to expect him to make it. His brain was swelling and there was fluid in his lungs. Our pain was bad enough. Theirs was incomprehensible.

But another week went by, and one day Paul opened his eyes. In only a matter of days, it was apparent to us, though the doctors wouldn't say so, that he would be okay.

At first he had trouble talking, mixing up our names, saying "bus station" when he meant "airport," or needing help filling in the blanks as he talked. It made him madder than heck, and he got better every day.

Within a week of his awakening, we wept with joy and relief as Paul, with a little help from his father, walked us from his hospital room to the elevator. Within a couple of months, he was as good as new, back on the job, and as goofy as ever. But with a valid excuse now.

We learned a lot about our own dependence after that Independence Day. On friendship and on miracles.



## Things That Go Boom In The Night

Ahhhh...the smell of gunpowder in the morning. Smells like...patriotism.

This being Fourth of July week, our normally peaceful canal street has taken on the smoky ambiance of a hotly contested neighborhood in Sarajevo, or Mogadishu, or Los Angeles.

The rockets' red glare! The bombs bursting in air! Gave proof through the night that all the kids in every one of these rental houses have pestered their parents into smuggling enough pyrotechnics across the South Carolina border to blow Holden Beach off the map.

These amateur fireworks displays normally begin under close parental supervision, with fathers offering typical fatherly advice like:

"Don't burn yourself. Be careful. You might put your eye out with those things!"

But as the evening wears on, dad's patience wears thin. Soon the grown-ups settle down on their porches to share an evening of margaritas and memories, while small bands of junior commandos embark on a serious inquiry into the true raison d'être of all fireworks—to blow stuff up.

Blowing stuff up is a basic human need, with a rich tradition dating back centuries.

It is a little known fact that the development of gunpowder led directly to the invention of the tin can. Centuries ago, the Chinese found that placing a lit firecracker under a straw basket wasn't nearly as dramatic as putting one under an empty metal soup container.

Few people realize that our familiar bent-topped galvanized mailboxes were designed in such a way that they could be neatly flattened by a single blast from the old fashioned "cherry bombs."

The government and the fireworks industry (otherwise known as the military-industrial complex) joined in a symbiotic relationship

Eric Carlson



that helped stimulate sales of both bombs and boxes, an arrangement that grew to impressive proportions during the cold war years.

Patrick, our resident 15-year-old demolitions expert, displayed the typical childhood fascination for all things explosive at a very young age. He still talks about the July 4th when, at age six, his stepfather first allowed him "to blow up food."

After warning him of the potential ocular engorgement inherent in all explosives, I demonstrated the traditional repertoire of fireworks fun—lighting whole packs of Black Cats, shooting cans into the air, destroying model airplanes. Pat eagerly absorbed it all and was soon ready to try something different.

So he began to destroy items randomly selected from the refrigerator. He blew up hot dogs. He blew up Jello. He blew up a banana. He blew up cheese. He made quite a mess. And quite an impression on his mother, who was further reinforced her conviction that we were both very sick individuals.

When I was Patrick's age, a youngster could still get his hands on serious explosive ordnance. This was before all the horror stories of blown-off fingers led to legislation aimed at preventing kids from putting their eyes out with those things.

Left to its own devices, the fireworks arms race reached its zenith with the legendary "M-80," which was universally regarded by kids (without a shred of evidence) to be the equivalent of "a quarter-stick of

dynamite." Looking back, it is hard to believe that those things were really legal and that we used to "play" with them.

An M-80 was far too much firepower for blowing up models. Even the largest B-17 bomber or Nimitz class aircraft carrier would simply vaporize in the blast, leaving nothing but a smoldering crater.

You couldn't even use an M-80 for shooting cans into the air. Because the metal would be shredded into flying shrapnel before the container left the ground. Which wasn't much fun. But it did provide an introduction to the "Bouncing Betty" land mines some of us would encounter a few years later.

Naturally, for the committed teenage terrorist even M-80s grew tame after time. So a couple of friends and I decided to make a "really big bomb" using the powder from a couple dozen M-80s.

We took the largest of the plastic barrels from the old "barrel of monkeys" toy and loaded it with about two cups of flash powder. Then we inserted about five feet of waterproof fuse (allowing us ample time to take cover).

For the next week, we sat in front of the television after school watching "Mr. Rogers" and tightly wrapping our bomb with electrical tape. (Earlier experiments with smaller bombs had revealed the importance of a compressed charge).

Once complete, our bomb resembled one of those bowling-ball-with-a-fuse types commonly carried by cartoon spies like Boris Badinov.

We carried it down to the stream behind a friends house, lit the fuse and tossed it into the foot-deep water.

Standing behind trees about 30 yards away, we waited for what seemed like an hour. Long enough for us to start thinking that we'd wasted all that time making a dud.

Then the surface of the water erupted like Old Faithful with a momentous blast that momentarily left a 20-foot dry circle where the stream used to be. For the next minute, a driving rain fell through the trees as three terrified teenagers ran for their lives.

Within seconds, every front door in the neighborhood opened. Small gatherings of excited people formed in front yards. Eyes scanned the horizon looking for the expected plume of smoke.

Later, we found out that one of our parents' friends had heard the explosion, jumped in her car and drove madly to the local airport, horrified that her pilot husband had crashed his private plane.

We felt pretty bad about that. And needless to say, we laid low for a while. In fact, it was many years before any of us broke our vow of silence surrounding the event.

And of course, there were no more bombs. Like those shocked scientists who stared in disbelief across a New Mexico desert and beheld the reality of nuclear weaponry, we would never forget our first thoughts after witnessing the terrifying truth about our creation.

We could have put our eyes out with that thing.

## Worth Repeating...

Art is a human activity having for its purpose the transmission to others of the highest and best feelings to which men have risen.

—Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy

It takes a little talent to see what lies under one's nose, a good deal of it to know in which direction to point that organ.

—W.H. Auden