

Holden Beach Seeking Revised Fire Contract With Tri-Beach VFD

BY DOUG RUTTER

For nearly a year, Holden Beach officials were under the false impression that the town's water rescue program had been incorporated into the Tri-Beach Volunteer Fire Department.

Now that they know the truth, town commissioners want to renegotiate their existing fire service contract with the department so it covers both fire protection and water rescue service.

The town board approved a contract last August that would have placed the community's water rescue program under the direction of the fire department. However, Tri-Beach officials never signed the contract.

"We thought it was settled," Commissioner Jim Fournier said at last Wednesday's town meeting. "We performed our part of a non-existent contract."

Now town officials want to try again. Mayor Pro Tem Gil Bass said transferring the water rescue program from the town to the fire department would reduce the town's liability in case of a lawsuit.

Water rescue team volunteers would be covered by the fire department's insurance instead of the town's. "I think that's a positive for Holden Beach," Bass said.

The water rescue team, made up of volunteers from the fire department, Coastline Volunteer Rescue Squad and Holden Beach Police Department, was formed in 1991 following several drownings at Holden Beach.

The program is currently the town's responsibility. But the fire department has changed its charter to include water rescue service as part of its function.

Among the contract provisions tentatively approved by town officials last week is one that would require the department to keep water rescue equipment for at least three years. The old contract said one year.

Bass said the rescue boat and other equipment, which was purchased by the town, is too expensive to replace every year. "I would like to see that extended for two or three years. It would make them more ac-

countable."

Commissioners also voted to specify each year in the contract the amount of funds being provided for fire protection and water rescue. Holden Beach included \$20,000 for fire and \$5,000 for water rescue in this year's budget.

Some town officials say they aren't comfortable with a provision in the existing fire service contract that would allow the department or town to terminate the contract after giving 90 days written notice.

"I'd hate to be sitting down here with no fire protection and all our equipment sitting in Columbus County," Fournier said. "We're not protected. We need to be protected."

"We have no security," added Commissioner Gay Atkins, who opposed the proposed water rescue contract last year because of the 90-day termination clause.

If the contract is terminated, commissioners want the fire department to return any equipment purchased with town funds.

Other Business

In other business last week, commissioners:

■ Postponed the appointment of a regular planning board member until the Aug. 2 meeting. The board needs a replacement for Perrian Padgett, who has resigned. Sandifer voted against a motion to postpone the appointment after suggesting that Johnny Craig, an alternate member, be appointed.

■ Asked Parker to send a letter to state health officials asking them to test Holden Beach's finger canals to see if they are safe for swimming or too polluted. The town earlier sent a request to the county health department, but it was turned down due to budget constraints. County and state health officials are currently testing canals at Sunset Beach.

■ Received a petition to pave the dirt portion of Brunswick Avenue near Ferry Road. Harry Lockwood presented the petition on behalf of Canal Investment Society and W.F. Sledge, which owns the property along the road. Town officials recently "closed" portions of two unopened streets at the request of the company, which owns a large tract of land north of Brunswick Avenue.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Meeting The Founder

David Pickett of Shallotte, right, is introduced to Dr. Muhummid Yunus of Bangladesh at a recent Association for Enterprise Opportunities conference in Raleigh. Yunus founded the concept of micro peer group lending, which has been adapted by the U.S. Small Business Administration to help entrepreneurs in rural American communities. Pickett is enterprise agent for the N.C. Enterprise Loan Program in Brunswick, Bladen, Robeson and Columbus counties. The program is administered by the Rural Economic Development Center in Raleigh.

BAROMETER ON THE ECONOMY

Employment Rose During May

In Brunswick County employment rose 1.7 percent between April and May 1993, according to data compiled by the Center for Business and Economics Services at UNC Wilmington.

The center's monthly "Barometer On The Local Economy" showed 17,490 people at work in April, with 2,956 unemployed, for an unemployment rate of 14.5 percent.

During May 1993, 17,795 were working and 2,632 unemployed, for an unemployment rate of 12.9 percent. The statewide unemployment rate is 5 percent.

In May 1992 17,343 people were employed, and 2,544 looking for work. The unemployment rate was 12.8 percent. At the time the statewide unemployment rate was 5.6 percent.

Registrations Climb

New vehicle registrations rose 9.5

percent in Brunswick County between April and May 1993, from 147 to 161.

The May 1993 level was 17.5 percent above the May 1992 level of 137. For the year ending May 1993, registrations of 1,912 showed a 6.8 percent increase above the prior year. In the year ending May 1992, the county saw 1,790 new registrations.

Month Saw Decline

Between February and March 1993 retail sales in Brunswick County fell 5.6 percent, from \$35.7 million to \$33.7 million.

The March 1993 level was 19.5 percent above the March 1992 level of \$28.2 million.

For the year ending March 1993, county retail sales totaled \$392.5 million. That was 7.5 percent above the level for the year ending March 1992, when sales of \$365.1 million were recorded.

Renovation Bids Awarded For Union Classrooms Wing

Renovations of the oldest building at Union Elementary School near Shallotte are expected to begin right away and to be nearly complete before students begin school Aug. 30.

The Brunswick County Board of Education approved contracts Monday night for upgrading the circa 1951 classroom facility.

The 10 small, 693-square-foot classrooms housed third- and fourth-grade students last year, said Union Elementary School Principal Zephia Grissett.

Work to be completed includes installation of a new heating and cooling system to replace the aging boiler and window air units, as well as new windows and dropped ceilings. Some repairs were completed earlier, including recarpeting of the floors and roofwork.

Bids came in at a total of \$301,432, under the \$385,000 budgeted for the 12,400 square foot project.

"We do have the money for this

project?" queried board member Bill Fairley before motioning to award the contracts.

All contracts went to the low bidders, with six bids received for general contractor, and three each for electrical, plumbing and mechanical.

Graka Builders Inc. of Whiteville will serve as general contractor, with a \$163,000 base bid plus a \$7,000 alternate for cabinets. Other bids went to Anchor Electrical Contractors of Wilmington, electric, \$46,300; Watson Electrical Construction Co. of Wilmington, mechanical, \$70,850; and Williams Plumbing Co. Inc. of Wilmington, \$14,282, including \$927 to fix and reinstall a sink.

In a September 1991 report, the N.C. Department of Public Instruction said the classroom area was suitable only for short-term use. The Division of School Planning recommended phasing out use of the building, which it said was in "fair" condition and "of marginal adequacy."

Call May Have Been Phony

Authorities believe that an offshore distress call that sparked a multi-agency search off Holden Beach Friday night may have been a hoax.

Boats from the U.S. Coast Guard station at Oak Island, a U.S. Marine Corps helicopter, a Brunswick County Sheriff's Department spotter plane and a Coast Guard cutter searched the waters, but were unable to locate an oil slick or floating debris that would have been left by a sinking vessel, Sheriff's Deputy Lt. Carl Pearson said Monday.

Pearson said he flew search patterns up to 18 miles offshore for three hours with a Marine helicopter flying complimentary patterns overhead. They identified numerous boats in the area, but none appeared to be in distress, he said.

The Oak Island Coast Guard Station received a radio call at about 10 a.m. Friday from an unknown vessel reporting itself taking on water, Station Chief BMCS J.D. Arndt said Monday.

"The reporting source stated that he was sinking and this was his final transmission," Arndt said.

The transmission indicated that the boat was about five or six miles off Holden Beach, he said. The station launched both its 21-foot fast response inflatable boat and its 41-foot patrol boat to assist.

Coast Guard authorities also called Brunswick County 911, which alerted local rescue squads, the sheriff's department and the Marine Corps air base at Cherry Point, which dispatched its "Pedro" search-and-rescue helicopter. They combed the area throughout the day with no sign of the distressed vessel.

Oak Island's two boats returned to station at 7 o'clock Friday evening,

Arndt said. The USCG Cutter Point Warde continued searching the area through the night, after which the Coast Guard suspended further action on the case.

While no official determination has been made, some authorities said privately that the call might have been a false alarm.

In addition to criminal penalties, a person convicted of filing a phony distress call can be forced to pay the considerable fuel costs of search and rescue agencies, Pearson said.

In other Coast Guard activities last week, the Oak Island station received a call at about 12:30 a.m. Friday morning from the vessel "Lucky Lady" reporting that it had run aground on an old barge on the outer edge of the Intracoastal Waterway channel between the wildlife ramp and Sandy's Seafood.

The station's 21-foot boat investigated and found the Lucky Lady resting on top of the old barge. It was listing heavily to starboard, but was not taking on water, Arndt said. Three crew members were taken ashore and transported to Southport by government vehicle. The 21-footer remained on scene as a commercial salvor retrieved the boat on the next high tide.

Wednesday afternoon (July 21) at about 5:30, the station received a telephone call reporting that a vessel was disabled at the state port in Wilmington. The owner said he had tied his vessel to the pier and was calling from a pay phone nearby, Arndt said.

Because the boat and its occupants were not in any danger, the station determined that this was a non-emergency case, Arndt said. The owner moved the vessel back to the wildlife ramp by himself.

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County Hires Ten Teachers

A new cafeteria manager for Shallotte Middle School and 10 teachers were hired by the Brunswick County Board of Education for the 1993-94 school year Monday night, along with other routine personnel actions.

These teachers were hired: Ellen Carroll of Bolivia and Teresa Smith of Boone, Chapter I pre-K, Lincoln Primary; Kimberly George of Castle Hayne, Chapter I pre-K, 50-50 Supply and Bolivia Elementary; Barbara Sich of Wilmington, Chapter I and Reading Recovery, Lincoln; Karen Cayot of Supply, special education, Supply; Chris Laird of Wilmington, math, North Brunswick High; Cynthia Covil and Ginny Prigden of Shallotte, interim, elementary, Union Elementary; Mary King of Carolina Beach, elementary, Supply; Joyce Burroughs of Supply, interim, elementary, Supply.

Also hired were Elizabeth Aikman of Ocean Isle Beach, cafeteria

manager, Shallotte Middle; Rhonda Davis of Southport, interim, assistant finance officer, central office; Holly Powell of Long Beach, office support personnel, testing department, central office; Judy Williamson of Long Beach, interim, four-hour custodian, Supply; Jeffrey Dern of Southport and Marquis Williamson of Whiteville, interim, five-hour custodian, Supply; Evelyn Pigott of Shallotte and Debbie Lenon of Bolivia, six-hour custodian, Supply; Thomas Gardner of Bolivia, interim, six-hour custodian, Supply; William Mosley of Leland, truck driver and warehouseman for child nutrition warehouse.

The board accepted the resignation of Mary Beth Morris of Shallotte, a teacher of the academically gifted at Southport Elementary; and received a notice from Amy Pricer of Wilmington rejecting the offer of a special education position at West Brunswick and Bolivia Elementary; and approved one substitute teacher.

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