

# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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## Personnel Shuffling Looks Like Same Stale Political Agenda

The Brunswick County Commissioners were correct in quashing County Manager Wyman Yelton's behind-the-scenes request to hire former County Manager Billy Carter as a consultant to address county water, sewer and other needs.

In the first place, Carter appears willing enough to share the wisdom of his experience with Yelton and some of the commissioners without being paid any more county tax dollars to do so. In the second place, the county manager's job is by no means too big a task for one man, despite Yelton's frequent claims of being buried under the demands of the position.

Yelton's requests to his board are troubling on several levels. They are not, for the most part, fresh ideas. The notion of placing Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan under Emergency Medical Director Doug Ledgett is recycled from the June budget proposal of former Interim County Manager John Harvey. And the rumor that Kelly Barefoot would be relieved of her duties as county manager's secretary pre-dated Mr. Yelton's appearance on the scene by several months.

It seems obvious that Mr. Yelton didn't undertake the two demotions simply because his assessment indicated those were urgent things to do. His public rationale went like this: "The less people that answer to me over all, the better manager I will be for Brunswick County."

But anyone who knows anything about Cecil Logan's work habits and loyalties has a pretty good idea that Logan hasn't been hanging around Yelton's door looking for excuses to monopolize his time. As for Yelton's demotion of Kelly Barefoot, we can't help thinking of it this way: if you're a new manager overwhelmed by the complexity of the job, getting rid of your very experienced secretary is not a smart early move.

The only logical conclusion is that Yelton is feeling some pressure to implement a stale old agenda whose roots are in grudges and political posturing that existed long before he became part of the process. That's too bad for him, because when some of the proposals fail to gain majority support—even though he might have been assured they would—he'll be left to take the fall.

That's also too bad for the citizens of Brunswick County, because every minute devoted to petty politics is time that could have been spent on making county government more responsive and responsible to them.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Rose Says Cable TV Bill Is 'Pro-Consumer'

To the editor:

I have heard from a number of citizens recently who wonder why the cable regulation bill passed by Congress last year has caused their cable bills to increase. New rates established by the Federal Communications Commission went into effect in most communities on Sept. 1.

The cable reform bill is one of the most pro-consumer bills passed by Congress in recent years, but the intent of the law is not to turn the cable industry over to the federal government. In cases where a cable company can show that an increase in basic service rates is in line with the actual cost of doing business, increased rates may be allowed. What this bill will do is prevent cable companies who enjoy monopolies in their communities from overcharging consumers for basic cable services.

In 1984, Congress deregulated the cable industry with the hope that freeing up the market would promote competition, making the cost of cablevision less expensive. Eight years later, the average rate consumers pay for cable nationwide had increased more than 60 percent, far outstripping the rate of inflation.

The intent of the new law is to bring basic cable rates into line with rates in communities where competition exists, and to establish standards for customer service. In addition to rate reductions, most Americans are also seeing the costs of equipment and cable installation go down.

For those who have not seen their rates go down, it is important to remember that every cable system is different, and that there will need to be further adjustments to ensure that rates accurately reflect costs.

Congress will continue to work closely with the Federal Communications Commission to ensure that the cable industry is in full compliance with the regulations.

Rep. Charlie Rose  
 D-7th District, U.S.  
 House of Representatives

### We Deliver Even Without Address

To the editor:

A letter with this address was received at the South Brunswick Branch Post Office Aug. 30:

*To the people who live in the tan house on a cul-de-sac which is next door to a grey house on the corner where an old black Subaru is parked in the driveway on the back nine of a golf course community Calabash, NC*

We have found the party that it belongs to and have delivered it. This is your Postal Service in action. We deliver even if you don't have an address to go by.

With all our bad press lately we thought you might be interested to know that despite all odds we still do one heck of a job.

Marie Grissett  
 Postal Employee

### Make A Difference

To the editor:

This is a letter for the people of our community. We can do something about pollution in our town and other towns throughout America.

Men and women fight for our country every day. But still we continue to pollute the air we breathe and the water we drink. If you were to take a survey of ten people in the United States and ask them if they recycle, nine would probably say no. We need to give those men and women who are willing to fight for us something to be proud to fight for. We need to clean up America, starting with our own back yard.

Together we can make a difference. I'm encouraging each and every citizen to do the following: recycle, pick up trash along the road as you're walking, and don't burn chemicals that may be hazardous to the environment.

Nichole Reeves, age 11  
 Shallotte  
 (More Letters, Following Page)

# Living The Cable-Free Life; It Isn't Fatal

Charlie Rose—the congressman, not the PBS talk show host—says the confounding new federal cable television act is "one of the most pro-consumer bills passed by Congress in recent years."

Okay, but how come my bill went up a dollar and 40 cents?

Its purpose, Rose says, is to "bring basic cable rates into line with rates in communities where competition exists, and to establish standards for customer service."

That's very noble but, again, how come my bill went up a dollar and 40 cents?

It used to be so simple—even as recently as 18 months ago, when Eric and I lived on a mountainside a mile up a dirt road where cablevision feared to tread.

You plugged in the set, pulled up the rabbit ears, waved them around a little, and you got two channels—well, only one on a northwest wind, and both too snowy to videotape. You invested a buck in one of those circular antennas that screws into

Lynn Carlson



the back of the set, and PBS would come in clear as a bell.

I have to admit having been excited about getting cable television when we moved here. I'd never seen "Yan Can Cook" or "The Urban Peasant" or "Cuisine Rapide." Eric would be able to predict good surf by tuning into The Weather Channel's hourly Tropical Update. It was all so new and exotic.

It took us a couple of months to figure out how to set the "on-screen programming" features of the VCR through our 12-year-old television set; consequently we were pleasant-

ly surprised that, with just one experimental button flick, we got 31 channels instead of 12.

To that point, we'd hardly used the VCR for anything at all except to play rental tapes. It was like manna from electronic heaven.

But when the new wears off, you realize that having cable is like having a VCR or air conditioning or a car phone. If you're a reasonably well-adjusted person, you appreciate the extra comfort those amenities add to your daily life, but coping with the loss of any one of them is really not such a big deal.

That's why I have a hard time understanding why people get so fired up about their cable service, or lack thereof.

In my personal case, the cable television I get is more than adequate for my family's viewing needs. And if the infinitely wise Congress of the United States chooses to protect me, the consumer, by mandating that my bill be jacked a buck forty, I can probably fish

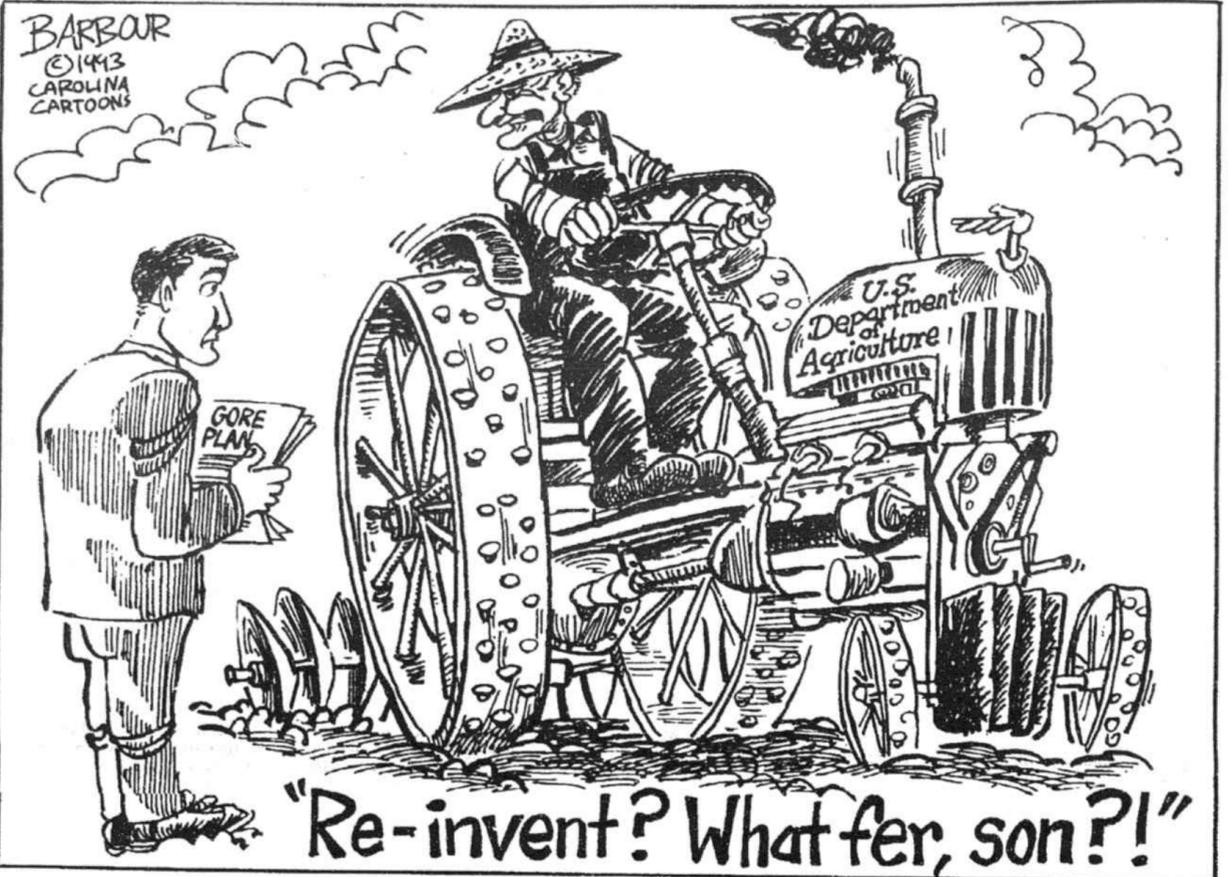
enough change out of the sofa cushions to cover it.

If, on the other hand, my cable service failed to satisfy me, or if I perceived my rate as exorbitant, I'd simply quit subscribing and somehow make do in this life with what came in through the rabbit ears—even if that meant no television whatsoever. I'd give anything if I had the same freedom of choice when it came to, say, car insurance.

Having cable is better than not having cable. Especially when it's a rainy Sunday afternoon and there's a Joan Crawford movie on TNT. And if you're wide awake at 3 a.m. and need help numbing your mind, there's nothing like the fare on late-night TV to get you slouching toward dreamland.

But it's not THAT much better.

As I used to tell my son when he was little and afraid to go to sleep after watching some scary show, "Settle down. Remember, it's only TV..."



"Re-invent? What fer, son?!"

## Lynch Mob Ought To Think Twice About Who Stands To Win Or Lose

It's been a long time since I've seen a verbal lynch mob in action.

All the group that showed up at the last Shallotte town board meeting lacked was a tree and a piece of rope. It was among the rudest and most self-centered groups I've had the privilege of witnessing.

Their chosen victim—General Manager Russell Price of Atlantic Telephone Membership Corp. They had him cornered; Price could either turn his backs on town aldermen, who he had come to address, or the crowd. Guess which he did?

He had been invited to the town board meeting to talk about cable television but didn't really get much of a chance as stunned leadership allowed the meeting to get out of hand.

One apparently well-intended town alderman had invited the out-of-town guests to attend the meeting, since they had an expressed interest in area cable TV service. For information, he said, so they could hear what Price had to say.

But that Tuesday night crowd didn't come to listen; they came to rant, to rave, to make below-the-belt shots at ATMC and to personally insult Price. Price took the blows like the gentleman he is and tried to answer their questions courteously.

It wasn't just what they said, it was how they behaved. Speakers yelled out without identifying themselves or asking permission to speak; addressed their remarks to Price, not the chair; interrupted Price and town board members while they were speaking. One local businessman set out to play a wicked "Guess Which New Technology I'm Thinking Of" game with Price that few in the audience could follow.

It was a pity party on a grand scale: Poor me, I have a \$1,000-plus television that came with all kinds of bells and whistles and it's all your fault I can't use them.

It seemed like all they wanted to know was when ATMC plans to get rid of the converter boxes that are "robbing" them of the technological capabilities that came with their ex-

Susan Usher



pensive "cable-ready" TVs—even if it requires ripping out and replacing every bit of ATMC's existing technology and passing on the cost to members.

For the audience members, their grievances are very real. They think they are "due" more and better services, like those provided by systems that serve larger towns and cities and have a much larger customer base and more densely populated service delivery area. They want no black boxes, lots more channels—and cheaper prices at the same time.

Call me provincial. I was sitting there thinking about all the people on the ATMC telephone system who still don't have any cable television service at all. They get to choose among three Wilmington stations and WUNJ. For me, getting cable to this group would be the highest priority.

But ATMC is nicer and is trying to do more for both groups. The changes were hinted at during the co-op's annual meeting last October and are becoming a reality: extension of service to new areas of the county while adding on another half-dozen channels and upgrading some of the system's basic technology. (Notice: the black boxes are staying, not going away.)

Change is occurring rapidly in home consumer electronics products—like those TVs manufacturers claim are "cable-ready" but that aren't compatible with the technology used by many cable providers, not just ATMC.

Change and advance are also bywords in the technology available to cable operators. Their choosing new

system hardware and software is like one of us trying to decide on upgrading a home or business computer. By the time a new system's installed, it could be obsolete. When do you jump in? At what price is it feasible, affordable? When is the old system not adequate?

Some ATMC cable customers are eager to invite in competition, to show ATMC what a "real" cable company can do. Competition can be healthy, but it's better when the teams are playing on the same field.

Other companies might be interested in franchises in Sunset Beach or Calabash, but I don't know of any profit-motivated company that would do what ATMC Cable did back in 1982: take on serving rural Brunswick when no one else would because there was no money to be made. The member-owned cooperative lost big bucks on cable TV over

more than half of the system's 11-year existence. It took those terrible black boxes and a growing customer base to start turning a profit.

Many of us still wouldn't have cable now if we had waited for a commercial company to provide it.

We can undermine ATMC's position if we like by refusing to grant the co-op a franchise in more densely populated places like Calabash and Sunset Beach or granting additional franchises to competing companies. Either would make it more difficult for ATMC's cable division to stay in business and serve the customers left in its more rural areas. It could push the price per customer up so high as to become unaffordable.

And that, for any ATMC consumer-member, whether they are served by ATMC's cable TV or not, would not be good news.

The crowd at that Tuesday night meeting is missing the big picture.

## Worth Repeating...

■ *This much I do know—that a society so driven that the spirit of moderation is gone, no court can save; that a society where that spirit flourishes, no court need save; that in a society which evades its responsibility by thrusting upon the courts the nurture of that spirit, that spirit in the end will perish.*  
 —Learned Hand

■ *I have learned silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet strange, I am ungrateful to those teachers.*  
 —Kahlil Gibran

■ *If I'd known I was going to live this long, I'd have taken better care of myself.*  
 —Eubie Blake

■ *Modesty and unselfishness—these are virtues which men praise—and pass by.*  
 —Andre Maurois

■ *The young man who has not wept is a savage, and the old man who will not laugh is a fool.*  
 —George Santayana

■ *A billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you're talking about real money.*  
 —Everett Dirksen