

PLAYGROUND FUND WAS STOLEN

What's A Penny Really Worth? Ask A Supply Elementary Student

BY SUSAN USHER

What's the value of a copper penny? Not much, by some people's estimation.

But for the 700 students at Supply Elementary School, pennies add up to a playground.

Two weeks ago Friday, students launched a drive to collect one million pennies, \$10,000, to buy equipment for their vacant playground.

Within a week, the first \$212 in pennies turned in by students had been stolen from inside the school. Principal Carolyn Williams could hardly speak through her tears Thursday morning over the school intercom as she announced the overnight theft.

"I thought about it a long time before I told the students," she said. "But I decided they needed to know what had happened to the pennies, which we had placed where they could see the number grow. And I decided they needed to know that there are some bad people in this world."

Assistant Principal Clifton Jones said he entered the front office Thursday morning and sensed that something was missing. "I stood here and looked. And I asked, 'Didn't I see a full jar sitting up there yesterday?'"

"It was gone. It was just gone. I couldn't believe it."

The pennies had been displayed in a container in a window of the office overlooking the hallway, where students could watch their numbers increase by the week.

Each week the individuals and classes who turn in the most pennies that Friday are recognized school-wide, to encourage participation and enthusiasm for the project.

"Despicable, there's no other word for someone who would steal children's pennies," Williams said of the perpetrator in an interview Friday, her tears by then hardened into anger over the students' hurt and disappointment.

Her voice was smiling, though, when she was able to announce to students that, thanks to the efforts of the "lots and lots of good people" in the community, the school had already replaced the stolen pennies, with contributions still pouring in.

"We were going to buy playground equipment, but somebody stole our pennies," explained fourth grade student Gerald Brock. "Now people come every day bringing pennies." He said his class has collected at least \$70 worth.

As volunteers like PTA member Pat Hewett spread the word through the community of the loss, local residents opened their checkbooks as well as their change purses, giving



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

FOURTH GRADER Gerald Brock says people are bringing more pennies to Supply Elementary School every day. First it was to replace \$212 pennies stolen from the kids, but the effort snowballed into something bigger: visible proof to the kids that there are more good people than bad in the world.

generously. "We want them to know that there are good people in the world, too," said Hewett.

By Friday afternoon, more than one jar stood in the front office. Pennies topped a bucket, spilled from pans on the floor, filled a large bottle and stuffed a giant baby bot-

tle. A staff member had headed to the bank to convert bills, checks and larger coins to pennies.

Though the pennies will remain where students can watch their number increase, anyone interested in stealing the kids' pennies in the future will have a much harder time of it.

"It's getting to the point it's going to be too heavy to carry," said Williams.

Plus volunteers are already designing and building a container that will hold all 6,000 pounds of pennies, and can still be rolled into the school vault each evening for safe-keeping.

"We have collected much more than what we lost. It's been just phenomenal what people will do for children," said Williams Friday afternoon as the penny campaign, by then the focus of community attention, topped the \$1,000 dollar mark. "We're a tenth of the way there. We are going to meet our goal this year. Some other schools have taken more than two years to do this, but we are going to do it in one year."

Supply Elementary School is a year old now, but still has only a small blacktop area for student play outdoors. The students and PTA are working together to prepare the site and purchase equipment, including basketball goals, climbing struc-

tures, swings and slides.

A playground committee has planned three separate activity areas for students: kindergarten and first grades, second and third grades, and fourth and fifth grades, with appropriate equipment selected.

But the project was much more than students simply collecting money to buy play equipment, she said. Classes were also using the growing pile of pennies in their communications and math studies. During the 180 days of the school year they will write about the pennies and the playground project, count pennies, estimate numbers of pennies and perform countless other arithmetic calculations using pennies.

"It was part of a learning process," said Williams. "We wanted them to experience, to see, what one million of something was. And pennies were about as small a thing you can get that's worth collecting."

With the theft of their pennies, Supply Elementary School's students dents learned a harsh lesson in good and evil that faculty members hadn't counted on.

As of Tuesday afternoon, Detective Gene A. Caison of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department said he had one suspect under investigation in the case, but was not ready to make an arrest.

Commissioner, Former Manager Differ About Water Agreement's Value

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County for its initial investment.

"That is just absurd," Clegg said when asked about Vereen's charges. "It's nonsensical. I don't know where he's coming from, if anyone does. It's just stupid. If he's got a charge to make, I suggest that he get right down and make it."

Clegg said he helped negotiate the agreement "because it was a stated policy of the board of commissioners that they wanted that money back." He called the arrangement "a good deal" for the county because it provided cash to pay off other water debts. And over the long haul, he said the authority's debt will be shared by other water customers.

He said Brunswick County should not see any significant increase in water rates as long as the authority keeps a tight rein on its budget.

County Finance Officer Lithia Hahn said Tuesday that the county is currently paying less for raw water—by very small amount—than it did before the repayment deal was signed. She said she has not been asked to do a cost/benefit analysis of the deal and could not give an opinion about Vereen's claims.

The \$3.7 million returned to the county last March was used to retire old water revenue bonds obtained by the county through the Farmers Home Administration. The first installment of the \$1.7 million disbursement was budgeted for water projects that will extend service to Shell Point, Sunset Harbor, along Mt. Misery Road and other areas of the county.

"If this was such a bad deal and

they don't want that money, then why are they spending it like there's no tomorrow?" Clegg said. "You can't spend money like its falling out of heaven and damn the messenger that brought it."

"I don't know why they should be listening to Billy Carter. He hasn't even been to a meeting (of the authority)," Clegg said. "Why don't they call Gene Pinkerton or Dick Marshall or Alton Milliken, who are Brunswick County members who participated in the votes that led to this agreement?"

Carter will take his seat on the authority at its next quarterly meeting Oct. 11.

In other business the board:

■ Heard a request from the Southeastern Mental Health Center for the donation of land to build a children's center and playground in Bolivia using a \$200,000 grant it hopes to receive from the state. The county would also be expected to maintain the facility and pay its utility expenses. Commissioners Chairman Don Warren said the board "would probably like to see this," but needed to study the proposal further before making a decision.

■ Authorized Economic Development Commission Director Tom Monks to apply for a \$8,500 loan to the American Hose Company through the state community development block grant program. The money will be used to purchase machinery.

■ Denied the town of Sunset Beach request that the county take possession of its elevated water storage tank.

noon at the Leland Veterinary Hospital in Clairmont Plaza.

In what is being termed a multi-state epidemic, a record 50 cases of rabies have been confirmed in North Carolina this year, more than double last year. South Carolina is running 20 cases ahead of last year, with 110 infected animals reported.

Horry County, S.C., health officials have identified 12 rabid animals this year. Columbus County leads North Carolina in the number of rabies cases among animals with 13 reported, while 10 people have had to undergo painful, expensive treatment for rabies exposure.

Health officials are especially concerned that the coming of hunting season will bring more dogs in contact with wild animals as their owners take to the woods. A single bite by an infected animal could quickly spread rabies to a hunter's entire pack of dogs, requiring that they all be destroyed.

Animals carry rabies in their salivary glands and can transfer the disease through bites and scratches. The virus is then carried to the brain, where it destroys the central nervous system and causes the animal to exhibit strange and often vicious behavior.

If left untreated, rabies is always fatal. Persons infected (or suspected of being infected) must undergo a four-week series of shots that can cost between \$500 and \$900, depending on body weight.

Shalotte Board May Ease Sign Restrictions

BY DOUG RUTTER

Shalotte officials are considering changing a zoning rule that allows some Main Street businesses to have 40-foot-high signs while restricting others to 6 feet.

Aldermen will conduct a public hearing at their Oct. 5 meeting on a proposal to amend the zoning ordinance so sign regulations are the same for Central Business and Highway Business districts.

Under the current code, merchants in the Central Business district can't have signs higher than 6 feet or larger than 32 square feet.

In Highway Business, the height limit is 40 feet and signs may be up to 50 square feet.

Alderman Wilton Harrelson suggested at Tuesday night's town meeting that sign regulations be the same in both districts. "It's discriminatory from one end of the street to the other," he said.

The Central Business district extends from Al Street to just south of the Shalotte River bridge on Main Street. Most other lots along Main are zoned Highway Business.

The issue was raised during a public hearing on a variance from the sign regulations that was requested by First Citizens Bank, which is to be located in the Central Business district when the bank merges with Pioneer Savings.

Representative Julius Crocker said the bank is

in the process of changing signs for all of its facilities in North Carolina.

For its Shalotte location, Crocker said bank officials want either a 45-square-foot sign that stands 15 feet high, or a 65-square-foot sign that stands 18 feet.

Town officials did not make a decision on the variance Tuesday night. If they amend the zoning ordinance following the Oct. 5 hearing, a variance may not be necessary.

Sewer Improvements

By the end of the month, Shalotte should complete improvements at its sewer plant that will provide the town with treatment capacity for 206,800 gallons of wastewater per day.

Finley Boney of Raleigh, consulting engineer for the sewer system, reported Tuesday that some nozzles in the spray fields have been replaced and about 100 new nozzles should be added by Sept. 30.

Boney also said he is negotiating with officials from Federal Paper Board and Carnegie Steel for additional property that would allow the town to expand its capacity in the future.

"This is not something that we can vote on tonight, but there have been very positive developments in the last week to 10 days," Boney told the town board.

Boney said there's a possibility the town could work out an arrangement that would allow

Shalotte to use property for spray irrigation while Federal Paper harvests the trees.

"We can scratch each other's back is what it amounts to," he said. "They can't grow a pine tree on those sand hills, but if we irrigate it they can."

Planning Board Chairman Carson Durham said system expansion and reduction of spray field buffer zones were among the issues discussed at a town sewer committee meeting Monday.

Other Business

In other business Tuesday, aldermen:

■ Adopted a resolution asking the N.C. Department of Transportation to widen and improve Smith Avenue. Town officials say traffic has increased on the road since the U.S. 17 Shalotte bypass was built. It is one of two side streets that link Main Street and the bypass.

■ Continued discussing the need for improvements at the Shalotte Post Office. Aldermen would like to see the post office moved to a new location in town, possibly to one of the shopping centers, due to parking and traffic problems at the existing site.

■ Voted to refund \$322 in taxes to Portent Inc. Tax Collector Sandy Hewett said the company was billed for property it does not own. A portion of the refund will be applied to the company's 1992 taxes.

Smoking Plan Public Hearing Topic

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of efforts to regulate exposure to second-hand smoke, which has been classified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a "Class A carcinogen."

Jim Innes of Shalotte told the group that he "used to love tobacco" and smoked cigarettes and cigars "for 40 years." Then, about nine years ago, he said he was forced to give it up.

"If I sound a little hoarse, it's because I have cancer of the throat," Innes said, displaying the scar just below his neck. "Government controls the purity of the food you eat and nobody argues. It regulates what goes into the water you drink. Is there anything different about the air you breathe?"

Susan Gibble of Holden Beach, a physician's assistant and partner in a health care business, stressed the need to reduce the exposure of children to second hand tobacco smoke.

"I make my living from smoking, too," she said. "If everybody really did quit smoking, I'd go out of business. But I'm not here as a health care giver or a businesswoman. I'm

here for my kids. Please pass this ordinance, knowing that you will benefit your kids, my kids and your grandchildren too."

After the hearing, Health Board Member Dr. Brad Kerr, who chaired the smoking rules committee, said he found "nothing that glaring" in the opposition expressed, but hinted that he is willing to consider some changes in the proposed rules.

"I think maybe some of the rules could be phased in over time," Kerr said. "And I think we need to think about making some changes in enforcement. It needs to be directed at the individual breaking the law rather than the business establishment."

That was a concern raised at a recent health board meetings by member Patrick Newton, who said Tuesday that he had prepared a detailed list of changes he plans to propose at the board's next meeting.

"I think what we have is too restrictive," Newton said. "I am not totally against this. But I would like to see it applied primarily in public places, not in private businesses. It needs to be made more palatable. It's not going to pass like it is."

Member Dr. Jeffrey Mintz said he thought that comments expressed at the hearing would result in changes to the proposed regulations.

"In the long run, I would like to see some kind of smoking regulations. But whether it's this rule or an amended proposal, we'll have to wait and see," Mintz said.

"People have strong opinions about whether they want smoking in businesses," he said. "Maybe we need to give small businesses more of a choice."

The health board is expected to act on the proposed smoking regulations at its next meeting on Oct. 11. Legislation recently passed by the N.C. General Assembly prohibits local governments from adopting any smoking control rules after Oct. 15 that are more stringent than those outlined in the new state law.

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Warm Weather Said To Continue A Few More Days

(Continued From Page 1-A)

at the Brunswick Animal Hospital, U.S. 17, Supply, from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. at Companion Animal Hospital in East Gate Square, Shalotte; between 8:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. at Seaside Animal Care on Carter Drive, Calabash; and from 8 a.m. until

Shalotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady expects temperatures to range from the mid-60s at night to the mid-80s during the day. The forecast calls for normal rainfall, about one-half inch in the next week.

For the period Sept. 14-20, Canady measured .87 inches of rainfall and recorded a daily average temperature of 78 degrees, which was about 4 degrees warmer than normal.

The maximum high reading during the period was 91 degrees on Sept. 15, and the minimum low was 62 degrees on the 20th.

Canady said the daily average high was 87 degrees and the average nightly low was 70 degrees.