

**ENFORCEMENT BEGINS OCT. 1**

# Troopers Expect More Arrests, Convictions From Stiffer Law

BY ERIC CARLSON

Remember Otis Campbell of Mayberry, the lovable town drunk and habitual tenant of Sheriff Andy Taylor's jail?

Unfortunately, a lot of people still cling to the image of the stumbling, slurring Otis when they think of what used to be known as "drunk driving."

Nowadays it's called "driving while impaired." And beginning at one minute after midnight Friday morning, anyone who doesn't know the difference is likely to learn a very hard lesson.

"You don't have to be like Otis to have your driving impaired by alcohol. People need to get that idea out of their heads," said Sgt. Anthony Midgett, the N.C. Highway Patrol supervisor for Brunswick County. "Nobody is saying you have to be drunk. You start losing a lot of judgment and motor skills long before you get to that point."

Under a new state law that becomes effective Oct. 1, the threshold at which a driver is considered ille-

gally impaired by alcohol will be lowered from a blood alcohol content of .10 to a level of .08. The change is expected to result in a marked increase in the number of convictions for driving while impaired.

It's a change being applauded by law enforcement agencies throughout the state who say it has been difficult to get convictions for DWI charges when offenders register blood alcohol levels on or near the legal threshold, despite mounting evidence that a driver with a BAC of .10 is incapable of operating a vehicle safely.

The new law means that if a driver registers a blood alcohol level of .08, that evidence alone will be sufficient for a conviction. The change is expected to result in more arrests and more convictions because, under the old law, drivers who blew a .09 or .08 were often released with a warning.

"We welcome the change," said Midgett. "We believe that alcohol

*"This .08 BAC law will have a positive impact on our efforts to reduce drunk driving."*

—R.A. Barefoot, N.C. Highway Patrol Commander

consumption at any level has no place in the operation of a motor vehicle. There are studies that indicate that impairment actually starts at a level of .03."

Midgett said there will be no "grace period" before the new level is enforced. No warnings will be issued to drivers whose BAC falls between the old and new levels.

"If I stop you at one minute after midnight, you will be charged under the new law," Midgett said.

Troopers across the state plan to step up their efforts to catch impaired drivers as soon as the new law takes effect, according to N.C.

Highway Patrol Commander Col. R.A. Barefoot. Beginning Oct. 1, the highway patrol will increase the number of checkpoints where drivers are routinely stopped and screened for impairment.

"This .08 BAC law will have a positive impact on our efforts to reduce drunk driving," Barefoot said. "Initially, the new law will probably result in more arrests because some borderline offenders have gotten off in the past. In the future, we hope the new law will reduce the number of offenses and result in safer highways."

North Carolina is the 10th state to

enact the lower .08 blood alcohol limit. California experienced a 12-percent decline in highway fatalities in 1990 following enactment of the lower threshold.

Joe Parker, director of the governor's highway safety programs estimates that if the new law reduces North Carolina's alcohol-related fatalities by 10 percent, it would save 54 lives and result in some 1,300 fewer traffic accidents. Last year

534 people were killed in North Carolina in crashes involving drivers impaired by alcohol.

Parker refuses to call alcohol-related crashes "accidents."

"Driving while impaired is a criminal act," Parker said. "It is an act of great social irresponsibility. Such an act may be called many things. It is unwise. It is a willful act of harmful conduct. But it is certainly not an accident."

## Whiteville Woman Charged With Possessing Stolen Sample Drugs

A routine drunken driving stop by a Sunset Beach police officer Sunday night resulted in the arrest of a Whiteville woman on charges of possessing stolen prescription drug samples.

Senior Patrol Officer Anna Dosio charged 36-year-old Sue Ellen Chandler of Whiteville with driving while impaired, possessing stolen goods and possessing prescription medications without a valid prescription, Police Chief J.B. Buell said Monday.

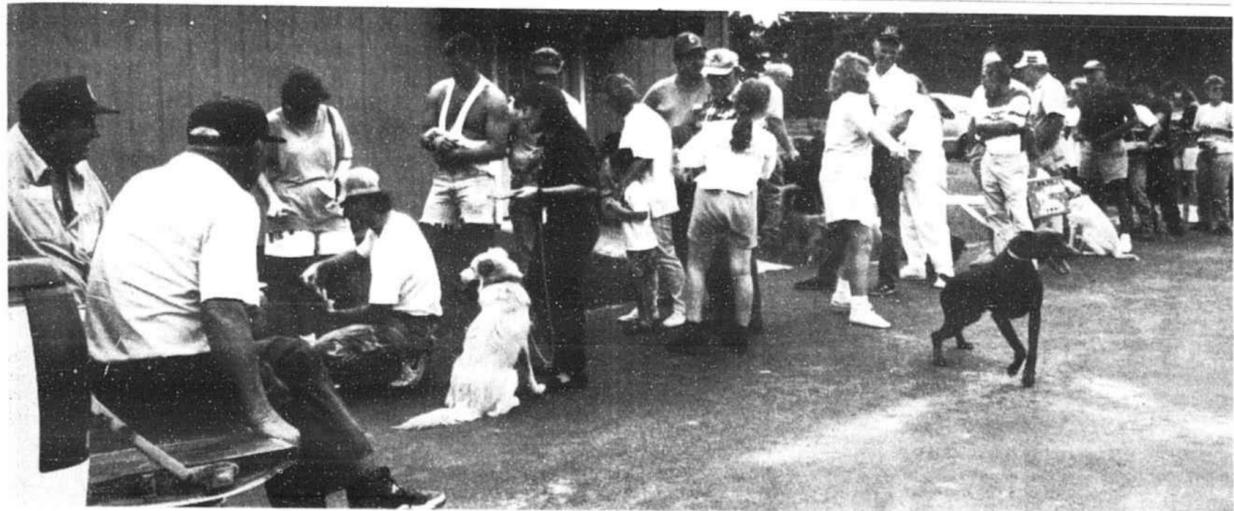
"The suspect threw a beer can out the window right in front of Officer Dosio," Buell said. "She was pulled over just past the Food Lion on N.C. 904 and given a roadside sobriety

test, then was taken to the jail in Bolivia for a breathalyzer test."

In the process of checking the car before it was towed, Dosio found a trash bag under the seat containing 38 sample bottles of Naprosen and Anaprox, non-narcotic anti-inflammatory drugs used to treat such ailments as back aches and arthritis, Buell said.

"The suspect said they had been given to her by doctors she worked for, but when the doctors were contacted, they said no," Buell said. A spokesman for the Wilmington Orthopedic Group, where Chandler had once worked, estimated the value of the medicines at \$700.

Buell said Chandler was free Sunday after making bond of \$500.



STAFF PHOTO BY LYNN CARLSON

### Lining Up Two By Two

Dog, cat and even ferret owners queue up Saturday to have their pets vaccinated against rabies at Brunswick Animal Hospital in Supply. More than 1,000 animals were protected against the disease at four rabies clinics throughout Brunswick County. Authorities said public awareness was heightened by the news last week that two raccoons in the Ash area tested positive for the disease. The story is on Page 1-A.

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