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Oyster Season Begins Friday With New Limits On Fishermen

BY DOUG RUTTER

Brunswick County shellfishermen will face stricter harvest limits than ever when oyster season opens Friday along the North Carolina coast.

In an effort to preserve a shrinking oyster population, the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has set daily commercial limits of 5 bushels per person and 10 bushels per boat.

The season officially opens Friday at sunrise, but local harvesters won't be clogging area rivers in search of their traditional first-day feasts until mid-afternoon.

Low tide on Friday will be around 2:27 p.m. at Lockwood Folly Inlet and 3:07 p.m. at Shalotte Inlet.

Tight restrictions are nothing new to local shellfishermen, who have had to deal with increasingly strict harvest limits in recent years.

Just four years ago, oystermen were allowed to harvest as many as 50 bushels per boat per day. The limit was slashed to 7 bushels per person and 14 per boat three years ago.

"There have been a lot of requests to lower it a little bit to make it last longer," said Rich Carpenter, southern district manager with the Division of Marine Fisheries.

Even with the new limits, longtime fisherman Herbert "Midget" Varnum of Varnamtown doesn't have high hopes for the 1993-94 season.

"I don't expect nothing," he said Tuesday. "There may be a few for the first two or three days but that's going to be it."

Brunswick County commercial fishermen have done well the last two oyster seasons. They harvested 90,131 pounds of oysters last season with a value of \$353,501, according to state statistics.

Those numbers are up sharply from the late 1980s. The county's commercial oyster-

BRUNSWICK COUNTY COMMERCIAL OYSTER HARVEST

Season	Pounds	Value
1983-84	97,927	\$133,532
1984-85	85,155	\$141,517
1985-86	89,313	\$192,567
1986-87	99,680	\$234,588
1987-88	44,015	\$114,923
1988-89	77,044	\$215,089
1989-90	63,654	\$220,040
1990-91	64,325	\$237,370
1991-92	116,515	\$427,911
1992-93	90,131	\$353,501

Source: N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries

men harvested an average of 62,185 pounds per season from 1987-88 to 1990-91. The

average has jumped to 103,323 pounds over the last two seasons.

Carpenter warned that the local harvest could be down somewhat this year. "We had a fairly good season last year so that usually takes a toll on it," he said last week.

"We have fair numbers of oysters out there now, but a good number of them are undersized," Carpenter added. "Early on it won't be so good. We should have more later in the season."

The weather will be a key factor in determining what kind of season fishermen have. If it rains a lot this winter, shellfish waters will be closed because of stormwater runoff pollution.

"Last year we were fortunate we didn't have a lot of closures during the season," Carpenter said. "Some winters you have a lot of rain and you have to close the oyster beds, but we were lucky last year."

Dermo, a parasite that is harmless to hu-

mans but can kill oysters, remains a threat to North Carolina fishermen. It was blamed for killing lots of local oysters a few years ago.

Carpenter said biologists are still detecting the parasite in area waters, but they have not seen many pockets of dead oysters.

If Dermo is going to cause problems during oyster season, Carpenter said biologist usually see deaths in August and September. They didn't see that this year.

Besides stricter harvest limits, oystermen also must deal with a new state regulation requiring them to fasten tags to all containers in which shellfish are transported.

Tags must include the fisherman's name, address and shellfish license number; date and location of the harvest; and the type and quantity of shellfish harvested.

The tags, required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, are expected to help health officials identify sources of contaminated shellfish.

Ulrich Hired As Holden's Town Manager

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach Commissioners, who received applications from as far away as Vermont and Florida from people interested in being town manager, have decided to hire a man who lives less than two miles from town hall.

Gus Ulrich, interim manager since Aug. 5 and who previously served a 1 1/2-year stint as manager, was hired at the close of an emergency meeting last Friday.

"He has the experience," Commissioner Gay Atkins said. "He lives here and has had the opportunity since the first time he was manager to get a better understanding of coastal living."

Ulrich served as town manager from January 1989 until August 1990 and has served two stints as interim manager, including the most recent one. Before coming to Holden Beach, he was town manager in Garner for 17 years.

Ulrich said he decided to apply for the position shortly after he was hired as interim manager. He fills a vacancy created when Gary Parker resigned two months ago under pressure from the town board.

"I felt like I wanted to get back into the work I was doing before," Ulrich said. "I found that I missed it after a couple of years away from it. When you do something for most of your life it's hard to get away from it."

Commissioner Sid Swarts said Ulrich's familiarity with the community is a big advantage for Holden Beach.

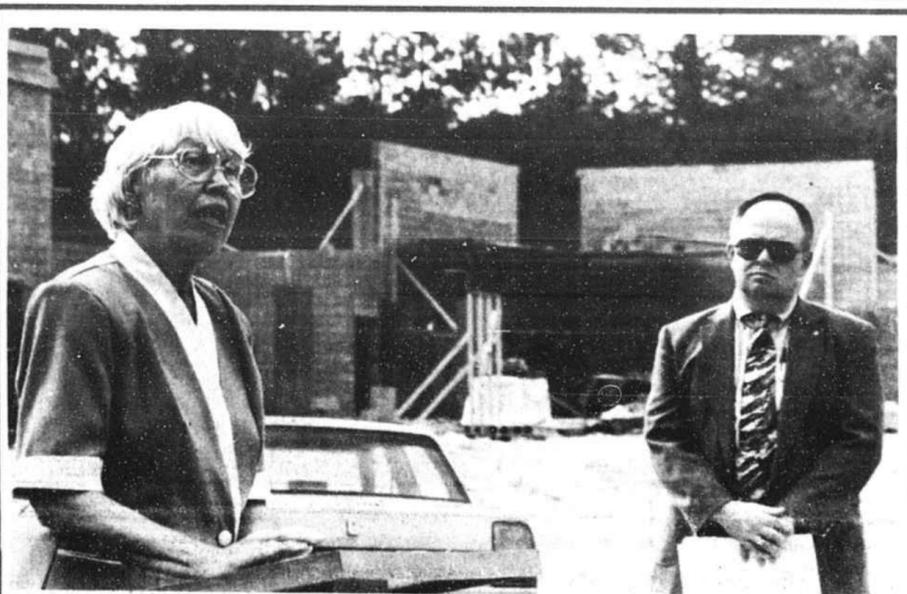
"He's very familiar with the island, he knows the people and he knows the problems," Swarts said last week.

"Anybody coming in here new has a problem getting to know the people and the problems. They don't realize the importance we put on certain things here," he added.

Mayor Pro Tem Gil Bass served on the town board when Ulrich was first hired 4 1/2 years ago. "I've always been impressed with Gus. All of us feel good about Gus, and I think he'll do a good job."

Bass said Ulrich's strong points include his knowledge of finance and budgeting, public relations and problem-solving skills. He also

(See ULRICH, Page 2-A)



STAFF PHOTOS BY ERIC CARLSON

Pillars And Cornerstones

Edith Tillman (above) of Leland and Anne Hines of Yaupon Beach speak at cornerstone ceremonies held Sunday to commemorate the new Brunswick County Library branches now under construction in their towns. The two women led fund raising efforts to build new libraries and became charter members of the county library board after the board of commissioners last year allocated \$1.5 million to create a four-branch county library system. The new 4,700-square-foot buildings at Leland and Oak Island are scheduled for completion in March, 1994, when work will begin on additions and renovations to the Shalotte and Southport libraries. Shown with Tillman is Library Board Chairman Don Eggert. Architect John Sawyer holds one of the dated cornerstones that will decorate the front walls of each new building.



Man Admits Taking Liberties, Gets 40 Years

A 49-year-old Shell Point man accused of asking young neighborhood boys to photograph themselves in the nude was sentenced to 40 years in prison Monday after pleading guilty to 21 felony charges, a Brunswick County sheriff's detective said.

Without testifying or offering any evidence in his defense, Herbert Clifton Windham appeared briefly in Brunswick County Superior Court to enter a plea of guilty to 10 counts of taking indecent liberties with a minor and 11 charges of disseminating pornography to a minor, according to Courtroom Clerk Lisa Aycock.

As part of a plea bargain, Windham agreed to serve

four consecutive 10-year sentences on indecent liberties convictions. In return, the state agreed to dismiss two charges of delivering controlled substances and to have other sentences run at the same time as the 40-year term.

Windham was accused of illicit sexual activities involving two 12-year-olds, two 14-year-olds, one boy age 13 and another age 15. All the victims are residents of the Shell Point area.

Windham was arrested July 18 after police learned that he kept a photo album containing sexually explicit photographs of young boys. One of the boys, a 14-year-

(See WINDHAM, Page 2-A)

Doctor's Abstention Spells Defeat For Tough Countywide Smoking Regulations

BY ERIC CARLSON

Brunswick County's Medical Director Dr. Harry Johnson said he was "in the middle of a dilemma" over a proposed smoking ordinance and could not vote on the issue, thereby assuring its defeat by a slim majority of the county health board Monday night.

Despite unanimous support from the three other health professionals on the board, the controversial smoking rules were voted down by a majority that included county commissioners Chairman Don Warren and the two health board members appointed since he took office.

Dr. Brad Kerr, Dr. Jeffrey Mintz and Patricia Nutter, a registered nurse, voted for the ordinance, which would have eventually banned smoking in all public places not served by separate ventilation systems.

Voting against the proposal were Warren, Bruce Quaintance, Patrick Newton and Arthur Knox. All had voiced opposition to the ordinance as originally drafted.

Johnson had previously indicated he favored some kind of smoking regulations. Supporters of the ordinance had counted on his vote to set up a 4-to-4 tie that would have been broken by board Chairman Maliston Stanley, who said he planned to vote for it.

But when it came time to vote, Johnson expressed second thoughts.

"As a health professional, I think smoking is bad," Johnson told the board before announcing his decision. "On the other hand, by doing this, we will be encroaching on a private citizen's right to run his business the way he wants to run it."

"Either way you go, you're intruding on people's rights," Johnson said. "Because I'm in the middle of a dilemma, I have elected to abstain from voting."

Immediately after the vote, Johnson was patted on the back by Ann Batten, a woman who had addressed the board earlier in support of the ban. She told the board she has a punctured lung and cannot go to restaurants where smoking is allowed.

"Thank you," she told Johnson.

"You took the easy way out."

Under state law, elected members of city and county governing boards cannot abstain from voting unless they have a personal financial interest in the outcome. If a member refuses to vote on a motion of the board, it is recorded as a vote for the motion.

But no such rules specifically apply to county health boards, according to Jeff Koeze at the N.C. Institute of Government at Chapel Hill, an expert on state laws governing boards of health.

"While there is no way to abstain in the General Assembly and only certain ways to do so on other boards, there is nothing in the board of health statutes that makes abstentions impermissible," he said. "It's a matter of policy or ethics rather than a legal issue."

Koeze said he had received inquiries about abstaining from health board votes "five or six times" since local regulators began considering smoking control ordinances.

Towns and counties across the state have drafted and sometimes passed ordinances aimed at beating an Oct. 15 deadline imposed by the state legislature under which localities will be prohibited from enacting stricter guidelines than those passed by the General Assembly at the urging of the state.

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Ocean Isle Officials Push For New Interstate To Enter Brunswick

BY LYNN CARLSON

Ocean Isle Beach commissioners will ask state and federal transportation officials to consider routing the next major eastern interstate highway through southern Brunswick County.

In a unanimous vote Tuesday, the board resolved that Interstate 73, a Detroit-to-Charleston route whose plan is expected to be delivered to Congress next spring, should follow U.S. 74 from Rockingham to the Whiteville bypass in Columbus County before continuing generally along N.C. 130 to U.S. 17 in Brunswick County.

"I don't need to tell you how important it is that we get an interstate to come into Brunswick County," said Odell Williamson, the town's founder and a gubernatorial appointee to the state transportation board.

"I'm trying to get support for I-73 to intersect with (U.S.) 17. If we can show the powers-that-be that Brunswick County needs this kind of economic boost, I think we have a good shot at having it come in on 17 and then on to Myrtle Beach."

Congress mandated I-73 in December of 1991 to begin in Detroit, Mich., and to terminate at Char-



"If we can show the powers-that-be that Brunswick County needs this kind of economic boost, I think we have a good shot at having it come in on 17 and then on to Myrtle Beach."

—Odell Williamson

leston, S.C. The legislation also requires the highway to pass near Portsmouth, Ohio, and Winston-Salem. The Federal Highway Administration added Myrtle Beach,

S.C., to that list.

A preliminary route for the North Carolina portion, recommended by the state DOT board this summer, would run through the middle of the

state, entering northwest of Winston-Salem at Mt. Airy and running parallel to U.S. 220 to Rockingham before crossing into South Carolina.

Columbus County business and political leaders have asked the state DOT board to consider continuing the interstate more easterly through North Carolina, following U.S. 74 to a point between Chadbourne and Whiteville before crossing into South Carolina near Tabor City.

Board Member Williamson wants to take that a step further, saying it makes good sense to have I-73 continue east to U.S. 17 so that it can serve the South Brunswick beaches

and ultimately connect with the Carolina Bays Parkway proposed to bypass Myrtle Beach.

"We need to work at this thing all we can," said Williamson, scheduled to discuss the alternative route with his fellow board members today Thursday and Friday as they meet in Asheville.

The town's resolution was to be submitted to N.C. Transportation Secretary Sam Hunt and to 7th District Congressman Charlie Rose.

No construction funds have been allocated for the new highway, which is expected to take years to fund and build.