

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Boards' 'Playground Squabble' Growing Tedious, Indefensible

Will nothing short of the next election motivate the Brunswick County commissioners and school board to stop acting like preschoolers jockeying for a place in Time Out?

These are men and women who just weeks ago emerged from the grueling process of mediation over the schools' budget, most of them speaking of hope for a new day when communication would be smoother and needs more clearly understood.

So much for that. The current flap regarding the use of left-over funds is tantamount to a playground squabble. School board: "He's picking on me." Commissioners: "Well, you're being bad." School board: "Give me back my toy." Commissioners: "No, you can only play with this one."

The commissioners are enjoying the bully part all too much. Same would appear to be true of the school board in its role as victim.

Meanwhile, those of us watching from the outside can't help being squeamish with embarrassment. And those of us with kids in those schools know who will suffer—no, keep suffering—until something changes.

VIC Needs A Santa To Solve Its Christmas Space Dilemma

It's a sticky problem that pops up every year as reliably as little green sandspurs. Where will the Brunswick County Volunteer and Information Center set up its massive Christmas giveaway program?

The VIC office is filling up with the contributions generous Brunswick Countians make to their less fortunate neighbors for the holiday season. Members of the Extension Homemakers and other clubs will soon be turning in the hundreds of dolls they lovingly dress each year for needy girls. There will also be hundreds of Tree of Hope presents, food baskets, bicycles and other gifts for children and adults.

But as of this writing, VIC has nowhere to store the goods and nowhere from which to distribute them. Somebody out there must be able to help.

What VIC needs is a space large enough to keep the giveaway goods from the end of this month until the week of Christmas. They'd like a central location—somewhere in the Supply area would be great—but will take what they can get. The giveaway is scheduled for Dec. 21 and 22, according to VIC Executive Director Pete Barnette, then the space would be cleaned out on the 23rd.

They're down to the wire. If you can provide the space VIC needs to help more than 600 families—more than 2,000 less fortunate fellow Brunswick Countians—you're the Santa they're looking for.

Worth Repeating...

■ *The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle...If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.*
 —Frederick Douglass

■ *We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.*
 —Aldo Leopold

■ *The public buys its opinions as it buys its meat, or takes in its milk, on the principle that it is cheaper than to do this than to keep a cow. So it is, but the milk is more likely to be watered.*
 —Samuel Butler

Neither Rain, Snow, Nor Lack Of Stamps...

It's one of the those love/hate relationships.

You readers seem to appreciate your personal postal carriers as much as I do mine.

It's the bureaucracy and the baffling innards of the U.S. Postal Service that frustrates us. A recent visit to behind-the-scenes workings of the post office didn't help. Turns out that bureaucracy baffles and frustrates even hard-working postal employees. Should we be surprised?

After venting my own postal frustrations in the Sept. 30 issue, I invited readers to send their postal success and horror stories. Almost equal numbers of both came by mail and by fax, but not the total volume of responses one would expect.

Let me share with you three of the most succinct and articulate responses, all from friends, that represent the full range of reviews: grateful, frustrated, relieved.

Ruth Hood of Sunset Beach, an award-winning rugmaker and crafts-woman of excellent skill, is also a

Susan Usher



new grandmother.

She writes, "I want to applaud my mail carrier. In early September, in the excitement I felt after my new grandson was born, I put in the mail six letters, all without stamps, to friends whom I wished to share the good news. We had stopped our mail as we were going to help our daughter and enjoy the new baby.

"When we returned, our mail carrier (Carrier 5, Sunset Beach) told me that the six letters did not have stamps, and as she knew we might be away a long time she had put the stamps on and mailed them.

"Our carrier has always been very

helpful," concludes Ruth. "I find it amazing that for a mere 29 cents I can send letters to my children who live in California, Arizona and Chicago."

(That is a bargain for 29 cents each; however, I'd pay more if that brought better service and stop the junk mail.)

A facsimile from a high school classmate, Don O. Stanley of Ash, brought back memories of regular mail cross-ups between Shallotte and Charlotte in the pre-ZIP days. Apparently something similar happens even in this marvelous era of postal automation:

"Greetings from Ash N.C. 28420! That's right, Ash 28420, not Asheville 28801, not Asheville 27203, not even Ashford 28603, but just plain Ash 28420.

"Mail is ZIPPED from one end of the state to the other trying to locate the elusive Ash 28420, and eventually, through a series of brutal mutilations and various colorful stampings, it arrives. I think.

"I assumed that the Postal Service sorted and directed mail by ZIP Code, after all it is their idea. Right?"

"If you're wondering why I faxed this, it's not paranoia. I just wanted to be sure it ended up in Shallotte 28459 and not Charlotte 28202."

And lastly, a word from retired longtime Winnabow postmaster Tom Bragg Rabon Sr., who since retirement has earned a real estate license and won election as District 4 county commissioner.

Tom writes, "The Postal Service receives a lot of bad press. I'm sorry to say that much of it is deserved.

"A look at the enclosed envelope, which was delivered to me 4 days after mailing, with a Wilmington address, renewed my faith in the U.S.P.S."

Sure enough, the U.S.P.S. found Tom (at P.O. Box 1, Winnabow 28479) even though the envelope was addressed to "Rabon Realty Estate, Wilmington North Carolina".

He adds, "P.S. I'll admit to being a bit (underlined) biased."



Back In School, Hoping For A Snow Day

Guess who got a speeding ticket. And I was being so good. Haven't had one in years and years. Long enough to earn "safe driver" rates from my insurance company. For which I feel permanently qualified, since I've never caused an accident.

I just like to go fast sometimes. Unlike Lynn, who never, ever likes to go fast and who constantly reminds me by making panicky little "Eeek!" noises and slamming on the imaginary brakes as I skillfully maneuver her peppy little sports sedan through congested highway traffic.

Just like I was on the day of my alleged offense.

We were heading out of Wilmington after eight hours of bustling around the city, looking forward to that nice, quiet, sunset ride down U.S. 17. As usual, Wooster Street was a madhouse of careening motorists darting from lane to lane, jockeying for position on the Cape Fear River Bridge.

As we enjoyed the view from the crest of the span, I noticed a Wilmington Police car close behind us. Assuming he was on some investigative mission to Brunswick County, I paid it no mind until we were nearly to Leland and the blue light started flashing.

Although he WAS out of his jurisdiction, and he was NOT in pursuit, and I DID have every right to ignore

Eric Carlson



him, I finally located a safe place to stop and pulled over beside the busy interstate.

"He probably wants to tell me Lynn's brake light is burned out again," I thought.

But nooooooo. He wants to give me a ticket, for going 50 miles per hour on Wooster Street.

"So was everybody else," I told the officer politely. Yes, that's true, he said. But it's a 35 m.p.h. zone and he's been assigned to slow them down by picking out a daily dozen and writing tickets for them.

"Lucky me," I thought. He had plunged into the speeding masses and snagged me like a shark grabbing a snack from a school of mullet.

No hard feelings. He was only doing his job. And he was nice enough to tell me about New Hanover County's program that allows speeders to avoid points on their license (and higher insurance rates) by paying a hundred bucks to take a four-hour safe driving course.

So now I'm going back to school...again. You see, this won't be my first post-graduate degree in motor vehicle safety. I'll be going for my PhD (Perfect Highway Driver).

I got my license back in the late 1960s, when cars were cars and radar was some fancy gadget on airport towers. Back then, a policeman had to get behind you and clock your speed before giving you a ticket. Which gave the officer time to decide if he was observing a momentary indiscretion or an blatant disregard for public safety.

That all changed during the 1970s Energy Hoax, a make-believe "crisis" that magically disappeared after small oil companies were run out of business and gasoline prices tripled. It also brought us the "energy-saving" double-nickel speed limit and radar in every patrol car.

I had some problems adjusting to this "new road order." As a testosterone-poisoned teen-ager with a fast motorcycle, I was accustomed to moving from place to place at a somewhat rapid pace. So when the clamp-down came, I often found myself sitting in patrol cars, watching the little red light on the radar gun flashing "75! 75! 75!"

Then one day I got a letter from the N.C. Department of Motor Vehicles notifying me that I had earned enough points to qualify for

Safe-Driver School. Unfortunately, this is a game where scoring points is bad and qualifying is worse.

Lucky for me, my session was probably the shortest driver safety school in state history. Instead of two three-hour evening classes, we graduated after little more than an hour of instruction. For which I will be forever grateful.

The class consisted of a boring rehash of motor vehicle laws, safety recommendations and other exciting facts delivered by an equally bored veteran highway patrolman who no doubt took this assignment as an easy way to finish his last few months before retirement.

After a half-hour of squirming around in our chairs and watching the clock, we were delivered from purgatory by an act of God. Another trooper came in and reported that the wind had shifted, the tide was coming up and the causeway from Manteo to Nags Head would be awash within the hour.

Class dismissed!

The next night several of the guys in back apparently tried to make the evening more interesting by having a cocktail (or ten) before class. These were students who had earned their points by operating motor vehicles while under the influence of some impairing substance and who had yet to learn the error of their ways.

As the building's rickety old heater chugged out its musty, hot exhaust and the instructor's dissertation droned into its second half hour, one of the DWI boys started to look a little green around the gills.

He began to exhibit a bad case of "baby head," that pre-comatose phase of intoxication where the neck loses its ability to hold the face upright. Then, as the lights faded and the screen filled with a colorful photograph of a head-on collision, it happened.

"Aaaaauuggghhh!" came a gurgling cry from the back of the room. Then the little pitter-patter of liquid dripping from a desktop to the carpet.

Without looking back to see what we all knew had happened, the instructor suggested that we take a short break. After surveying the damage and having a little talk with perpetrator, the trooper awarded all but one of us honorary degrees and sent us home.

So if there is a massive power failure on Nov. 11 at about 6:15 p.m., you will know that somebody up there still likes me.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rhetorical Crime Fight 'Don't Feed The Bulldog'

To the editor:

The rhetorical assault on crime by Governor Hunt and Attorney General Easley would be comical if the repercussions were not so tragic. Words don't feed the bulldog. Only bullets and bricks will deter the murderers who hold no value for human life—new statutes to aid law enforcement in criminal prosecution and bricks to build new prisons.

Our society has been pushed to the brink of anarchy by the state government's 20-odd-year neglect of the prison system. In the 1970s North Carolina's reported crime rate ran well below the national average, so the state stopped building prisons. In 1981, North Carolina was third in the nation for average time served by felons.

During the 1980s, the time served by criminals in North Carolina became progressively shorter and reported crime increased proportionally. From 1985 to 1991 the total reported crime rate in the United States rose by 15 percent. During the same period, North Carolina's

reported crime rate increased by 45 percent, three times the national average. The scandalous inadequacy of the state Department of Corrections was apparent during Hunt's former administration.

The class action lawsuit filed against the state is evidently the motivation for Hunt and Easley's war of words on crime. The lawsuit contesting the prison cap was filed by Thom Goolsby, partner in a small five-member law firm.

The attorney general is supposed to be the people's lawyer. In a perfect world, it would have been Easley who initiated the lawsuit on behalf of the undeniably injured victims. But it fell to Goolsby to contribute untold pro bono hours to advance the people's cause. Goolsby contesting Easley's immense staff is the classic David versus Goliath confrontation.

Attorney General Easley is petitioning the federal court to relax the prison cap, he says, so that DOC can house more prisoners in the available space. His real intent is to divert the

public's attention away from the need to build more prisons. From 1987, when the Prison Cap Statute [G.S. 148.4-1] was ratified, the state has implied that DOC was conforming to the 50-square-foot-per-prisoner mandate. The 50-square-foot mandate was the excuse used for releasing the horde of ravening evildoers to prey on the, until now, unsuspecting public.

Easley now admits that DOC has never complied, has never intended to comply, with the court agreement. Secretary of Corrections Freeman now admits that, if the consent agreement stands, on July 1, 1994, DOC will have to release an additional 1,600 prisoners. A more accurate assessment is over 2,700.

Freeman is offering several stop-gap Band-aid schemes he apparently believes will serve to defuse the pressure of the heightened public awareness. Since taking office Freeman has talked of several different minimum-security housing projects, but nothing has materialized. Check the parole letters in any district attor-

neys' office. The current early releases are only violent criminals. DOC's desperate need is for more maximum-security cells. Freeman's Band-aid proposals will accommodate only minimum-security inmates.

The class action lawsuit is example of the course of action necessary to protect our families from the horde of murderers and rapists with which the elected officials have afflicted us.

Nothing good will be made to appear until a sufficient number of determined citizens join together to make it happen. Do not look to the elected and appointed to place the blame. Bad government results from the inaction of the face you see in your mirror.

John Donne's quote is appropriate, "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls." We are all the less when good men like James Jordan are so needlessly sacrificed.

R.B. Nicholson
 Winston-Salem
 (More Letters On Following Page)