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MM Got No Breaks On Septic Permit, Health Officials Say

BY ERIC CARLSON

Brunswick County Health Department officials on Friday denied charges that Martin Marietta Aggregates was given preferential treatment in processing a septic tank permit for its proposed limestone mine near Southport.

Calling the approved septic system plan "conservative" and "slightly overbuilt," Environmental Health Specialist Bruce Withrow said he had discussed its design with company representatives for "more than a month" and found them "cooperative and willing" to make recommended changes.

"They asked for no special favors and they received none," Withrow said.

Opponents of the proposed mine last week asked the state to revoke any building permits on the site until the company's septic tank plans are reviewed to assure compliance with environmental regulations. A group calling itself the Brunswick Mining Awareness Committee claims the system as proposed would violate wetlands regulations and could easily be damaged by heavy equipment.

In its letter to the N.C. Division of Environmental Management, the committee also accused local health officials of acting "erroneously, unlawfully and without proper procedure" when they issued a permit for the system "almost immediately upon receipt of the engineering plans" and

"They asked for no special favors and they received none."

—Environmental Health Specialist Bruce Withrow

without proper site inspection and specification review.

"I don't know where they got their information from," Brunswick Environmental Health Supervisor Andrew Robinson said

Friday. "There have been a lot of phone conversations—maybe a year old—pertaining to this site. Nothing out of the ordinary has been done. They did not get any preferential treatment."

"In fact, their permit took a bit longer than most," he said.

Robinson said he was unable to document all the health department's contacts with Martin Marietta because field notes from a site inspection were found to be missing from department records after formal requests were made to review the septic system file. He did not indicate who had inspected the file.

Because the company's plans called for a mechanical septic system, Robinson said he

referred the permit request to Withrow, who specializes in such designs.

Withrow said he was first contacted by Martin Marietta around Oct. 1 and had several discussions with company representatives before they requested a permit application. Withrow advised them that the plan would have to be certified by a licensed engineer. He scheduled an on-site meeting for Oct. 13.

After walking the site and inspecting preliminary plans, Withrow said he told the company that more information was needed before the county could review its application. A second site evaluation was done on Oct. 27.

(See SEPTIC PERMIT, Page 2-A)



LIEUTENANT Carl Pearson (in photo above) leads William Anthony Daniels of Ash toward a sheriff's department van for transport from "the shed" in Longwood to Brunswick County Jail on cocaine possession charges. Below, sheriff's department officers prepare for a series of raids on alleged drug-dealing areas. Narcotics officers raided "the shed" and several other alleged drug-trafficking areas last week in a county-wide crackdown dubbed "Operation War Paint."



'OPERATION WAR PAINT'

Officers Arrest 14 In Drug Crackdown

BY ERIC CARLSON

"Bad boys. Bad boys. Whatcha gonna do? Whatcha gonna do when they come for you?"

The throbbing reggae theme from the TV program "Cops" pulses through the police radios of five unmarked vehicles converging on one of Brunswick County's most notorious open-air drug markets.

It's a place called "the shed," an abandoned one-story building on N.C. 904 in Longwood that once housed a tractor dealership. Years of neglect and abuse have reduced it to a windowless metal shell emblazoned with graffiti and strewn with trash and liquor bottles.

Out front is an overhang that was originally designed to keep customers dry. It still performs that function. But now the products for sale are marijuana, crack cocaine and other controlled substances.

Any time of the day or night, you are likely to find a crowd of people, mostly unemployed young men, hanging around the shed, sitting in one of several stuffed chairs or milling around a makeshift table.

Cars pull up to the awning. Cars stop. Cars drive off. Sometimes they leave with illegal drugs.

Last summer, the sheriff's department narcotics squad sent a visitor to the shed and to other known drug markets around Brunswick County. They watched him make a number of purchases. They captured the action on videotape, gathering evidence in what came to be known as "Operation War Paint."

At sunset on Friday, it was "pay-back time." Armed with a stack of sealed felony indictments, ten sheriff's officers in bullet-proof vests and black tactical uniforms paid a visit to the shed with "Colonel," the unit's new drug-sniffing dog.

Approaching from three directions, four cars and a van slid to a halt at several pre-arranged locations around the building. With blue lights flashing and guns drawn, the officers jumped out and swarmed toward the crowd of about 20 men milling around out front.

"Sheriff's department! Everybody up against the wall!" the officers shouted.

In the momentary chaos that followed, most of the men complied and moved quickly toward the side of the building. But at least three took off running through the darkness to a far corner of the shed, where the corrugated steel skin had been peeled back to provide an easy escape.

As expected, several of the detainees were among those accused in the indictments of selling crack cocaine. Another was found to be holding a small quantity of marijuana. They were handcuffed, advised of their rights and herded into the van.

Next to the shed, on the roadway beside a parked car, one of the detectives picked up a plastic container. Removing the green cap, he looked inside and found 63 rocks of crack cocaine worth nearly \$2,000.

"Bad boys. Bad boys. Whatcha gonna do? Whatcha gonna do when they come for you?"

The convoy moves to its next destination, a stretch of Turkey Trap Road in the Cedar Grove community where a number of drug offenses and shooting incidents have been reported.

Again there is a crowd of young men standing around cars parked in front of a mobile home. Like before, some of them run into the woods as the officers swarm from their vehicles. Others quickly toss small items into a nearby drainage ditch.

Another indicted felon is found among the group. He is ushered to the hood of a car, handcuffed, frisked and helped into the van with the others.

"Check this out," Detective Billy Hughes says, pointing his flashlight into the back seat of a silver Toyota. There, protruding from beneath a portable cassette player, is the foot-long banana clip of an SKS assault rifle.

They locate the owner of the rifle and radio for a check of its serial number. Meanwhile one of the deputies ejects the 50-round clip, which slips to the ground, spewing copper-jacketed bullets across the pavement.

Colonel immediately tugs at his leash and begins

(See COUNTYWIDE DRUG, Page 3-A)

COUNTY SAID RESPONSIBLE FOR MESS

Manager Ordered Clean-Up On Former Commissioner's Land

BY ERIC CARLSON

In what he acknowledged to be "an exception to the normal rules," County Manager Wyman Yelton recently ordered his landfill supervisor to use county personnel and equipment to haul trash, old tires and other debris from a former county commissioner's property.

In a Nov. 5 memorandum to Operation Services Director Darryl Somerset, Yelton said he felt "compelled to take the bull by the horns and clean up this mess rather than let it continue to exist" along a strip of undeveloped subdivision lots owned by former commissioner Benny Ludlum.

Somerset said he complied with Yelton's order by authorizing a backhoe operator to spend an eight-hour day removing items from Ludlum's lots on Lakeside Avenue

off Oxpen Road last Tuesday. He estimated the cost to the county at around \$400.

"The boss told me to do it. I've never been asked to do it before," Somerset said.

In an interview Tuesday, Yelton said he authorized the clean-up because he felt the county was somewhat responsible for causing the mess.

"He had some trash dumped on his property that he hadn't been able to get cleaned up by the party who dumped it there," Yelton said. "It was three months since it was reported. I felt we had an obligation to correct the problem."

The clearing was done on a strip of wooded lots along the edge of a marsh about a half mile from the Oxpen solid waste convenience site. People who arrive at the

dump station during off-hours frequently leave piles of trash outside the gate. Yelton said he felt the proximity of Ludlum's property to the convenience site contributed to the illegal dumping.

But the debris cleared from Ludlum's property was not the bagged household trash commonly found around the waste site, according to the person who supervises the county's solid waste enforcement officers. Recycling Coordinator Mary McCarley, who inspected the Ludlum property, said much of what she found there looked as if it had been there for a long time.

McCarley said she found numerous piles of tires and large rusted auto parts that were overgrown with vegetation. She said she also found an old burnt building, a television set, wooden crates, a cable spool, some old

carpeting, "common litter" and cut pieces of wood and yard debris "that may have come from on-site."

"It was not all in one location. It did not give the appearance of coming from one person. Judging from the rust and the weeds grown up over it, it appeared to have been there for some time," McCarley said.

One thing she did not find on Ludlum's property were "no trespassing" or "no dumping" signs. Nor have there been any complaints from other property owners in the area about overflow dumping from the convenience site. McCarley said she has never heard of the county cleaning up trash on private property and admitted she "was shocked" to see Yelton's memo.

Both state and county laws say it is the responsibility

(See LAND CLEAN-UP, Page 2-A)

ZONING TO RETURN JAN. 1

Board Hears Rosy Forecast Of Mining Benefits

BY ERIC CARLSON

The Brunswick County Commissioners were told Monday that Martin Marietta's proposed limestone quarry will pump \$6.9 million into the county's economy for every 3.6 billion gallons it draws from the local ground water.

Commissioners took no action on a request from opponents of the project who want them to ask state regulators to hold back a mining permit until questions about the currently suspended zoning ordinance are resolved.

Instead, the board voted unanimously to reinstate the land use law on Jan. 1.

The economic impact report prepared by

Economic Development Commission Director Tom Monks estimates that Martin Marietta will add 103 positions to the county job market and increase annual tax revenues by \$113,710 while costing the county nothing in return.

But opponents of the mining project say Monks paints too rosy a picture of Martin Marietta's economic impact. They say the study "completely ignored" the mine's potential effects on tourism or the possibility that property values might decline due to a deterioration of the environment.

They are concerned about blasting at the quarry site and increased truck traffic on N.C. 211 and fear that the company's plan

to use 10 million gallons of ground water per day will dry up local wells and ponds and cause dangerous sinkholes to form.

Martin Marietta says the opponents' claims are exaggerated and the concerns unwarranted.

Monks' report says the county can expect a \$280,000 increase in retail sales during the first year of construction and operation of the mine. Once the company reaches full production, the county can expect \$6.9 million in additional sales attributed to the Martin Marietta operation every year.

The company will directly employ about 50 truck drivers and 28 service workers, (See MINE WILL BRING, Page 2-A)

Beacon Publishes Early During Holiday Week

Because of the Thanksgiving holiday, *The Brunswick Beacon* will publish a day earlier next week and all advertising and news deadlines will be a day earlier.

All real estate advertising must be placed by 5 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 18, and classified advertising must be ordered by noon on Monday, Nov. 22.

The newspaper will be available in racks and at dealer locations Tuesday. Mail subscribers in Brunswick County should receive their paper on Wednesday. Other subscribers should get their papers about the same time as usual since post offices will be closed for the holiday on Thursday, Nov. 26.

The *Beacon* office will be closed Thursday, November 26.

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