

# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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## Stanley Did Effective Job As Health Board Chairman

Everyone is fair game in the public arena, but it is nonetheless disappointing to see a solid, thoughtful leader like Maliston Stanley lose a job he seemed to be doing so well.

Last week, Stanley was replaced by engineer Patrick Newton as chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Health in a 5-4 vote. The four health professionals serving on the board supported Stanley; the others did not, which may say something about the board's apparently evolving priorities in recent months.

Stanley led the health board through the fractious smoking ordinance debate and did so with a great deal of grace, keeping his promise to give all sides a fair forum and to remain objective unless his vote was needed to break a tie. It was not.

Long before his election as chairman, Stanley was demonstrating his commitment to public health by working for health education and prevention for minority males, a group at risk for some of the most serious long-term health problems in our society. That kind of action means infinitely more to the community than simply showing up once a month to sit at a table and vote.

This is not to suggest that Patrick Newton will be any less effective a leader. In his short time on the health board, Newton has demonstrated considerable initiative and clear, strong opinions he can back up. We wish him success and support.

Newton can no doubt count on the cooperation of the outgoing chairman, who remains on the health board and who told this newspaper last week, "I'm a team player. He was elected and I will support him 100 percent. I think he will do a good job."

## Better Policy, Welcome Change

West Brunswick High School's revised attendance policy is a welcome change, especially in light of last week's release of another gloomy report card for public schools in Brunswick County.

Tightening up a policy that wasn't working may be just a drop in the bucket, but it is still one means of upgrading standards and expectations, the answer put forth by Jan Calhoun, the county's assistant superintendent for instruction, to the question of how to turn an entire school system around.

Under all but the most extraordinary of circumstances, three absences per grading period is a gracious plenty for any student. And it certainly makes sense to require missed work to be made up right away.

After all, you can't teach them if they're not there.

## VA Track Record Demonstrates Why Government Should Stay Out Of The Health Care Business

BY J. ELLIOTT WILLIAMS

As a patriotic duty to my country, I am urging every American to get involved in the fight against government-run health care as envisioned by President Clinton's health-care proposal.

From a veteran's perspective, the lesson is simple: Government-run health care hasn't worked. Ask any veteran what they think of the Veterans Administration and the health care it provides to more than 2.5 million vets, and the answer will be the same almost anywhere in the country: It is government at its worst.

There are waiting periods of 60 to 90 days to see specialists such as cardiologists, incredible amounts of paperwork, average three-hour waits whenever you try to see a doctor, and hospitals that are physically falling apart. This is government acting not as a healer, but as a roadblock to understanding problems such as Agent Orange and the current Gulf War Syndrome.

That's what we deal with every day. Hopefully, other Americans will never have to endure the same difficulties and hardships as we do in getting basic health care. In fact, if anything, the Veterans Administration should serve as the number-one example of how NOT to run a health care system.

That's why I'm so amazed that so many of our national politicians, including President Clinton, would advocate a larger role for government in providing health care instead of a smaller one. Because, based on our experience, the government just isn't up to the job. The proof is in the numbers: Of 26.7 million veterans eligible for VA health care, less than 10 percent actually seek VA assistance.

In one of the most perverse outcomes imaginable, what was supposed to be an extraordinary privilege for veterans—medical care guaranteed and run by the government—has turned out to be a nightmare.

While everyone else in the country has access to the finest technology, the most skilled surgeons and physicians, and the finest hospital facilities in the world, VA users are confined to a system that isn't even mediocre. And they're trapped. There's no way out, because most of the 2.5 million veterans who use the VA don't have any alternatives.

So when I hear that government is going to have a monopoly on health care through these regional health alliances, I shudder. When I hear that a new national health board is going to set standards for the rest of the country to follow, I think of the way VA standards have been allowed to deteriorate.

When I think of the second-rate care that veterans are consigned to receiving, I just can't sit still and let the rest of the country go down the same path.

Don't let government run your health care into the ground. Don't let them take it over. The entire history of the 20th century shows that once government gets its hands on something it never lets go. There have to be ways to improve health care without having government run it, as President Clinton is currently proposing. His plan takes us down precisely the wrong direction, and everyone—veterans and non-veterans alike—need to let our elected officials know that this is the wrong way to go.

It may not seem like a big deal now. But 10 years from now, when you're overwhelmed with paperwork and waiting three hours to see a doctor or 90 days to see a heart specialist, it will be much more important to you. We have to ensure that this scenario never happens.

J. Elliott Williams lives in South Carolina and Florida. He served 20 years in the U.S. Navy and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his service in Vietnam. He is the immediate past-president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. The views expressed in this article are his own and do not represent the views of the society.

# Telecommunications Access Could Be The Key to County's Economic Future

Richard Snelling contends that, in the 21st century, the economic development and/or quality of life of any area will be totally dependent on the information structure in place or being built.

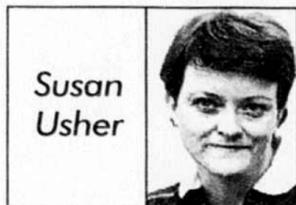
In his opinion, North Carolina is an international model of how it can be done, with its commitment to develop a fiber-optic based Information Highway.

He should know. The retired Bell-South of Atlanta chief executive may have left his old job, but he's still at the forefront of telecommunications technology with his own business. He recently put the activity in a global perspective: Nine telephone companies in Japan are coming to the United States to see systems in operation. Where are they coming? North Carolina.

There's only one problem: Most of us aren't doing much to get ready for this new age. We don't understand its importance and how rapidly it is advancing upon us. It's here.

Snelling says there is growing evidence that without a solid telecommunications infrastructure in place, it is questionable whether communities will be able to maintain even "flat" growth, resulting in a new form of "haves" and "have nots" in the so-called Age of Information.

This Age of Information is predicted to be an era "in which immediate access to information" means the difference between success and failure," according to a study completed in 1991 by the N.C. Rural



Susan Usher  
Economic Development Center in Raleigh.

That study looked at the results of questionnaires sent to urban and rural telephone companies and cooperatives, businesses and industries, and county economic directors and local chambers of commerce. The surveys looked at access to digital switching facilities, use of fiber optic cables and the importance of telecommunications service to businesses and industries.

Both business people and economic developers saw telecommunications as increasingly important. However, business people rated it significantly higher when both groups were asked to rank the importance to the business community of five types of infrastructure: transportation, telecommunications, water, sewer and solid waste.

Sixty (60) percent of all business respondents ranked telecommunications as most important. Repeat, most important. Only 6 percent said it was least important.

Economic developers, however, consistently ranked telecommunications at or near the bottom. Only 9

percent said it was most important.

As a result, the Center staff identified two general problems to be overcome: 1) local economic developers are slow to acquire expertise in telecommunications and to inform the community of its potential; and 2) there is an apparent lack of communication among the developers, telecommunications providers and the business community.

We're ahead of the game in some respects here in Brunswick County. ATMC is busy installing a fiber optic ring that will help secure uninterrupted long-distance telephone service in most instances. A fiber optic highway will run parallel alongside U.S. 17, the backbone of a future web of cable moving information with incredible speed and clarity. Brunswick Community College and West Brunswick High School will be linked to an interactive distance learning network by fall. More government and private ventures will follow, bringing the new technology into the settings where we live, work, shop, learn and play.

Snelling contends that education is the key link that ties all this together. "No society can reach a higher level for its people than its educational system provides," he said.

Translated: To take advantage of the opportunities that will be available, we must become a computer literate society and a society of learners.

As a county interested in economic diversity and growth, we need to

do our homework and be ready when opportunity comes looking.

Snelling outlines these telecommunications essentials that will be required when an Information Age business or industry comes calling:

- Access to a local switch that makes different fiber optics systems compatible;
- Access to a fiber optic ring with "self-healing provisions" so that the telephone service on which the new technology relies will be reliable;
- Access to a carrier with lines running to major destinations—a link to an information highway. Southern Bell is one of three interstate carriers in North Carolina;
- Built-in redundancy (I haven't had a chance to find out what that is, but it sounds like a back-up system);
- Access to cable television (CATV);
- A computer literate community and workforce, which means there must be qualified teachers and training facilities available;
- An environment "conducive" to creating a level playing field for all telecommunications users. This requires, among other things, greater receptivity by local government to advancements in technology and to the needs of the players—a mix of government, franchise and open market businesses—in this rapidly-evolving and complex arena.

Maybe our local decision-makers need to be listening to what this expert has to teach us.



## Reunion Of Tres Amigos: Greetings From Acapulco

By the time you read this, I will be gone.

That is, unless your paper arrives a few days late. In which case, by the time you read this I will be back.

From where, you ask? From sunny Acapulco, that famous half-moon bay on the Pacific coast of Mexico, home of tacos, margaritas, big floppy hats, bad water and guys who dive off cliffs.

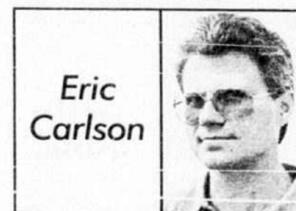
Why Acapulco, you ask? Wasn't that an old jet-set stop back in the '50s? Doesn't everybody go to Cancun or Cozumel or Cabo San Lucas these days? Yes, but they don't get to stay in a luxury waterfront condominium for 10 days, free of charge.

That's why I am now in Acapulco. And also because this may be my last chance to go on an adventure with two of my oldest friends. (We'll call them Tim and Dave.)

Tim is a painter, a very good one, who for the past several years has been working tirelessly to break into the big-time New York art scene. After numerous shows in and around the city, he is steadily building a reputation and receiving high praise from learned art critics.

At one of his recent gallery openings, a New York travel agent fell in love with one of Tim's paintings and asked him to trade it for a round-trip plane ticket and the keys to his condo and car for one month. The cash value was less than the asking price of the painting, but a month in Acapulco sounded better than Jersey in January.

Dave is the son of a painter, a very rich and famous one (we'll call him Roy) who entertains other rich



Eric Carlson

and famous people at his beautiful summer home in the Hamptons. During our teenage years, Roy also endured lengthy visits from Dave's poor and infamous surfing buddies—like me and Tim.

While Roy and his lovely wife dined on the veranda with such notables as Lee Radziwill and Robert Rauschenberg, his top floor loft was total bedlam, strewn with wet bathing suits and surfing magazines, reeling with Dave's early attempts at rock guitar and rolling from frequent impromptu wrestling matches.

His kid brother, now a Hollywood movie actor, once pushed Dave through a sheet rock wall during one of these conflicts.

Back then, Dave was the most devoted surfer I ever saw. During the school year he lived with his mother in New Jersey, about 50 miles from the ocean. But somehow he could always finagle us a ride to the beach.

Surfing was all Dave thought about. His bedroom walls were covered with surfing pictures and posters. His class notebooks were filled with sketches of perfect waves and experimental board designs. He taught himself how to shape foam and laminate fiberglass and started building his own surfboards in his

garage.

I can remember surfing with Dave in February, when it was so cold that ice formed in our hair. So cold that we had to ask a passer-by to unlock the car because neither of us could close our fingers around the key.

I remember the night we camped on the cliffs at Montauk Point and woke up at dawn to see perfect head-high tubes rolling in to the rocks below. We scrambled into our wetsuits and made it halfway down before noticing the 10-foot shark cruising back and forth through the waves, which it continued to do for most of the morning.

But the day we all remember most was July 6, 1971. Tim and I had been staying with Dave for two frustrating weeks of total flatness. Then one evening, we went for our usual sunset swim and saw that the shore break was beginning to pound.

Out of nowhere, the surf kept growing until we found ourselves body surfing eight-foot waves in total darkness. The next morning we piled our boards into the car and drove through an intense, thick fog to an inlet jetty known for its perfect big-wave break.

With the roar of the surf deadened by the fog, we had no idea what was in store until we paddled a half mile offshore and into the biggest waves I had ever seen. We only had a chance to catch a handful before the swell began to drop, disappearing as quickly as it came.

Dave's local surfing friends, who stayed in bed that morning, said we were crazy and forever refused to believe our story about the phantom swell. But Tim and Dave and I will

always remember.

Dave went to California (naturally) after high school and we haven't seen much of each other since. Tim and I have rendezvoused for several surfing trips to Puerto Rico. But the three of us haven't stood on the same beach for nearly 20 years.

So why aren't we going to some famous surfing spot instead of lounging by the pool in Acapulco? Well, first of all, there's that free room. And a few things have happened over the years.

Tim has been diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease. He could be completely blind in five years. Or his sight could remain as it is today, which is not too good.

He can no longer drive a car or ride a motorcycle, which used to be one of his favorite pastimes. He can still see enough of an approaching wave to go surfing, but the destructive effects of sunlight on his eyes makes staring out to sea an unhealthy practice.

Luckily, in the controlled atmosphere of a studio, Tim can still paint. His work continues to improve and more people are beginning to notice.

Dave has been diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, a degenerative muscle disorder. Within five years, he might need a wheelchair to get around. Or he could remain healthy enough to keep playing guitar and continue his post-graduate studies in computer science. But he can't surf.

So Acapulco will do just fine. I wouldn't have missed this reunion if they held it in Peoria.

Hasta la vista, baby.