

Hard-Working Albert Hughes Vital To Shallotte

BY DOUG RUTTER

No man is indispensable. But it's hard to imagine what would happen to the Town of Shallotte without employee Albert Hughes.

Would the city grind to a halt? Probably not. But town officials are plenty thankful they have Hughes on the payroll.

"Nobody is indispensable," Mayor Sarah Tripp admits. "But if I could say that about anybody I would say it about Albert Hughes. He is as close to being indispensable as anybody is."

Considering what Hughes has done for the town in nearly 11 years on the job, the mayor's praise has been earned.

Where else could Shallotte find one man to oversee the water and sewer systems while also serving as public works director, building inspector and zoning administrator?

"I hate to even think what we would do without him," Mayor Tripp added. "I don't know how he does all he does. We couldn't hire anybody to come in and do what Albert is already doing."

In a town without a town manager, Hughes has everything but the title.

In short, he's the type of employee every town needs and very few have—someone who will do whatever needs to be done and never complain.

A Brunswick County native, Hughes sums up his vast duties in four words: "Anything outside is mine."

That's a far cry from what he was hired to do in July 1983. His main responsibilities were coordinating operations of the town water system and the brand new sewer system.

In the 10 years since, Hughes has taken over as head of the streets and maintenance department and the town's enforcer of building codes and zoning regulations.

"As time went along they had to have somebody to blame so I was chosen," Hughes said, half-joking. In reality, the expanding job has put him under a lot of pressure.

"I don't have time to plan and prepare for things as much as I'd like to," he says. "I just put out fires. Whatever comes up, I just try to handle. Half the time I don't know whether I'm coming or going."

Hughes says the growth of the town over the last 10 years has made his job more demanding. Now that Shallotte handles zoning and inspections in the extrajurisdictional area, he's busier than ever.

"The regulations in every aspect, from water and sewer to building codes, have made it much more demanding," he says. "Nothing's simple anymore. It requires a lot of education which I don't have a lot of time to acquire."

Before long, Hughes says the town will need a few more department heads. It's too much for one person to oversee streets, water and sewer, inspections and zoning.

"In order to do justice to the town and the people, one person can't be on top of everything. They're going to

have to divide it up and have a few more people out there," he said.

In the meantime, the 39-year-old Waccamaw School graduate will continue to do his best in the limited amount of time he has each day. And at the end of the day, he'll go home to his wife, Jill, and two sons, Kyle and Keith.

The Hugheses live in downtown Shallotte, but Albert's roots are in the Longwood community. He grew up on a farm where he helped grow tobacco, corn and soybean and raise hogs.

Hughes tried his hand at farming shortly after he was married, but it didn't work out partly because he was farming on leased land. He also worked for a small finance company, a milk company and The Brunswick Hospital before coming to work for the town.

It's hard to imagine, but the same man who works around construction materials, heavy equipment and sewer pumps all day is also one of the most admired gospel singers in the area.

"I probably love that as much as I love anything," said Hughes, who started singing when he was 12 years old. He has been music director at Old Shallotte Baptist Church for the last eight years.

Hughes, Larry Heustess and R.L. Hewett make up a gospel group called "The Altarmen."

In those rare moments when Hughes isn't working for the town, involved with his church, on the road singing or helping raise his kids, there's nothing he'd rather do than fish.

"I was raised to fish," he boasts. "I've always enjoyed the challenge, and since I've been working for the town that has broadened to I enjoy getting away. It's one way I can relax."

While it's not likely Hughes would ever turn down a saltwater fishing trip, he prefers freshwater. That's what happens when you grow up on the Waccamaw River.

Hughes says the Waccamaw would still be his favorite place to fish if it weren't so crowded. "It's become so overfished that's it's almost not worth going any more," he says.

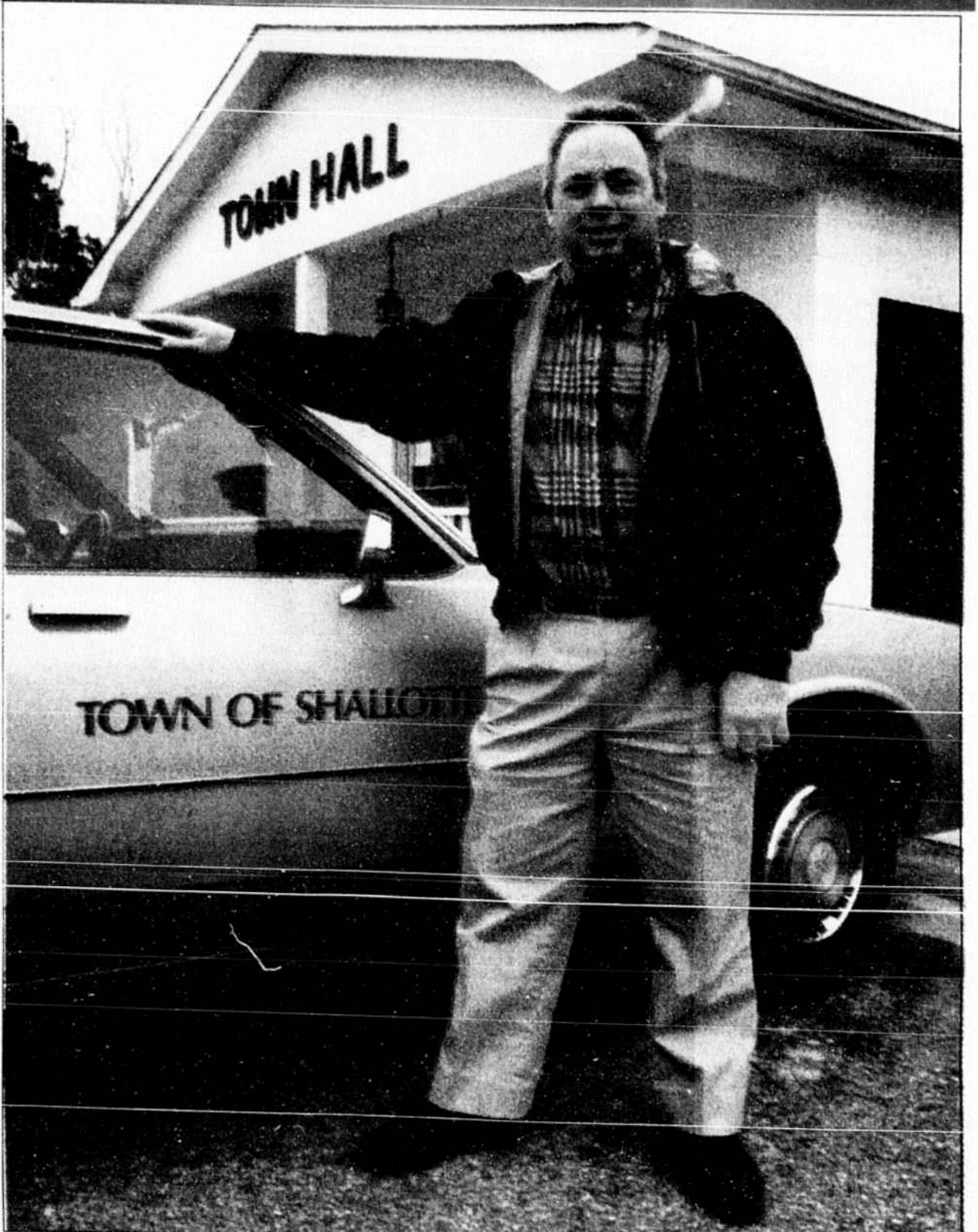
His favorite fishing hole is a 60-acre lake in the Mollie community, about five miles from Nakina in Columbus County. To hear Hughes tell it, that lake has some of the prettiest bass you've ever seen and plenty of them.

A colorful storyteller, Hughes is somewhat reluctant to share his greatest fishing tale. "The only real story I could tell you would sound so much like a lie I'd hate to tell it."

He tells it anyway.

It happened a few years ago on the Fourth of July. He was trolling for red bream in Waccamaw River one morning when he hooked one about the size of a man's hand.

He started reeling it in and got it up near the boat



ALBERT HUGHES does a little bit of everything for the Town of Shallotte. His duties include building inspector, public works director, zoning administrator and water and sewer systems operator.

when it suddenly took off for the bottom of the river. Puzzled, Hughes brought it toward the surface again only to find a large black fish on the end of his line.

The black fish wasn't hooked, but had apparently taken a liking to the bream. The black fish escaped, naturally, leaving behind the bream and one confused fisherman.

The story doesn't end there. Later in day, Hughes was digging clams in Shallotte River when he spotted a fin-

ger mullet skipping along the water. The fish headed toward Hughes like a guided missile.

"Before I knew it that mullet and me were nose to nose," Hughes says. "I reached up and grabbed him with both hands."

"That was the most unusual thing related to fishing that's ever happened to me and they both happened in the same day," he said. "Just like I was saying, it sounds like a lie but it's the truth."

Volunteers Needed For New Brunswick Buddies Program

BY DOUG RUTTER

When Bob Hayes is asked what difference he hopes to make by helping a handful of children in a county full of needy ones, he likes to tell a story about starfish.



HAYES

"It will make a difference to that starfish."

Hayes, director of the newly-created Brunswick Buddies program, realizes he can't help all of the kids who need it. But he thinks he can help make a difference in the lives of a few.

"People are always complaining about crime and the problems young people face in our society," Hayes said.

"This is their opportunity to make a difference. I hope we find a lot of volunteers who don't just want to talk about it but will get out there and help a kid redirect their life before someone else affects them negatively."

Hayes, who served five years as director of the N.C. Division of Crime Prevention, started working as coordinator of the Brunswick Buddies program last October.

The program matches adult volunteers willing to

serve as positive role models with children between the ages of 7 and 17 who have been involved with the court system or are otherwise at risk.

"I think it's a great program. There's so much that can be done with it," Hayes said. "What we're trying to do is get kids to emulate the behavior of a positive role model so they'll grow up to be thinkers and positive doers."

The program is a component of the non-profit Brunswick County Volunteer and Information Center in Supply. Brunswick Buddies is funded by VIC and the N.C. Division of Youth Services.

After completing a six-hour training session, volunteers are interviewed and asked to provide references before they are matched up with children with similar interests.

Hayes said volunteers must commit to spending four hours per week with a child for one year.

"The volunteer is basically just a friend," he explained. "The volunteer is a role model. He's not supposed to be a probation officer or a parent or anything like that."

Volunteers are discouraged from spending a lot of money on the children, but they are asked to get the kids involved in meaningful activities that teach them how to do something.

Hayes said volunteers should do things that the kids

might not otherwise have an opportunity to do, like visit a museum or shopping mall or go on a fishing trip.

Other options include taking children on a beach cleanup, teaching them how to cook or taking them to a sporting event and encouraging participation in sports.

"It's limited only by the suggestions we make and the imagination of the volunteer," Hayes said.

Ninety percent of the children involved in the program have been in some sort of trouble with the law. They include kids who have run away from home, skipped school, shoplifted or been involved with drugs or alcohol.

"You do have some kids who have been involved in more serious crimes like breaking and entering or car theft," Hayes added. Other kids will be referred to Brunswick Buddies by the school system or Brunswick County Department of Social Services.

Hayes said parents and guardians of children involved in similar programs do not feel threatened by the volunteers. About half of the kids come from single-parent families. "The parents seem to appreciate the program," he said. "They seem to be very appreciative of someone coming in and helping their child."

Brunswick Buddies is starting out as a half-time program, which means it can only work with 10 to 15 children per year. "I'm hopeful that our program will go full-time in July so we can bring it up to about 30 kids

"People are always complaining about crime and the problems young people face in our society. This is their opportunity to make a difference."

—Bob Hayes

William Temple Allen, CPA, P.A.

Income Tax Preparation/
Representation
(federal and all state returns)
Accounting and Bookkeeping
Services
Computerized Payroll
Tax and Estate Planning
Former IRS Assistant Director
Technical Division, Washington, D.C.
25 Years Tax Experience



Ragpach Row, Calabash
579-3328

ZENG'S GARDEN Chinese Restaurant

LUNCH BUFFET Monday-Friday 11-2:30 PM
FAMILY NIGHT BUFFET Monday-Saturday

NEW HOURS:
Monday-Thursday 11 AM-3, 4:30-8:30 PM
Friday 11 AM-3, 4:30-9 PM
Saturday 4:30-9 PM
Sunday 11 AM-3 PM

For take-out call
754-5280

East Gate Square, Holden
Beach Road • Shallotte

DIANA'S INCOME TAX SERVICE

Staff of Well-Qualified Tax Preparers

Open All Year • Starting Rate \$20
Electronic Filing • Super Fast Refunds
Federal & All State Returns • Computerized Payroll Services

2 LOCATIONS

280 Holden Beach Rd.
(1/4 mile from Wal-Mart)
PO Box 384
Shallotte, NC 28459
(910)754-8979

9905 Beach Dr.
(500 ft. east of stoplight)
P.O. Box 44023
Calabash, NC 28467
(910)579-8485

