

It's Set: BCC, West Brunswick Among First 107 'Highway' Sites

Brunswick Community College and West Brunswick High School are among the first 107 sites on the North Carolina Information Highway (NCIH). Gov. Jim Hunt confirmed Tuesday.

These first sites are expected to come into service in August as part of a high-capacity telecommunications infrastructure. The public-private undertaking is the first of its kind worldwide.

Both BCC and West Brunswick High School are among area sites sharing in a \$485,000 Rural Electri-

fication Administration (REA) grant that will help provide the equipment necessary for them to join a regional distance-learning network based at UNC Wilmington, their link to NCIH.

"It's a very exciting time," said Michael Reaves, president of Brunswick Community College.

The college has identified space for its distance-learning classroom and will pace readiness of the facility to coincide with Atlantic Telephone Membership Corp.'s schedule for getting fiber optics to the cam-

pus, probably sometime in May. "We want to use the summer to do some trial work and training and get ready to go on line in August," said Reaves.

BCC anticipates two-way benefits—receiving courses and programs from other distance-learning sites, and exporting some of its own programming, such as courses from the new aquaculture technology curriculum that will begin this fall and is the only one of its kind in North Carolina, he said.

"By linking these sites with cutting-edge technology, we can boost education, public safety, economic development, health care and criminal justice in all communities across North Carolina," Hunt said in a prepared statement.

Of the 107 initial sites announced Tuesday, 23 are in southeastern North Carolina. The NCIH project is being initially funded with \$1.4 million authorized by the N.C. General Assembly last year.

Sites chosen for hook-up to the highway had to commit to designating locations for distance learning

and data communications, choosing site personnel to support the project, acquiring strong support and participation from key leaders, staff training and support, and purchasing and maintaining necessary site-based equipment.

The telecommunications infrastructure will be part of the public-switched network, in which the state will offer communications services to its agencies primarily through the facilities of the local telephone companies and long-distance carriers. The state will handle administrative

aspects of the sites along the highway, while telephone companies will own and operate the network.

Areas with immediate uses for NCIH are public schools, universities, community colleges, hospitals and medical centers, economic development, crime control and criminal justice, and state and local government. Major applications include distance learning, video conferencing, tele-medicine, multimedia collaboration, imaging and high-speed data exchange for business and research.



BCC PHOTO BY ANNE MARIE BELLAMY

Have Car, Will Train

Brunswick Community College's automotive mechanics program got a boost last week with the donation of a 1993 Buick LeSabre from Rick Edwards Regional Automotive Outlet, Whiteville, for use in class, but not on the road. Pictured above (from left) are student Michael Tompkins of Bolivia, lead instructor Roy Hornaday, BCC nominee for the State Board of Community Colleges/First Union Foundation Excellence in Teaching Award; student Nathan Francis of Long Beach and Edwards. While Hornaday's goals include more equipment to keep pace with changing technology, he said, "We've got some good new cars coming in to work on and I hope a lot of students will begin showing up."

Some Local Farmers To Be Interviewed For Costs Survey

Coleman Cain of Garland will be contacting some Brunswick County agricultural producers over the next few weeks asking them to participate in the Farm Costs and Returns Survey.

The survey measure the current financial system of U.S. agriculture. It will provide detailed information about producers' expenses, income, finances, production practices and other operating characteristics during 1993.

The survey results are to show how well agriculture is doing as a whole, how the various types of enterprises within agriculture are faring, and whether some sectors are more financially vulnerable than others.

Survey figures are used to help set target prices and loan rates. They are also used to determine farm credit and disaster needs, and to compute grazing fees, parity prices and support prices for some program

craps. They also help measure the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture.

The survey will be carried out by the N.C. Agricultural Statistics Division of the Department of Agriculture. This is the tenth year North Carolina producers have been asked to take part.

Producers chosen to take part in the survey will be notified by letter. They were selected at random. All figures describing individual operations will be kept confidential.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Migrant Labor Laws Focus Of Meeting

A meeting on migrant farm labor housing and employment-related laws will be held for area farmers Tuesday, Feb. 1, at the Whiteville Cooperative Extension Service office, from 9 a.m. until noon.

Speakers will review migrant housing and field sanitation requirements, the Fair Labor Standards Act, Child Labor Laws, worker program enforcement and show a video on worker protection.

The Whiteville Extension Service office is at 112 West Main Street.

Train Workers To Use Pesticides Safely

Two meetings have been scheduled in Brunswick County to teach farm, nursery, forest or greenhouse owners how to train their agricultural workers and pesticide handlers to meet pesticide safety standards.

The worker training is required by recently enacted Environmental Protection Agency Worker Protection Standard Laws. The laws also apply to labor contractors and for-hire or independent crop consultants for these types of businesses.

The first meeting will be held Thursday, Feb. 3, from 10 a.m. until noon in the Brunswick Community College Teaching Auditorium, located upstairs in the Administration Building.

The second meeting will be held Thursday, Feb. 10, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Office.

Participants are to register for the meeting they plan to attend by calling Jetty Gore at 253-4425.



STAFF PHOTO BY LYNN CARLSON

Gene Ward (center) of Winnabow was selected recently to attend the 1994 Master Farm Management seminar, a one-week program designed to enhance farmers' financial management skills. He's shown with Evan Gore (left) of the Farm Credit Service office in Shallotte and David Nash, county cooperative extension agent.

Ward Chosen For Week-Long Farm Management Seminar

Gene Ward of Winnabow was recently selected to polish his financial management skills during a week-long Master Farm Management seminar this month in Raleigh.

The event is sponsored by grants from six Farm Credit Associations of North Carolina; Ward was sponsored by the local office. The program is conducted by the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at N.C. State University.

Through a combination of lectures, problem-solving exercises and computer laboratory instruction, participants study business management skills, examine how their own goals and attitudes influence adoption of sound business practices, and

study how to develop accurate financial statements, good record-keeping systems and micro-computer applications to farming.

The program also aims to increase participants' understanding of farm credit, marketing techniques, income tax issues, farm labor issues and other factors that affect management decisions.

According to Evan Gore of the local Farm Credit office, good production skills alone are not sufficient for successful farm operation in the 1990s. Farmers must manage their operations as full-fledged businesses, which requires accurate financial information, business knowledge and understanding of economic factors in management.

Special Tax Credit Available To Some Low-Income Workers

One frequently overlooked tax break available to low-income workers is the earned income tax credit (EITC). According to the North Carolina Association of Certified Public Accountants, the credit is worth up to \$1,511 for the 1993 tax year. What's more, as a result of the new tax, the credit will be worth even more in 1994 and subsequent years.

Not only does the EITC offset any taxes that are owed, but it may also put money into your pocket. Here's why: if the amount of the credit exceeds your tax liability, the difference is refunded to you.

Who Qualifies?

To claim the EITC in 1993, you must have earned income (or adjusted gross income, if greater) of less than \$23,050 and you must have a qualifying child who lived with you in your main home in the United States for more than six months in 1993. A qualifying child is your son, daughter, adopted child, grandchild, stepchild or foster child who at the end of 1993 was under age 19, or under age 24 and a full-time student, or any age if permanently and totally disabled.

When estimating your earned income for purposes of the credit, you must include wages, salary, tips, commissions, jury duty pay, union strike benefits, self employment earnings, as well as certain disability pensions.

If you are married, in order to claim the credit you must also file a joint tax return. However, if your spouse did not live in your household for the last six months of the year and you maintained a home for a child who lived with you for more than half of the year, you may claim the credit as a head of household.

For the 1994 tax year, you must meet these same requirements, but the income limit increases to \$23,760 if you have one qualifying child and to \$25,290 for two or more qualifying children.

How Much Is It Worth?

For the 1993 tax year, the EITC consists of three parts: a basic credit and supplemental credits for health insurance and newborn children. To qualify for the supplemental credits, you must first qualify for the basic credit.

The maximum basic credit is \$1,434 if you have one qualified child, and \$1,511 if you have more than one child. The maximum credit is gradually reduced on earned in-

come (or adjusted gross income, if greater) in excess of \$12,200. The EITC is completely phased out for workers with earned income (or adjusted gross income, if greater) over \$23,050.

As long as you are eligible for the EITC and pay health insurance premiums for a child, you may also claim the health insurance credit. This credit is limited to the lesser of \$451 or the amount paid for health insurance premiums.

A supplemental young-child credit is also available to you if you had a child under the age of one year at the end of 1993. It is computed on the same income base as the basic EITC and is limited to a maximum of \$388. Be aware that this credit may be claimed only for one child. The amount is not increased if you have twins under the age of one.

Also, note that if you claim the supplemental young child credit, you may not claim the child-care credit—a credit that is generally available to low-income earners who pay for child care help in order to work.

New Rules For 1994

To simplify the computing of the EITC, the new tax law repealed both the health insurance and young-child credit beginning with the 1994 tax year. At the same time, it increased the amount of the maximum credit to \$2,038 for one child and to \$2,527 for two or more qualifying

children. Phase-out rules apply if your earned income (or adjusted gross income, if greater) is in excess of \$11,000. The maximum EITC credit will increase again in 1995. The amount of earned income you may have to qualify for the EITC will be adjusted annually for inflation.

Be aware, too, that effective with the 1994 tax year the EITC is extended to low-income taxpayers who are at least age 25 and under age 65 who do not have children and who are not the dependents of another taxpayer.

Finally, CPAs point out that you needn't wait until tax time to request the EITC. You may elect to receive the credit on an advance basis by providing a certificate of eligibility to your employer. Your employer then makes an advance payment of the credit at the time wages are paid.

Guitar Class Set

A beginning guitar class starts Feb. 2 and runs through March 23 at Brunswick Community College.

Taught by master guitarist Be-tram Hatch, the self-supporting class will cost \$60 per person, with enrollment limited to 10 people.

The class will meet on the BCC main campus.

For more information or to register contact Stuart Callari at 754-6922.

AARP Offers Free Tax Help

Free income-tax assistance will be available for Brunswick County Residents through the Tax-Aide Program of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

Seventeen volunteer counselors have been trained by the Internal Revenue Service to provide counseling service and assistance at these times, dates and locations:

■Shalotte, National Guard Armory, Tuesdays and Thursdays, Feb. 1 through April 14, 9 a.m. until 1 p.m.

■Supply, Brunswick Community College Interagency Building, Wednesdays Feb. 1 through April 13, 9 a.m. until noon by appointment only. Call Chryli Coleman at 754-6900, Ext. 400, to make an appointment.

■Southport, Brunswick Community College, Lord and Owens Streets, Tuesdays and Thursdays Feb. 2 through April 14, 9 a.m. until 1 p.m.

Dan Beddard, coordinator for the tax program, said the service is de-

signed to help older persons understand income tax forms and become familiar with special benefits available to older persons.

Beddard said, "Our counselors, many of whom are retired business people with considerable experience in tax matters, are trained to prepare returns for older taxpayers."

He added that past experience indicates that many older people are not aware of special benefits they are entitled to claim, and some may not even be required to file a return because of limited income.

Persons wishing to use the free service should bring with them copies of their previous year's federal and state returns and forms for the current tax year, including W-2s and other relevant records and materials showing income and expenses for the year.

For more information about the service, call Dan Beddard at 278-4242 or Larry Nielsen at 845-2121.

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