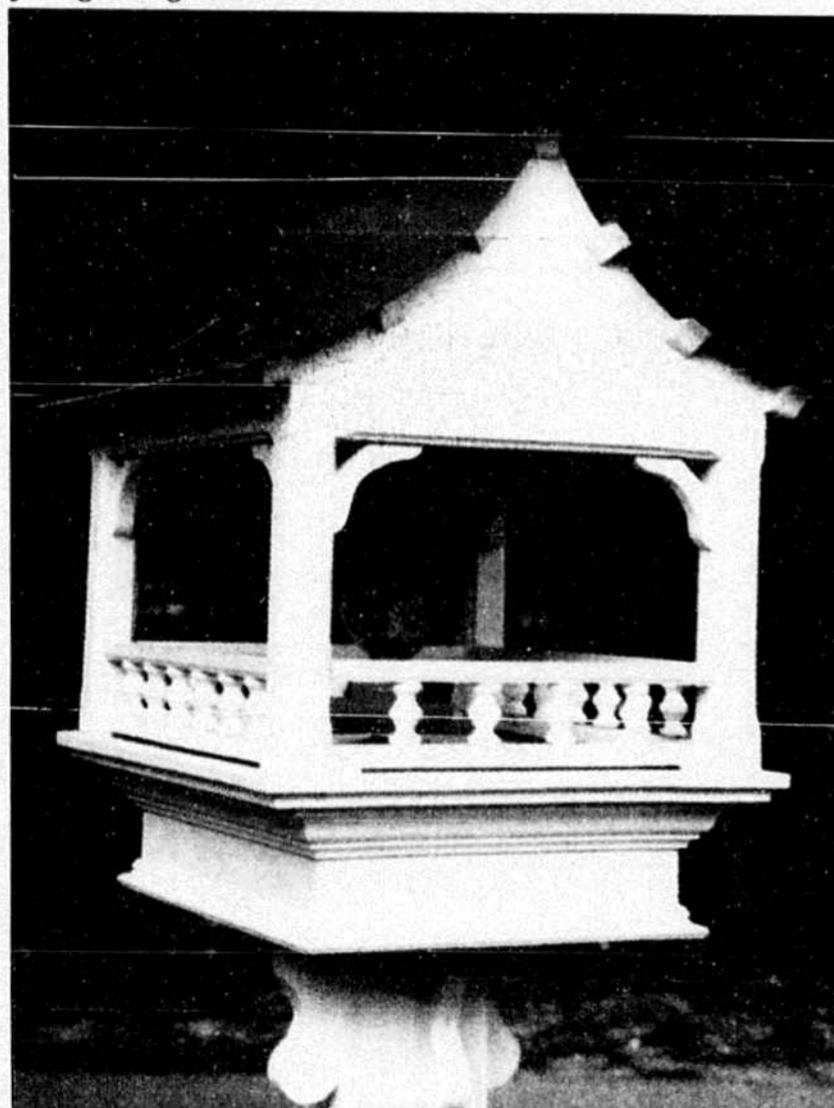




THIS VICTORIAN STYLE feeder, like many of the others, has its opening fitted with a copper background to keep pesky squirrels from gnawing on it.



DEAN CHESSER, a U.S. Postal Service retiree from Charlotte, shows the "bird sanctuary" he created on request from his wife, Pat. The unusual bird feeder is one of several of Chesser's creations nestled in the trees around the couple's Sea Trail home.



INTRICATE STYLING and attention to even the smallest detail typifies the birdhouses and other woodwork that has been a life-long hobby for Chesser.

How Tweet It Is...

Building Open-Air Mansions For Feathered Friends

BY LYNN CARLSON

I have four children, and they're all good with their hands," Dean Chesser says. He sounds as if that's some kind of mystery.

When you take a walk around the cozy Sea Trail Plantation home of Dean and wife Pat, you can't help marveling at how their talented hands have touched every corner with things lovingly built or sewed or painted or grown—things beautiful and utilitarian, things fashioned from materials and ideas old and new.

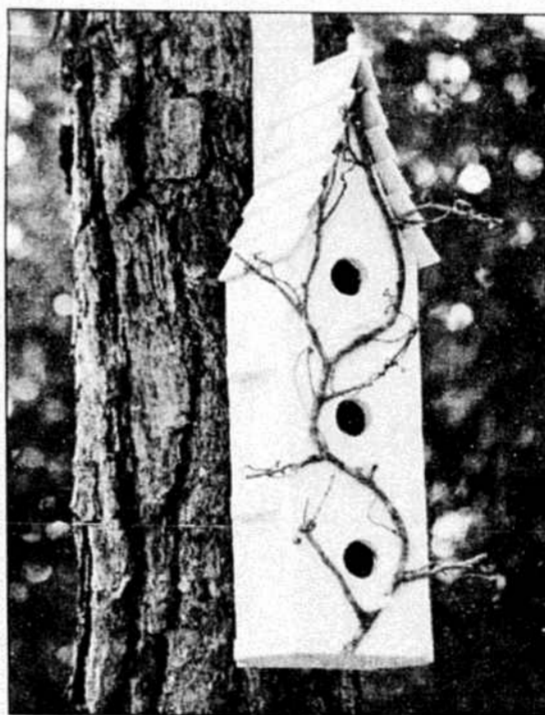
They could be poster children for an Association of Well-Adjusted Retirees. They laugh a lot, praise each others' skills and aren't a bit sorry they left the hubbub of Charlotte when Dean retired from the U.S. Postal Service. They've explored the entire region around Brunswick County and can give you a quick rundown on good antique stores and restaurants within a 50-mile range of Sunset Beach.

Pat sews costumes for her ballet-dancing granddaughter. She forages for muscadine vines to make wreaths she adorns with herbs she grows and dries herself.

In front of a sliding glass door overlooking the golf course is a tray of tiny green shoots peeking past soil—something Pat is sprouting from seeds. Dean jokes that she's forgotten what kind of plant it is.

Dean's woodworking shop is a small room off the garage, where works in progress include a corner cupboard and a combination shelf/towel rack Pat has ordered for one of the bathrooms.

The most famous products of Dean's workshop are his birdhouses, particularly the "bird sanctuary" on one side of the house. It sits on a forked



WISTERIA vine decorates a three-hole house with perches.

piece of petrified wood, a putty-green miniature "Church in the Wildwood," its steeple reaching toward heaven from the tin roof that came off an old barn.

"That one stops people on the golf course," Dean said, explaining that he copied it from one Pat admired in a store.

A few family members, good friends and charities have been rewarded with one or more of Dean's birdhouses. He has no interest in selling them; he just makes them and gives them away.

He loaned one to the Sunset Beach Beautification Committee to place atop the first town Christmas tree, then he gave it to a neighbor who admired it.

"I don't have much design imagination, but I can copy ones I like," he explains.

Throughout the Chessers' yard, birdhouses perch atop poles, are posted on the sides of tree trunks and hang from limbs. You have to really look to see them all, since many of them just blend into the surroundings.

"There are a lot of birdhouse fanatics," he says, adding that he can't remember a time before he had this hobby of working with wood.

Each birdhouse is different. There's a round one, an A-frame and one that looks like a miniature gazebo. One is a domed grey Victorian-looking creation, complete with "gingerbread" details. Another has three holes, each with a perch below it, and a wisteria vine encircling it.

Most of the feeders have copper shields at their openings to keep the squirrels from gnawing out the holes to get at the birdseed. (When you have a lot of birdhouses and like to plant things in your yard, you learn about the infinite tenacity of the squirrel population, the Chessers explain.)

On this midwinter day, with visitors strolling around the lawn, the birds keep their distance. But in just a few short weeks, the first fat robins of the year will stop by for a vacation at Chez Chesser, which in bird judgment must be one of the plushest resorts on the spring flyway.

Summit Looks At 'Children In Crisis,' Challenges Community

BY SUSAN USHER

Mobilizing all of a community's resources to meet the needs of children and families in crisis.

That was the challenge speaker Linda Hyler put to a medley of county agency and public school personnel gathered Wednesday morning at Brunswick Community College for a summit conference on "children in crisis."

"I assure you this is the beginning," Assistant Brunswick County Schools Superintendent Oscar Blanks Jr., who coordinated the event, said afterward, saying Hyler's challenge to move from talk to action has already been accepted.

"It takes a whole village to raise a child," he told participants at the start of the conference. "These agencies can't do alone. The schools can't do it alone."

In planning the summit meeting, he said, "everybody I talked to said we need to do this; and our principals said it should be our top priority. This is a way to help educate our students at a higher level."

"We will probably use some part of Communities In Schools and adapt it to Brunswick County; it's very flexible," he said. "We'll be tapping Linda Hyler and the resources she has available." Those resources include research, training, and helping coordinate start-up of a program.

Hyler is director of North Carolina Cities/Communities in Schools, a non-profit organization that helps communities take a methodical approach in identifying and meeting the needs of young people in danger of failing in school or in life. The structure is simple: a public/private partnership is created that involves the schools, the business community, social service providers, parents, churches and civic organizations. Typically the targeted services are delivered through the local schools serving as resource centers.

The strategy typically focuses on dropout prevention with a twist: keeping kids not only in school, but succeeding in school, by providing a human support system that addresses the personal and family needs that

helped create the problem in the first place.

In North Carolina, said Hyler, 72 percent of all prisoners dropped out of high school. If the juveniles who appear in court, 85 percent either have school attendance problems, are truant or are drop-outs.

More than 130 communities nationwide are using the Communities or Cities in School approach to take collective responsibility for their children, including more than 20 in North Carolina. In southeastern North Carolina, Onslow County and the City of Clinton in Sampson County are developing CIS programs.

"We need early intervention," said panelist Michael Reaves, president of Brunswick Community College. "We have children in crisis now, but if we don't do anything about that we will soon have youth in crisis; if we don't do anything about that we will have citizens in crisis, and then we will have leaders in crisis."

Wednesday's meeting was a start-

ing point for working together. It allowed service agencies from the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department to Southeastern Mental Health to tell educators, and each other, what their agency has to offer children or those who work with children.

For some participants, both on the nine-member agency panel and in the audience, the conference provided a forum for airing frustrations and a wish list for needed resources and services. The summit also offered a glimpse of how those services might be delivered more effectively by working together.

Facilitator Dudley Flood, director of the N.C. Association of School Administrators, cautioned the group not to be satisfied with having talked about the problem they share.

"I have been dismayed to find that too often we come to this point and think we have done what we can do," he said. "But this should only be a start. You have to ask yourself, Brunswick County, 'Are you committed?'"



LINDA HYLER (left), director of North Carolina Cities/Communities in Schools, listens intently to Gail Novello, a Union Elementary School guidance counselor, following the "Children in Crisis" conference last week.