

Vereen Wants State To Study Brunswick Schools Spending

BY ERIC CARLSON

Brunswick Commissioner Wayland Vereen wants the state auditor to conduct a "management performance audit" of the county school system to find out if the county is getting the most from its education funding.

"It's everybody's money, not just the schools," Vereen said. "We can't just turn over and pour it out in barrels. They tell us how much money they need, and we need to know where it's going."

Vereen said he recently met with State Auditor Ralph Campbell Jr. and discussed studies his office is conducting in three other

county school systems. Vereen said a 1993 performance audit of Wake County Schools found their spending priorities "top-heavy."

An audit of Brunswick County Schools would not seek to compare dollars with grades, Vereen said. But it would help determine whether there were "overlapping jobs and programs" and "unnecessary duplication" of services in the school system. It would also help administrators keep better track of equipment, he said.

The county has never had an independent analysis of school spending, said Vereen. "I think this is something that's

long overdue. The people deserve it."

Vereen plans to ask the board to approve a resolution requesting the state audit at the board's next meeting March 21. But even if the measure is approved that quickly, the audit probably wouldn't be ready in time for the next fiscal year budget, he said.

"A lot of counties are going to want them, so we'll have to get in line," said Vereen.

Although he was unsure how much the county would have to pay for an audit, Vereen said the spending study in Wake County costed "around \$20,000."

In another matter, the board voted unani-

mously to approve new personnel policies governing sexual harassment, drug use and employee licensing and certification.

Sexual harassment, defined as "unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature," is strictly forbidden under the new policy.

Among the behaviors specifically prohibited are "spoken or written abuse meaning to an employee's sex, sexually oriented comments about an employee's body" and "showing or displaying an employee's name, address, telephone number and or picture in a way which may be sexu-

ally suggestive and/or invite advances."

The policy calls for a confidential investigation to be made for any complaint of sexual harassment. It also prohibits retaliation against employees who bring sexual harassment charges. An employee who violates the policy will be disciplined or dismissed.

The drug-free workplace policy prohibits the illegal use, possession, distribution or sale of controlled substances while an employee is at work or on stand-by duty. It allows the county manager to request that an employee submit to a drug test if the de-

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At Work And Play

While an early-season trawler works the waters off Holden Beach, West Brunswick High School sophomore Patrick McGowan braves the chilly Atlantic to enjoy Sunday's good surf.

STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, BREACH OF CONTRACT CHARGED

Fired Chamber Exec Files New Lawsuit

A new lawsuit filed Monday charges that the actions of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce and two of its former officers "amounted to no less than attempts to force" Hollis B. (Holly) Richards "into acts of prostitution to keep her job."

Richards, who was executive vice president of the chamber from July 1991 until she was fired in April 1992, reiterated the sexual harassment charges stated in a lawsuit she dropped in February 1993. She has added claims charging the chamber with breach of contract, and former officers Annette Odom and Terry Barbee with malicious interference of contract, fraud and misrepresentation, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

In September 1992, Richards filed a lawsuit alleging she was fired "on account of her sex" and was "subjected to sexual innuendo, suggestions, advances and harassment" by Odom and Barbee. At the time the first complaint was filed, Barbee was the chamber president and Odom, its immediate past president.

The 20-page complaint, which remains essentially intact in the new lawsuit, claims Richards

was dismissed after she refused sexual advances by the defendants and declined invitations to participate in "nude hot-tubbing" parties with chamber members.

In a response to the first action, Odom and Barbee countered that Richards was fired for failing to fulfill her job duties and alleged that she "engaged in excessive drinking during times she was supposed to be working" at the 1991 North Carolina Oyster Festival, a chamber-sponsored event.

Odom and Barbee, represented by Winston-Salem attorney Michael Greeson Jr., last June asked the court to order Richards to repay their defense costs for filing a "frivolous" lawsuit containing allegations characterized as "scandalous and without merit factually or legally."

On Feb. 1, 1993, Richards dropped the first lawsuit. In filing the withdrawal her attorney, William Shell of Wilmington, said his workload made it impossible to carry the case forward at that time, "but more importantly that information had developed which would indicate additional causes of actions which might be brought against the defendants."

The four new claims for relief allege:

■ that the chamber breached its agreement with Richards by "failing to provide its support in managerial help and by instead acceding to the demands of defendants Odom and Barbee, who were working in order to terminate" Richards, and by "depriving" (Richards) of her salary and benefits due to her..."

Richards in both lawsuits admitted to lacking managerial experience when hired to manage the chamber's daily operations, but claims she was promised "help and assistance" by members of the chamber board of directors, as well as a \$10,000 raise above her previous salary, a car allowance and periodic performance reviews with chances for salary increases.

Before being hired here, Richards was employed as secretary of the N.C. Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, and then as legislative assistant for the N.C. Citizens for Business and Industry.

■ that Odom and Barbee "maliciously, wilfully and wantonly interfered" with (Richards') contract with the chamber, resulting in her termination.

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NURSE ACCUSED OF MISREADING TB TEST

Health Officials Trying To Determine Truth Of Former Employee's Charges

BY ERIC CARLSON

Brunswick health officials are trying to determine whether to believe a report that a county nurse allowed a patient who tested positive for tuberculosis to leave without a more detailed examination or to dismiss it as an exaggerated claim of a disgruntled former employee.

At its most recent meeting last week, former community health assistant Christine Stewart asked to speak to the Brunswick County Board of Health privately about "a personnel matter." Stewart recently

resigned from the health department after she was passed over for a promotion.

According to board members who attended the closed session, Stewart outlined a number of grievances about health department operations and accused a staff nurse of misreading a tuberculosis (TB) skin test.

The test involves an injection on the patient's forearm that must be examined 48 hours after it is administered and again 24 hours later. A redness or swelling around the injection point indicates that further test-

should be done.

Stewart told the board that a man came to the health department to have a TB test examined and had to wait for a considerable time before it could be examined, according to Pat Nutter, a nurse and health board member. Stewart allegedly told the board that as a licensed nurse she is qualified to read TB tests. However, she was not authorized to do so under her job description at the health department.

According to Nutter, Stewart told (See HEALTH, Page 2-A)



Man On A Mission

Tom Singleton of the Seaside area enlists a shopper entering a Shallotte store to sign a petition urging the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners to enact an ordinance forbidding excessive noise. Singleton has been gathering signatures throughout the county and is asking citizens who agree with him to contact their county commissioner or the county manager's office. The commissioners have discussed enacting an anti-noise law, but have not drafted a proposal.

Authority Orientation Wednesday

Members of the South Brunswick Water & Sewer Authority were to meet for an orientation and brief business session Wednesday, Feb. 23, at 7 p.m. at the Maples Clubhouse, Sea Trail Plantation.

Representatives of Piedmont Olsen Hensley, project engineers for the towns of Sunset Beach and Calabash, were to conduct the orientation.

A memo from Project Director Joseph A. Tombro indicated that along with authority members, elected officials of Calabash and Sunset Beach and Brunswick County Engineer Robert Tucker were expected to attend the meeting, which was also open to the public.

The engineers' briefing was to provide an overview of the sewer system project and its proposed financing, historical and legal background, and the anticipated role of the various parties involved in the project.

Tombro also recommended the authority elect a chairperson, appoint one person each from Calabash and Sunset Beach to serve as liaisons with all elected officials, and schedule future meetings.

Sunset Wants To Send Voters Uniform Message On April 5 Bond Referendum

BY SUSAN USHER

As an April 5 sewer bond referendum nears, Sunset Beach Town Council is making a concerted effort to get a single, consistent message to voters.

"Let's hash this out so that when the phones ring we all give the same answer," suggested Councilman Herb Klinker, a council liaison for the sewer project.

The message: If voters decide to give the town the authority to issue up to \$5 million in general obligations for construction of a sewer system, that doesn't mean the town must issue the bonds or intends to issue them.

"I don't think anybody on this board would vote to issue general obligation bonds and raise the town tax rate," Mayor Mason Barber said Tuesday afternoon at a special council meeting called to clarify the wording of a letter that will be mailed by the town to potential voters.

Council wanted to correct any confusion created by a mailing from its bond counsel that was based on outdated information. That letter indicated the Town of Sunset Beach would be seeking financing for the sewer system, but as of December that is no longer true. The applicant

will be the quasi-governmental authority established to operate the sewer system.

Should the referendum pass, the South Brunswick Water & Sewer Authority will be authorized to seek full funding of \$34.9 million for the sewer system, which is expected to serve the Sunset Beach-Calabash area.

Anticipated funds include a \$3.8 million loan from the N.C. State Revolving Loan Fund and a \$5 million N.C. Clean Water Bond Loan. To cover the balance, the authority is expected to issue \$26.1 million in revenue bonds, which would be repaid through user fees.

The letter won't address what will happen if the referendum fails, or if the authority doesn't obtain the state loans it anticipates, or various other contingencies. Those questions will be addressed if and when the need arises, council members agreed Tuesday.

"We're not trying to answer all the questions," said Councilman Herb Klinker, who drafted the letter to be mailed. "There are a lot of good questions out there, but it would take an 8- or 10-page letter to answer. And we don't know the answers to all of them."

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