

Beyond Weeds...
Learn how to get there in **Section D** our annual **Lawn & Garden** supplement.

Clean-Up Time?
Sunset Beach Planning Board recommends new rules against junk, nuisance, and abandoned vehicles. Page **10-A**.

Now For Round 2...
West's Derek Frink scores 24 to lead the Trojans to a Round 1 3A playoff win. Page **1-E**.

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Quiet Time

On Brunswick County's south-facing beaches, there are few better places to watch the day end than from a fishing pier. This pier visitor took advantage of unseasonably warm temperatures early this week to stop and enjoy a beautiful sunset on Holden Beach.

STAFF PHOTO BY LYNN CARLSON

TRUCKS WOULD HAUL RODS TO AIKEN SITE

State Thinks Sunny Point May Be Feds' Top Choice To Receive Nuclear Waste

BY SUSAN USHER

State officials said this week they have reason to believe Sunny Point Military Ocean Terminal near Southport may be the U.S. Department of Energy's first choice as a port of entry for accepting spent nuclear fuel elements from foreign research reactors.

On Monday Gov. Jim Hunt sent a strongly worded letter to U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Hazel R. O'Leary opposing use of any North Carolina port for this purpose.

Under the plan 448 spent fuel rods would be returned to the United States for storage as part of a national security effort to reduce availability of highly enriched uranium that could be used to produce nuclear weapons.

The rods would come from reactors in settings such as hospitals and research facilities located in five European countries. Encased in lead-lined shipment casks, they would travel by commercial cargo ship to one or more ports. Then they would be taken by truck or rail to the DOE's Savannah River Site in Aiken, S.C. for storage. The fuel is expected to be more enriched—to have a higher ratio of radioactive isotopes—than similar waste taken from reactors in this country.

The N.C. State Ports Authority at Wilmington had been identified in a federal environmental assessment as one of seven likely entry ports selected for further study from an earlier list of 151 potential ports. Sunny Point had been relegated to alternate status, though not discounted entirely.

That scenario may have changed.

In his own March 7 memo to Gov. Jim Hunt, Secretary Jonathan B. Howes of the N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources advises that no ports have been disqualified entirely.

"Moreover," he writes, "meetings that our staff have attended in Washington, as well as information received from Brunswick County Emergency Management personnel suggest that Sunny Point may be DOE's first choice."

Representatives of Sandia Laboratories in Albuquerque, N.M., visited several county agencies about two weeks ago, looking into possible routes for transporting the spent fuel rods.

They talked with Brunswick County Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan, who is attending (See **SUNNY POINT**, Page 2-A)

Detective Charges 'Phantom' Fraud Suspect In Calabash Jewelry Theft

BY ERIC CARLSON

Investigators call him a "mystery man" and a "slick operator" who is wanted for questioning in at least nine states for suspected forgeries and credit card frauds dating back to 1985.

Detectives say his real name is Michael Wayne Hudgens. But he also uses the surnames Hodge, Hough, Lee and McCaskill.

They say he's a good-looking, "smooth-talking" guy who makes friends quickly, especially at nightclubs. He gains the trust of his new acquaintances and gets invited home. Sometimes he stays a few days or a few weeks.

"Then one day he disappears with the guy's cash, jewelry and credit cards," said Brunswick County Sheriff's Detective Tom Hunter, who has heard similar stories from police, credit card companies and victims in several southeastern states.

Hudgens is believed to have forged checks and used stolen credit cards to obtain more than \$40,000 worth of goods and services since September, Hunter said.

His last spree allegedly began in mid February, when he made off with \$2,900 worth of jewelry and several credit cards from a Calabash businessman who met Hudgens at a Myrtle Beach, S.C., club and invited him to stay at his home for a couple of weeks, Hunter said.

It ended last week, when Hunter traced Hudgens to Asheville, where he allegedly tried to use one of the stolen cards to buy an expensive piece of jewelry. When Asheville Police picked up Hudgens, he was still wearing the diamond ring and gold bracelet stolen from the man in Calabash, Hunter said.

Hudgens' car was loaded with purchases from the last of his illegal shopping sprees, Hunter said. Credit company records indicate that the cards stolen in Brunswick County were used for small purchases at shopping malls, hotels and restaurants in Myrtle Beach, Wilmington, Jacksonville, Raleigh, Durham and Calabash.

Florida authorities believe Hudgens may have gotten the car through another of his scams. According to Hunter, a man in Crestview, Fla., told police that someone resembling Hudgens was staying at his house and wrote him a \$6,000 personal check in exchange for a certified check that he used to purchase the car. The personal check bounced.

Warrants have been issued for Hudgens' arrest in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Reno, Nev., Hunter said. When he entered Hudgens' name and description into the national crime information computer, Hunter said he also received inquiries from police in South Hill, Va., Atlanta, Ga., Savannah, Ga., Charleston, S.C., and Jacksonville, Fla.

"Everybody I talk to says he's really slick, a real mystery man. None of them even had a picture of him," Hunter said. "They say he's like a phantom who stays just long enough to build confidence. Then he leaves and takes what he wants, including any photographs that might have been taken of him."

That's basically what happened in Calabash, where

Hudgens allegedly told his victim he was in the area to invest in some property, Hunter said. The businessman introduced him to a local real estate broker, with whom Hudgens signed a contract to purchase a \$160,000 horse farm in Loris, S.C.

Hudgens said he would pay cash once he closed the sale on a house in Florida, Hunter said. But that property was involved in another apparent scam.

"The property inspector down there said (Hudgens) was trying to buy an \$800,000 house and had hired him to inspect it," Hunter said. "Then he left town without paying him his fee. The guy said he trusted Hudgens completely, never suspected a thing."

That's what people in Calabash said about their dealings with Hudgens, Hunter said. The man who brought him home said he trusted Hudgens enough to offer him a job managing his business. The victim has asked police not to release his name.

The real estate agents also thought Hudgens was a legitimate customer, Hunter said. They took him around (See **'PHANTOM'**, Page 2-A)

Holden Board Member Says Manager Should Be Fired

BY DOUG RUTTER

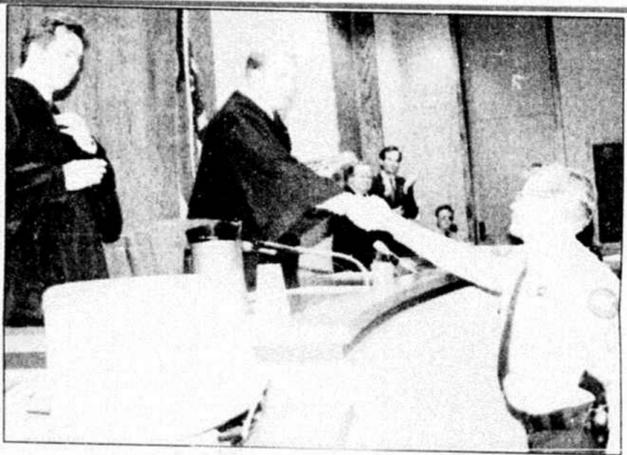
Holden Beach Commissioners met behind closed doors for more than an hour Monday to evaluate the job performance of Town Manager Gus Ulrich, and one commissioner said Tuesday he wants the manager fired.

Following a 75-minute executive session Monday night, Mayor Wally Ausley announced publicly that the commission is evaluating an unnamed town employee and that the evaluation is not finished.

Commissioner Jim Fournier confirmed Tuesday that the town board discussed Ulrich's performance during the closed session, which did not end until 11:25 p.m.

Fournier said Ausley and Mayor Pro Tem Gay Atkins planned to meet with Ulrich this week to discuss the evaluation.

"Wally and Gay are going to talk to him and give him a few items we



Saying Goodbye

Superior Court Judge Jack Hooks Jr. (left) joins Judge William Gore Jr. Monday in praising Brunswick County Sheriff's Deputy Troy Dunkin for 18 years service as a bailiff in the county's district and superior courts. Hooks made a special trip to Bolivia for retirement ceremonies honoring Dunkin and Deputy Billy Gurganus, who served as a bailiff for 23 years. The story is on Page 7-A.

TWO MEMBERS RESIGN

OIB Planning Board Issues To Go To Hearing April 12

BY SUSAN USHER

Ocean Isle Beach Mayor Betty Williamson and Commissioner Ken Proctor exchanged sharp words Tuesday morning after the mayor presented draft planning board changes that didn't reflect several key points agreed on during a workshop last month.

A public hearing on changes relating to the board and how it functions will be held at 8:30 a.m. Tuesday, April 12, just before the board's next regular meeting.

Tuesday's meeting was recessed until 8:30 a.m. Tuesday, March 22 for a hearing on plans to apply for a state Clean Water Bond low-interest loan for construction of a second elevated water tank. The board also expects to vote that day on a series of proposed fee changes.

Attendance, Expansion

The planning board bylaws draft presented Tuesday would keep the membership at its current number and calls for replacement of a member only for four unexcused absences during a calendar year.

At the Feb. 15 workshop the board's consensus was to establish an attendance requirement that no member could miss three consecutive meetings or any four meetings a year without having been excused for good cause.

In another effort to increase the likelihood of a quorum, members raised no objections to a proposal to expand the board, favoring that idea over use of alternate members.

"How are you going to have a quorum with two people?" Proctor (See **OIB**, Page 2-A)

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County Water Coming To Shell Point, Boones Neck, Sunset Harbor

BY ERIC CARLSON

There is light at the end of the tunnel—or in this case, water at the end of the pipe—for thousands of people living south of Shallotte and waiting to tap on to the Brunswick County water system.

Last month the county commissioners approved a \$334,000 engineering contract with the Raleigh firm of Camp Dresser and McKee to design \$2.5 million worth of new water mains that could eventually double the customer base of the water system.

Included in the project is a long looped line along Mt. Pisgah Road, Civictown Road, Sabbath Home Road and Stone Chimney Road that will provide enough flow to provide water service for the heavily developed area west of Holden Beach Road. Those areas include developments in Shell Point, Boones Neck and along Seashore Road.

Another arm of the project calls for a transmission line to be installed under the Intracoastal Waterway from Oak Island to bring water service to the Sunset Harbor area. Other planned extensions are a line along Mt. Misery Road and a loop connecting the old water system to newer lines in the Brickland area.

Although the improvements project won't be completed until fall 1995, approval of the engineering contract signals busy times ahead for the Utilities Operation Board (UOB) and system Director Jerry Webb. It means Webb can begin preparing maps and project outlines for the first of many Special Assessment Districts (SADs) for extending water service to individual homes.

At its April meeting, the UOB is expected to review and possibly set a public hearing date for an SAD to serve the Shell Point area.

Webb said most SAD projects take about 15 months to complete. So, if everything goes according to schedule, Shell Point residents should have their hookups in place when the waterlines get there.

A Boones Neck/Seashore Road SAD is likely to be the next in line, followed by a third project for homes in Sunset Harbor, Webb said. Residents of those areas won't have to wait until the Shell Point project is finished, however. Webb will begin preparing maps and plans for the second SAD as soon as the first one is set for public hearing.

"We fully expect to have several SADs overlapping and proceeding through the process at the same time," Webb said. "We don't stop."

The project is also expected to bring other requests for water service along the new water mains. Webb said the lines have the potential of serving an additional 4,000 parcels of land.

Camp Dresser and McKee plans to have the design phase of the project complete and ready for bidding in five months. Construction is expected to begin about five weeks later.

The largest portion of the project, the loop around Mt. Pisgah and Sabbath Home roads, consists of more than 10.6 miles of 16-inch and 12-inch pipe. Another 3.3 miles of 12-inch water line is to be installed along Mt. Misery Road.

Sunset Harbor will be served by a 14-inch line to be installed beneath the waterway, Webb said. Engineers will be studying two ways of doing this, either by dredging or by boring a hole for the pipe from Oak Island to the mainland.

The latter method may be more costly, but it would not disrupt activity in the waterway, he said.