

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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PAGE 4-A, THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 1994

When Executive Session Info Leaks, It's Time To Go Public

Holden Beach Commissioner David Sandifer should have received some support from his fellow board members when he tried to instigate public discussion of the to-date unsuccessful scheme to terminate Town Manager Gus Ulrich for reasons which at this point remain non-specific.

In a meeting last Thursday Sandifer cast the lone vote against going into closed session to discuss "personnel matters" obviously related to an article published on that day in this newspaper, in which Commissioner Dwight Carroll characterized Ulrich as "useless" and worthy of being fired. Sandifer also expressed his displeasure that some commissioners had discussed with our reporter what transpired in an earlier closed session, and said he wanted to offer board members a chance to give their views in an open session.

The issue begs that several points be made. First of all, our article was no revelation of any deep secret. Rumors about the push by Carroll and cohorts to have Ulrich fired were rife following the earlier executive session. In fact, the source of our tip was not an elected official but several citizens who heard the news "on the street."

That's a good indication that commissioners had been sharing executive session information pretty freely around town, which is perfectly within their rights. While the N.C. Open Meetings Law sets forth the circumstances under which a closed session can be held, it contains no gag rule for the participants, and it shouldn't.

Holden Beach's experience is a good example of the fact that elected officials more often use the executive session privilege to shield themselves from public scrutiny than to protect their employees from embarrassment. When that strategy backfires and rumors start flying, citizens demand and deserve a public explanation from the men and women they elected to represent them. In this case, they still haven't gotten one.

Meanwhile Ulrich, serving his second stint as one of a series of Holden Beach town managers in recent years, stands publicly accused of being unfit to do his job for reasons which remain entirely nebulous. Both he and the citizens of Holden Beach deserve a thorough public airing of the charges, the investigation and the conclusions. Only the commissioners can give them that.

Worth Repeating...

- America was discovered accidentally by a great seaman who was looking for something else; when discovered it was not wanted; and most of the exploration for the next fifty years was done in the hope of getting through or around it. America was named after a man who discovered no part of the New World. History is like that, very chancy.
—Samuel Eliot Morrison
- The strongest and sweetest songs yet remain to be sung.
—Walt Whitman
- Everybody wants to be Cary Grant. Even I want to be Cary Grant.
—Cary Grant
- We know the human brain is a device to keep the cars from grating on one another.
—Peter De Vries
- There comes a time in a man's life when to get where he has to go—if there are no doors or windows—he walks through a wall.
—Bernard Malamud
- Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest.
—Georgia O'Keeffe

Demise Of Spelling Bee Sign Of The Times

"What about the spelling bee? What's the schedule? What's happening?"

I was only the second caller to ask, she said.

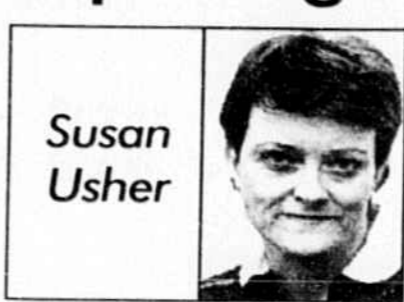
It was the first of March and there hadn't been a classroom or school spelling bee anywhere in Brunswick County. It was time. What was wrong?

There isn't going to be a Brunswick County Spelling Bee this spring, and perhaps not next year or the year after. The demise of the bee is a symptom of a larger ailment.

Nearly 11 years ago, the Shallotte Junior Woman's Club, under the leadership of Debbie Lemon and with the help of *The State Post Pilot* in Southport, revived the Brunswick County Spelling Bee. The county winner could no longer advance to a regional bee, because there wasn't a regional bee.

So, for the past 10 years a student from Brunswick County had advanced directly to the Scripps-Howard National Bee in Washington, D.C., part of a select group of students from across the country.

Our contestant never won, often didn't make it past the first round of a very difficult competition. But that student was there, a visible statement that to someone back home,



Susan Usher

spelling was important.

That "someone" was mainly Debbie Lemon, a Shallotte Middle School math teacher and then-Junior clubwoman. Last year she retired as bee director, after having tried three or four years to recruit a co-director. She would have continued another year as a co-director, but no one would take the other half of the job.

Just as well, she's been thinking. The past several years it's been like pulling teeth to get the cooperation of teachers and schools in scheduling the bees, and of the community in raising the money needed to send a speller and his escort to D.C. and obtaining prizes suitable for a county-level competition.

Let a year pass and perhaps some other people will miss the bee, she's thinking. Maybe students will miss the bee.

I'm afraid they won't, Debbie.

Few people, it seems, think spelling matters.

Why should they think any differently? That's what they're taught in school. Standardized tests give minimal weight to any of the "mechanics" of writing, though colleges complain regularly that the high school graduates entering their halls don't know how to write—in terms of both mechanics and the concise expression of thoughts and ideas.

"It's not important" or "I never use it" are typical excuses given by many an adult who never learned how to spell or use a dictionary, or can pass the chore on to clerical help.

Just the other day, a news release was presented on the letterhead of a county educators' group on a topic of current concern—allowing the faculties, principals and parents/communities to have a greater say in how their schools are run. Educators usually call it "site-based" management, but in this instance, the news release called it "sight-based" management almost all the way through to the bottom of the second page.

Teased about it, the submitter said, "We ran it through the spell-checker four or five times."

"Sight" and "site" are homonyms, words that sound alike but have different meanings. Both are legitimate

words that a spell-checking program on a computer would scoot past without a pause. Computerized spell-checking is no substitute for proofreading. I was reminded of that myself the hard way.

The release reminded me of one of our all-time goofs here at *The Brunswick Beacon*, where we do make a conscious effort to use and spell words correctly even if we don't always succeed. (I'd like to think the same could be said for our schools.)

One of our staff writers referred to the "wench" on the old Holden Beach Bridge, when he meant to write "winch." That little print imp sneaked past a spell-checker, of course, plus two editors and a typesetter. It showed up on Page 1, to our dismay and the delight of sharp-eyed readers. One even wrote a poem in its honor which we ran on the opinion page the following week.

Spelling may not often be the stuff of life-or-death scenarios, but it is important. If clarity and understanding are the goals of a writer, spelling must be a part of the process. There's no substitute for it, not even computer literacy.

An annual spelling bee was one way of getting that idea across to Brunswick County students. I, for one, will miss it.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rates Are Sewer Opponents' Only Concern

To the editor:
 What nerve! If there is a hidden agenda anywhere on the Calabash Board of Commissioners, it's with the opposition to the sewer authority.

Their agenda is to secure their own sewer rates, regardless of good or bad. There is no concern for what's best for the town; its extraterritorial jurisdiction or the region as a whole in the long run. The line of thinking seems to be, "What can we do for ourselves?"

The whole area needs this system. The overwhelming majority of the elected officials agree this is the best way to go. The only people who don't are those with a special interest in Carolina Blythe.

Using the term "hidden agenda" seems a bit hypocritical to me. But if we do have one, it's this: if we don't go ahead with this system, we'll all soon be floating in "it."

Forrest King
 Calabash Commissioner

Like A Friend's Visit

To the editor:
 Once upon a time, I was told that a good way to get to know an area was to subscribe to the local newspaper. So when my husband and I purchased a condo at Sea Trail, we took our subscription to the *Beacon*. What I was not told was what an enriching, entertaining experience it would be!

Each week we look forward to visits from our friends as we catch up on what's going on in a very special corner of the world. We think of it as a mini-vacation! Believe me, we've needed all the vacation we could get from the terrible weather we're having. (There's another 6 to 12 inches on the way today, exactly what we don't want!)

We've learned that Brunswick County is not an idyllic, never-never land, but that the citizens of the area are trying to come to grips with the problems that face all communities before they become insurmountable.

Progress is, indeed, a two-edged sword and must be handled carefully. Your reporting of these issues has been accurate, fair and most enlightening. Thank you, and keep up the good work!

Each time we visit, it feels more like home, thanks to you. We look forward to the time when we can get the *Beacon* hot off the press and not from an ice-encrusted mailbox!

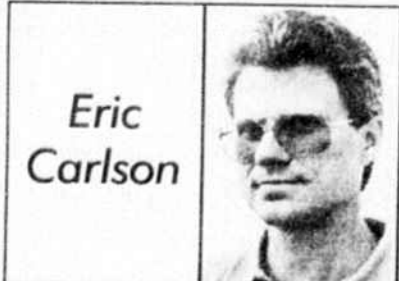
Rebecca Winfield
 Eastlake, Ohio
 (More Letters, Following Page)

Write Us

We welcome your letters to the editor. Letters must include your address and telephone number. (This information is for verification purposes only; we will not publish your street/mailling address or phone number.) Letters must be typed or written legibly. Anonymous letters will not be published.

Style Slaves: Don't Change A Hair—Or Hat

As a youngster, on the rare occasions when I stumbled upon a particularly astute observation, my grandfather always got a kick out of saying, "Hey, you're not as dumb as you look."



Eric Carlson

"You're darn right!" I would answer indignantly. "I mean... Yes I am! Hey, wait a minute. I'm not dumb!"

Which reminds me of an embarrassingly idiotic, yet stubbornly popular dressing habit that likewise makes one question whether the wearer really is as intellectually bankrupt as their appearance would indicate.

I'm talking about that ridiculous turned-around baseball cap thing. Now there's a fashion statement. One that shouts, "Look at me! I'm an imbecile!"

The fact is, walking around with your hat backwards is about as stylish as wearing underwear on the outside

of your clothes or stumbling around with your shoes on the wrong feet.

Hopefully, I've employed a sufficient number of "big words" to lose any readers who are so tragically clueless that they actually believe a ball cap is supposed to be worn with the bill (or visor) protruding out the back.

I don't want people like that calling to complain. (They aren't likely to write a letter.)

"Duhhhhh...Mr. Carlson? You know that thing you wrote?...I think you're...like...wrong...or something."

"Thank you, pumpkin. Don't change a hair (or your hat) for me."

Most stupid fashion statements are easily ignored. But so many people continue to cling to this moronic reverse hat habit that our MTV-infected young people might start to believe that the visor REALLY DOES belong in back!

Imagine an entire generation "growing up" to become like that slovenly pest in the Burger King commercials; the one who wanders from table to table picking at peoples' food and yodeling "I LUUUUUUUUUUU THIS PLACE!"

He reminds me of the mental patients you see loitering around the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York, talking to themselves, grabbing at imaginary insects and forgetting to use the bathroom.

Those guys can be excused for wearing their hats backwards. (Or their pants for that matter.) Shock treatment and heavy doses of lithium will do that.

But anyone with properly functioning brain synapses should understand that the purpose of a cap's bill is to shield the wearer's eyes from sunlight or rain. And unless you are extremely paranoid, your eyes are located in the front of your head. Pretty simple, eh?

The visor dates back to the "days of yore," a period spanning the years between the development of early stone tools and the invention of duct tape. In those days, knights in shining armor used to poke each other with spears and hit each other on the head with cans of Mace.

They also wore protective helmets equipped with little swinging doors in front called "visors." The term comes from the French words "vis," meaning face, and "or," meaning coverer-upper. Visors protected the knights from the stinging effects of Mace and allowed them to taunt each other in nasty ways without being recognized.

"Yo! Lancelot! You're so ugly, when you were born, the doctor slapped your mother!"

"Oh yeah? Well, you wouldn't say that if you weren't wearing that visor!"

A knight named Harold of Halitosis was the first to commit fashion suicide by wearing his visor in back. He thought it "looked cool." But the lack of ventilation made him violently ill and he choked to death on his own vomit.

The original visor lost its usefulness as people became more civilized and started killing each other with artillery and automobiles. It was retained on the baseball cap to shield a fielder's eyes from the sun. (Visors also keep the faces of managers and umpires a safe distance apart while they scream at each other.)

Baseball catchers were the first to wear their caps backwards, because they had a legitimate reason to do so: Their protective mask would not fit with the visor in front. Fortunately, they had enough sense to return the hat to its proper position after the game.

In the 1970s, some teenagers wore their caps turned

sideways and occasionally backwards as a "style thing." But the trend faded when new modes of self-expression came along that didn't look quite so dorky.

The next decade saw young white kids revive the hat backwards thing after a few rock musicians were seen wearing them that way. It's hard to say whether this was done on purpose, or because they didn't know any better, or because they exceeded the recommended dosage of medication.

Axl Rose, the lead screamer for the Guns and Roses rock band, was once asked if he knew how stupid he looked wearing a bandanna and a backwards hat at the same time.

"Uhhh...yes," Axl said. "I mean, no. Is this a trick question?"

Perhaps it isn't the visor in back that matters. Maybe these folks like to have that perforated plastic strap mashed across their eyebrows so they can have little tank-tread marks etched into their foreheads.

Personally, I don't get it. I can imagine only four legitimate reasons to wear a baseball cap with the visor turned around. You may do so if (and only if):

- 1) You are a baseball catcher actively engaged in catching baseballs while wearing a baseball catcher's mask.
- 2) You are looking through a camera lens, a keyhole or some other aperture in such a manner that the bill would get in the way.
- 3) You are outdoors during a windstorm or engaged in some form of activity that causes air to move rapidly toward your face, creating an area of low pressure above the visor, causing your cap to be blown off.
- 4) You really are as dumb as you look.