

## OTHER NEEDS AT STAKE, TOO

## Boards Agree Leland School Needed But Disagree On How To Pay For It

BY SUSAN USHER

Brunswick County Commissioners and Board of Education members are both committed to immediate construction of a new Leland Elementary School, but haven't settled on how to fund that project or other school capital needs.

An hour-long joint meeting at Brunswick Community College was called by Commissioners Chairman Don Warren after school board members said they had concerns about the Leland school plan. It was the first joint meeting of the two boards since they took office nearly 1-1/2 years ago.

As a result of the meeting, County Finance Director Lithia Hahn will seek proposals for shorter-term (5-, 7- and 10-year) certificates of participation that should reduce interest costs, with early repayment and refinancing options. She hopes to have alternative proposals available in approximately two weeks. Commissioners also held open the possibility of contributing some property tax revenues to the project from a reserve fund.

Both boards want to move on the Leland project quickly to avoid rising costs and to relieve overcrowding. The school board, which expected to complete its purchase of a 32-acre site on River Road this week, had planned to award bids for construction this month.

Commissioners initially proposed financing the Leland project over 15 to 20 years through certificates of participation that would be repaid solely with state half-cent sales tax revenues.

School board members questioned extended interest payments on the one Leland project when the system has other pressing construction needs, commissioners' commitment of no county tax dollars to the project, and whether school facilities are being given adequate priority.

Response was cool Thursday when Warren suggested the school board consider a bond referendum to meet the schools' long-term capital needs. School board members proposed instead that commissioners recognize the county's obligation to provide adequate facilities and set the property tax rate at a level to cover capital outlay needs, making school facilities a high priority.

"All those plans (for financing Leland Elementary School) are predicated on instructions not to use ad valorem (property) tax money," said school board member Bill Fairley. "That's a fundamental problem. I am satisfied we will not be able to meet the long-term needs of the schools without the county putting money in it."

"It appears to me we have put ourselves in a mode of thinking that we build schools on the basis of how much half-cent sales tax is available...I think we need to look at our needs, then decide how we're going to do it."

Otherwise, said Fairley, his children will "literally be paying for their educations" after they enter the workforce.

School board member Yvonne Bright urged that any available funds be applied to the Leland project to limit the amount that must be financed and the length of financing.

"I feel like they are committed to building the school, but are afraid of the t-a-x word," school board Chairman Donna Baxter said afterward.

The county's fund balance has dropped from \$18 million at the end of the last fiscal year to a projected \$10 million this year, Hahn said, so there isn't enough money available to "advance" the cost of the new school and allow the school board to repay it over several years—one of the proposals advanced last week by Baxter.

Commissioners set aside \$2 million this year in a new water and sewer/schools capital reserve fund it expects to continue. Of the available money, Warren said \$700,000 is committed next year for water transmission projects. He proposes using

some of the balance to cover school maintenance and repair needs, not construction.

"You can't spend it twice," he said.

"There are two things we feel strongly about," said Warren, who did almost all the talking for commissioners. "One, that we use the half-cent sales tax for school construction and that we continue this reserve fund we've begun. Second, nobody likes to mention this word 'bond referendum,' but let the people of this county vote on these

schools. You and I have got to sell them on these schools."

Earlier Superintendent Ralph Johnston asked commissioners to look beyond the Leland School, to consider folding the schools' long-term capital needs into any strategy to fund the county's overall five-year capital outlay needs, and to provide for the system's long-range maintenance needs.

The schools' \$18.3 million five-year plan includes an elementary school in the southwestern section

of the county, pre-kindergarten facilities and a new central office.

"We're trying to get into a long-range planning mode," he said, referencing County Manager Wyman Yelton's similar goals for other county agencies.

However, commissioners haven't begun looking at either the county's 1994-95 budget or departments' five-year needs, said Warren, and are reluctant to commit to any one department's financial requests until they have.

"There have been no capital needs addressed for any other departments," said Warren. "Until we look at what we're going to face as a county it would be premature to say what we will do."

"I think the commissioners are willing to listen to your five-year plan," he added later. "Nothing is cast in stone."

Added Commissioner Tom Rabon, "I'm not prepared to tell you we won't provide some ad valorem money."

"These are not 'our' needs, these are your needs too," said Russ. "Granted you have to look at other needs, but somewhere it has to be prioritized. If we don't put education as our number-one priority, where will we be?"

"We've got to get beyond 'we keep giving money and don't see results,'" she said. "You won't (see results) if we don't have the buildings and equipment we need. We're just going to have to bite the bullet and do it."

# It's time to promote Ronald Hewett

Ronald Hewett has served with distinction for 11 years as a Deputy Sheriff.

**He is in the prime of his law enforcement career, not one of those candidates winding down from another career. He is ready to be the kind of active, progressive Sheriff that Brunswick County needs and deserves.**

He has been preparing himself for this job ever since he was sworn in at Holden Beach in 1983 as North Carolina's youngest police officer. He has the training, the experience, the temperament, and the leadership ability for the job.

As Brunswick County D.A.R.E. Program Coordinator and Narcotics Investigator, Ronald Hewett put this county's D.A.R.E. program on the map and made a name for himself as national and state D.A.R.E. Officer of the Year for his outstanding work in trying to protect our young people from drugs by making them aware of its danger.

Ronald Hewett is ready, willing and able now to apply the same kind of dedication to the task of being Sheriff. No doubt he will make a name for himself as Sheriff, just as he has as a deputy. Because of his experience as a deputy, he knows the strengths and

weaknesses of the Sheriff's Department and knows what needs to be done to improve the operation of the Sheriff's office:

**•Form a county-wide Drug Task Force to coordinate efforts of all agencies to combat drug trafficking.** Your vote for Ronald Hewett will send a warning to drug

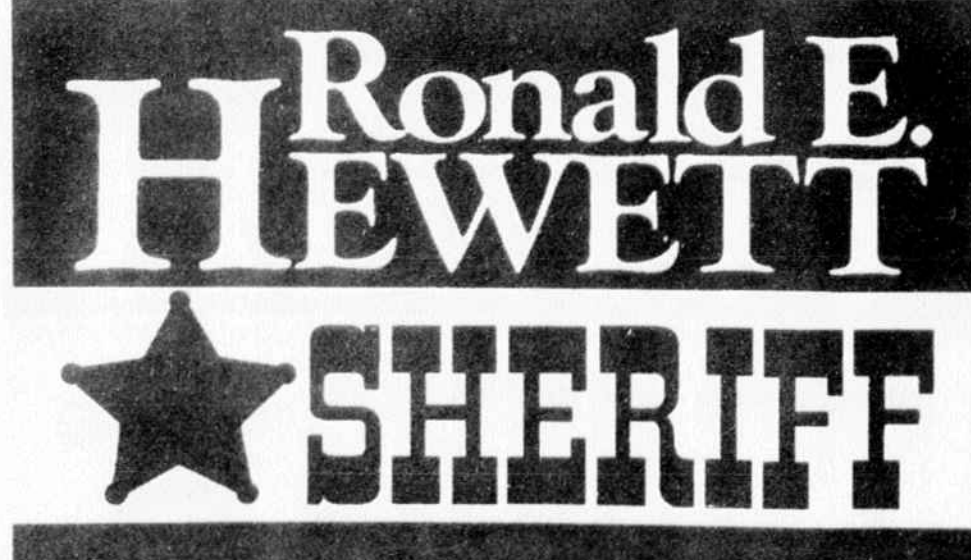
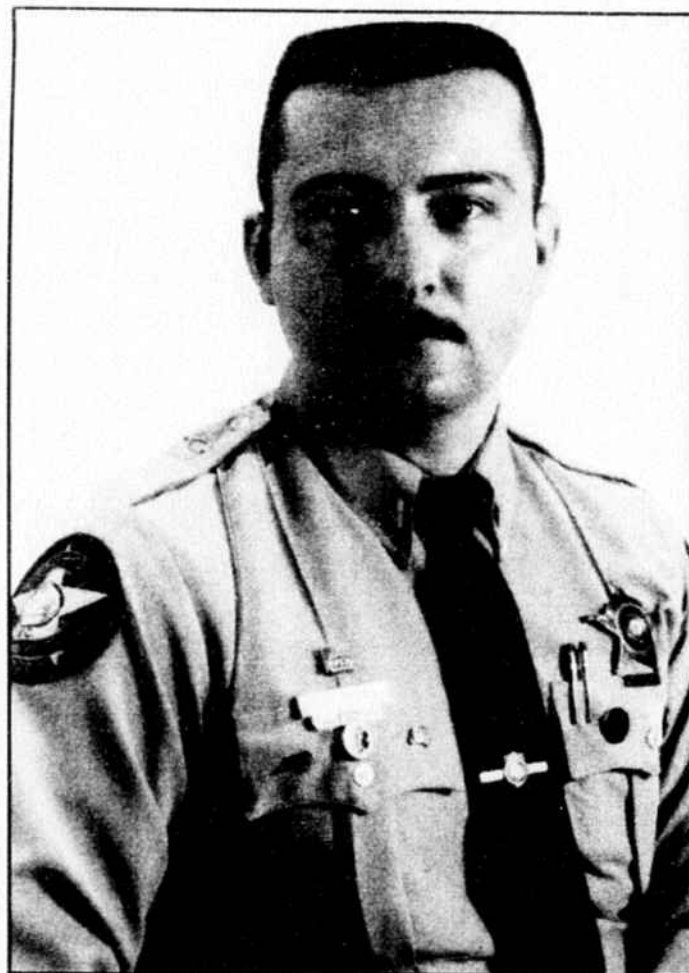
dealers to get out and stay out of Brunswick County.

**•Expand the D.A.R.E. program into the junior and senior high schools.** He knows how important this program is and wants to make it available to more young people.

**•Make homes and streets safer.** You have a right to feel safe in your home and on the streets. Ronald Hewett, a professional, experienced law enforcement officer, is also a family man who is dedicated to making Brunswick County a safe place for his children and yours. Keeping the door of the Sheriff's department

open 24-hours a day is just one of the many plans he has for making the Sheriff's office more responsive to county citizens.

**You have a very important weapon with which to fight crime. It is your vote—make it count. Cast it for Ronald Hewett.**



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Saturday, April 23  
4:30 PM  
Waccamaw Park  
Behind Waccamaw  
School, Ash  
All Are Welcome  
To This Rally

**FREE FISH FRY**  
Sunday, April 24  
4:30 P.M.  
Calabash  
Fire  
Department  
All Are Welcome  
To This Rally

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