

## THE BRUNSWICK PIONEER

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## Three Towns, Different Issues, Same Questions

Call it growing pains or call it coincidence, but all three South Brunswick Islands beach towns have experienced recent public discord between the people and their elected representatives.

■ At Holden Beach, residents and property owners are complaining about the process by which a new mayor pro tem and commissioner were selected after Mayor Wally Ausley passed away. Gay Atkins appropriately was chosen to serve as mayor; she'd been named mayor pro tem after the November election because she was top vote-getter among commissioner candidates.

But the board disregarded tradition and failed to appoint Commissioner David Sandifer, the next highest vote-getter in November, as mayor pro tem; its members then ignored the logical suggestion to appoint Jeff Lee, who lost the election by only three votes, to fill the empty commissioner seat. Instead, Commissioner Sid Swarts was named mayor pro tem, and Marlaine Thomas, who did not run for election in November, was appointed to the board.

One resident who wrote to this newspaper called it a "obvious railroading job" and a "pre-planned set-up to...override the voters' choice." The town's first mayor, John Holden, argued that the commissioners "ignored the votes of the residents of Holden Beach." Still another writer is "confident (the commissioners) will continue to take more heat and hopefully (be) ousted" in the next election.

The Holden Beach board thus far has taken no public measures to explain its actions to the disgruntled townspeople, nor have any townspeople used this newspaper's forum to voice support for the board's choices.

■ At Ocean Isle Beach, commissioners must decide whether to replay on May 10 their earlier 3-to-2 vote to leave the planning board at five members and allow the two extraterritorial area representatives to vote on all town planning and zoning matters. The board's April action contrasted sharply with the expressed feelings of those speaking at a public hearing on the action. Five spoke, all in opposition; none spoke in favor.

"Who are the commissioners representing?" asked one writer. Another proposed that "three members of the planning board come from residents who are not involved, directly or indirectly, with the development of Ocean Isle."

Commissioners Kendall Suh and Ken Proctor argued that it is a commissioner's job to do what the townspeople say they want done, and not to adopt a "we-know-better-than-you" attitude toward municipal government. It will be interesting to see on Tuesday whether any of their colleagues have come around to that way of thinking, too, and if this issue serves as a catalyst to intensify public input on municipal government there.

■ At Sunset Beach, where opposition to the town council is organized and ever-predictable, battles are fought not just with letters but with lawsuits. There, the issues are more of the big-picture type: Will a new bridge and/or a sewer system ruin a treasured way of life, or are they necessary to protect public health and safety in a town people can't help being attracted to? Council says it's willing to amass a war chest to defend itself against a threatened Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association lawsuit to halt the sewer system. A clear majority of voters gave the sewer plan their approval in the recent election, but council is being asked to make itself accountable not only to the voters who elected its members, but to the thousands of property owners who don't live there and can't vote there.

All three instances illustrate the eternal question for those we elect to represent us: Does representing us mean we invest you with the power to act in what you deem to be our best interests? Or does it mean you set aside your personal convictions and biases and do what it appears a majority of us want you to do?

They're tough questions, but nobody said it would be easy. Elected officials who aren't willing to try to face issues head-on now are likely to be forced to do so at election time.

### GUEST COLUMN

## New In Education: Advise Or Dissent

BY THOMAS C. GOOLSBY

There is a new movement afoot in public education and, at first glance, it seems to be in the right direction. Best of all it does not involve hiring more bureaucrats or simply throwing more money at the problem.

The new movement is parental involvement. Its sponsors claim that it's not simply more opportunities for PTA gripe sessions or fund-raisers sold as parental involvement. The latest invention for getting parents immersed in the public education quagmire is the "parent advisory team."

As the education technocrats finally seem to be getting the message that the system is broken and it isn't getting any better, attempts are slowly being made to decentralize the morass that is our government-run school system. Parents who are numb from complaining may finally have a chance to voice an opinion in the decision-making process.

Hundreds of schools across the

Tarheel State are implementing parent advisory teams to "advise" the school authorities on important issues such as student safety, course selections and the creation of apprenticeship programs. However, these parent groups have no official decision-making powers. That authority continues to reside with the principals, but the reality is that school administrators find it hard not to listen.

Maybe a lesson in real power is starting to kick in—parents are voters and taxpayers, and many of them don't feel that they are getting their money's worth of education for their children.

If no one listens to the concerned parents, then they may take matters into their own hands at the polling booth by electing "radical" school board members who will simply clean house. This is the biggest fear for the education bureaucrats.

As more and more parents get involved in the government-run edu-

## Waste Is A Good Thing To Mind

A mother called a conservative radio show a few weeks ago to complain about "The Planeteers," a television cartoon program whose credits indicate its idea originated with broadcast magnate Ted Turner.

Mom worried that kids are being indoctrinated with an anti-capitalist bias by the cartoon, which relies on characters like rat-faced monsters and snaggie-toothed villains who operate in concert with earth-fouling industries to spill oil and spew toxins throughout the world.

The Planeteers, a group of ethnically diverse adolescents accompanied by a pet chimp, possess magic rings which bear the powers of "earth, wind, water, fire and heart!" They touch their magic rings together to summon "Captain Planet," who rushes in to save rain forests and blow poisonous clouds off into space. At the end, a buxom Brunette Mother Earth appears to dispense pearls of wisdom on topics as diverse as composting and gang violence.

It is a bit much. I can't help wonder if young children are capable of sorting out the fantasy of evil mutant subhumans with rodent tails from the heady idealism of a world free of filth, greed, destruction and waste.



Lynn Carlson

But it's probably safe to assume that by the time they reach college age, many of those boys and girls will have figured out that while oil companies and defense contractors pay good wages to smart engineers, the classified ads aren't exactly brimming with listings for tree-huggers.

They say we're bringing up a generation of eco-tots who come home from school to educate their parents about the difference in HDPE and PETE plastics—kids bearing mimeographed maps to all the county convenience sites. And while I can't help sharing the radio mom's discomfort with the anti-business message, I'm glad kids have become conscious of the need to "reduce, reuse and recycle," as the catch-phrase goes.

It's not, after all, a radical new notion that waste is a bad thing—not

just environmentally, but morally and fiscally.

In my own lifetime, we've made much progress in some areas and regressed shamefully in others. In grammar school I often rode in cars driven by my friends' parents who would encourage us to throw our milk Dud boxes and Lance cracker wrappers out the window so we didn't trash up the family station wagon.

On the other hand, I can remember struggling to the J&J Superette with a six-pack full of empty Pepsi bottles to get 18 cents credit from the proprietor. (This was at least a decade before Pepsi opened a large cannery in my town to produce the "Taste of the Carolinas" in wildly popular disposable aluminum cans.)

If folks back then were less than foresighted about chucking their leavings onto the roadside, our elders had their own and their parents' experiences with leaner times to keep them frugal.

A neighbor of ours would send over little gifts of cookies or brownies on plastic foam supermarket trays which had once held meat from the supermarket. She washed every one and found a new use for it.

My generation seems to have been skipped by the "make-it-do, use-it-again" ethic. After all, we came along in the age in which you flicked your Big Mac and threw it away—the era of the 19-cent ball-point pen and cheap disposable razors. During my formative years, plastic tubs of margarine largely replaced wax-paper wrapped sticks of butter, plastic tubs of Cool Whip supplanted real whipping cream and plastic Zip-Loc bags took over for reusable freezer containers.

And though there must be others like me, who'd love nothing more than to have the time to preserve our own home-grown freshly picked veggies in sterile Ball jars, the reality of our lifestyle necessitates stopping by the store a couple of times a week to pick up a Stouffer's spinach souffle—to be microwaved in its handy plastic container which is not exactly recyclable.

While it's okay to be proud of ourselves for taking the effort to clutter up our back porches and spare rooms with recycling bins, we also need to give our own little Planeteers a lesson in what's really important—the fact that terrible waste is a good thing to mind.



## He Left Us Stronger Overseas, But Wounded, Divided At Home

Tin soldiers and Nixon coming  
 We're finally on our own  
 This summer I hear the drumming  
 Four dead in Ohio

—Graham Nash

No one who came of age during the tumultuous 1960s and 70s could ignore the recent demise of our 37th President.

Whether you supported or despised him, you couldn't name a leader in the past half century who had a more significant impact on America—both positive and negative—than Richard Milhous Nixon.

In the deferential days following his passing, amidst images of the flag-draped coffin and 21-gun



Eric Carlson

salutes, most commentary on Nixon's long political career has focused on his outstanding accomplishments in foreign policy.

After all it was Nixon, not Ronald Reagan, who set in motion the end of the Cold War. By risking his political neck to establish diplomatic relations with China, Nixon drove a wedge between Asia's two giant nuclear powers and isolated the Soviet Union.

In 1972, Nixon became the first U.S. president to visit both countries. He went to China in February for an eight-day "journey of peace" that resulted in a joint pledge for "a normalization of relations." Three months later, Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev signed the first Strategic Arms Limitation (SALT) Treaty.

Paradoxically, by playing the "China card," Nixon also exploded the myth that the West was engaged in mortal conflict with a monolithic "Communist bloc" of nations bent on smothering democracy worldwide, a belief that fueled a foreign policy for which more than 30,000 American lives were sacrificed in Korea and Vietnam.

Which brings us to the tarnished side of Nixon's legacy. He certainly earned historical praise for his diplomatic achievements. But Nixon also continued a policy of sending thousands of Americans to unnecessary deaths in Vietnam while waging an illegal guerrilla war at home against his political rivals.

When Nixon was elected presi-

dent in 1968, there were a half-million U.S. troops in Vietnam. Yet we were no closer to victory than we had been five years earlier. Sensing America's weariness of the conflict, politicians were unwilling to approve the massive escalation necessary to win.

The rising tide of anti-war sentiment gave such momentum to the "Peace Now" candidacy of Eugene McCarthy that President Lyndon Johnson was forced to withdraw from his re-election bid.

If not been for the assassination of Robert Kennedy and the Democratic Party's self destruction at the Chicago convention, it is very likely that a different 37th president would have been elected, one who pledged to withdraw from Vietnam immediately. Instead we got Richard Nixon and four more years of U.S. casualties (21,000 during his presidency).

No event did more to deepen the disillusionment of young people and widen the chasm between generations than the ugliness of Campaign 1968. (Except perhaps for the fatal shooting of four student war protesters by National Guard troops at Kent State University two years later.)

By then, those outside his so-called "silent majority" saw the Nixon administration as a gang of thugs. Nixon expressed his contempt for youthful critics through his attack dog Vice President Spiro Agnew, who publicly derided us as "nattering nabobs of negativism" and "an effete corps of impudent snobs."

So it came as no great surprise to many when Agnew was exposed for taking bribes and Nixon's henchmen were caught burglarizing the Democratic party headquarters.

All the sordid details of Watergate—the lies, the deception, the hush money payments, the domestic spying, the "dirty tricks" campaign, the other burglary at Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office—merely

proved what some had assumed about Nixon all along.

Faced with certain impeachment, Nixon resigned "to spare the nation." Then he had himself spared from criminal prosecution and possible imprisonment by the man he appointed after Agnew resigned in disgrace.

It will be for future historians to decide whether the positive effects of Nixon's diplomatic ventures outweigh the damage he did to America during the Watergate era. The ripples of both continue to radiate today.

Who can say how long the Soviet empire would have lasted without Nixon's brilliant China-policy flanking maneuver? We would certainly feel a lot more nervous today about North Korea's refusal to allow nuclear weapons inspections if Nixon hadn't broken the ice with the Chinese (who sided with Korea against United Nations troops last time around).

Nixon's effect on American politics is easier to measure and impossible to ignore.

His lies to Congress and his illegal attempts to thwart the Watergate investigation deepened Americans' distrust of public officials. His "enemies list" of prominent journalists and the investigative reporting that brought down his presidency spawned a generation of news gatherers who constantly assume the worst of all politicians.

The Gary Hart affair. The Congressional humiliations of Supreme Court Justice nominees Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas. The Iran-Contra investigations. And now the witch-hunt into the Clintons' Whitewater land dealings. All have their roots in the skepticism spawned by Watergate.

Richard Nixon may have bought us a momentary edge in post-World War II geopolitics. But we paid dearly for it.