

A Little Extra Security
 Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners agree to house a substation of the Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad. Page 3-A.

Holiday Beauties
 Twenty-six girls will compete for the Tiny, Little and Junior Miss Fourth of July crowns in a pageant Saturday. Page 5-B.

Gone Fishin'
 A 9.44-pounder is the tournament's top flounder, reeled in by angler Deuce Bruce. Page 4-D.

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THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Oh, Happy Day

Graduating West Brunswick High School seniors and their families pack M.H. Rourke Stadium for commencement ceremonies Saturday evening. More West graduation coverage is on Pages 2-A and 8-A. South Brunswick is on 7-D, and North Brunswick on 8-D. Awards Days at West Brunswick and Shallotte Middle School are profiled on Pages 8-9B.

Commissioners, Schools Face Off Over Funding

BY ERIC CARLSON
 Setting the stage for what could be a long fight over school funding, Brunswick County teachers, administrators, school board members and parents urged the board of commissioners to reconsider a draft budget that allocates \$400,000 less for education than last year's spending plan.
 About 150 people attended a public hearing on the county's proposed budget Monday night.
 Some requested increased funding for county libraries, volunteer fire departments, literacy programs, nutrition sites and domestic violence services. But most of the 20 people who spoke wanted to talk about the school budget.
 "Brunswick County is at the most critical crossroads in its history," warned school superintendent Dr. Ralph Johnston.
 If the commissioners go ahead with plans to cut \$5.8 million from the school board's funding request, "a reduction of local, paid classroom teachers may have to occur, resulting in increased class size," Johnston said. "Instructional materials and supplies...may be insufficient." Staff training "to adequately use and maintain the \$3 million investment and additions to the computer labs in the 12 schools will not be possible."
 Insisting that county schools are on the road to recovery, Johnston said countywide Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores have increased 25 points. Five positions have been reduced from the school's central offices, he said.
 "Our student population is growing," Johnston said. "We must address replacing, repairing and constructing facilities as needed. A plan for funding will be required to accomplish this."
 School Board Chairman Donna Baxter, who dropped out of the race for re-election, read a prepared statement from fellow member Bill Fairley, who has also declined to run and was unable to attend the hearing.
 "The overwhelming and undeniable truth is that we can afford adequate education in Brunswick County. We simply do not want to!" Fairley wrote. "The reality is that we have made a conscious decision to

deny our children adequate education so that we might keep a few extra dollars apiece in our pockets every year.
 "The purpose of government is to provide certain services to the public, without which the fabric of society begins to unravel," Fairley's statement said. "It appears that the process used in this budget has not addressed needs first and then attempted to meet those needs with taxing revenues. Instead, it has reversed the process by arbitrarily capping revenues and horseshoeing county needs within those limits.
 "Do you really want your children able to look no farther than a job serving hamburgers to the children of parents who had better vision and self-discipline than do we?" Fairley asked.
 School board member Polly Russ, who was defeated last month in her primary bid for re-election, said Brunswick County schools are in a "pay now or pay later" situation. She said the influx of new residents has compounded the problem of cramped space in county schools.
 "Brunswick County is growing," she said. "Where are we going to put those children? Our school system can no longer exist within the kind of budget it is being given."
 Yvonne Bright, also a board of education member, appeared at the microphone with her two-year-old son Caleb, saying that the two boards "work as a team" to develop an equitable spending plan.
 "Education is the business of everyone in the county," Bright said. "We are all to blame when it fails."
 Leland Middle School Principal Dians Mintz told the commissioners that the school board budget represents actual needs established by teachers and principals throughout the system. She said the roof at her school "has been leaking for years," yet the \$450,000 requested to fix it was cut from the budget.
 She called the school spending request a minimum figure reached through "compromise and consensus." She said the additional funding is "absolutely necessary for Brunswick County to realize its potential."
 Mary Yates, president of the Brunswick County Association of (See SCHOOLS, Page 2-A)

NO COVER-UP, INTENTIONAL WRONGDOING FOUND

Probe: Schools' Equipment Transfer 'Misjudgment'

BY SUSAN USHER
 An investigation by a Raleigh legal firm into the sale and delivery of surplus cafeteria equipment to a local restaurant correct last July found both to be "improper and unjustified," though no evidence was found of either corrupt motive or financial gain by the school system personnel involved, or of any attempt to cover up the incident by the board of education or its employees.
 The separate but related actions were "improper and unjustified," concluded investigator Brian C. Shaw of the firm of Richard Schwartz and Associates, retained by the school board. The transaction appeared to be a one-time incident involving "serious misjudgments" by school system employees, lack of communication and a lack of knowledge of appropriate procedures, he concluded.
 In a separate and confidential report to the school board, Shaw recommended personnel actions be taken with respect to several school employees.
 What actions will be taken, if any, is now up to Superintendent Ralph Johnston.
 This board has told him, not Schwartz, to make recommendations based on what he has observed and knows," said school board chairman Donna Baxter. "He understands we consider what happened to be grave. We told him we will support whatever his recommendation is."
 The board had anticipated that proposal at Tuesday's meeting, Johnston said Tuesday night he needed more time to prepare his recommendation, since he had been dealing with budget, graduation and other pressing business since receiving Shaw's report.
 As a result of an earlier internal investigation into the incident, Child Nutrition Director Rebecca Brandon was reprimanded and Odell Benton, a maintenance superintendent, was fired but later returned to his job. The school board has (See EQUIPMENT, Page 2-A)

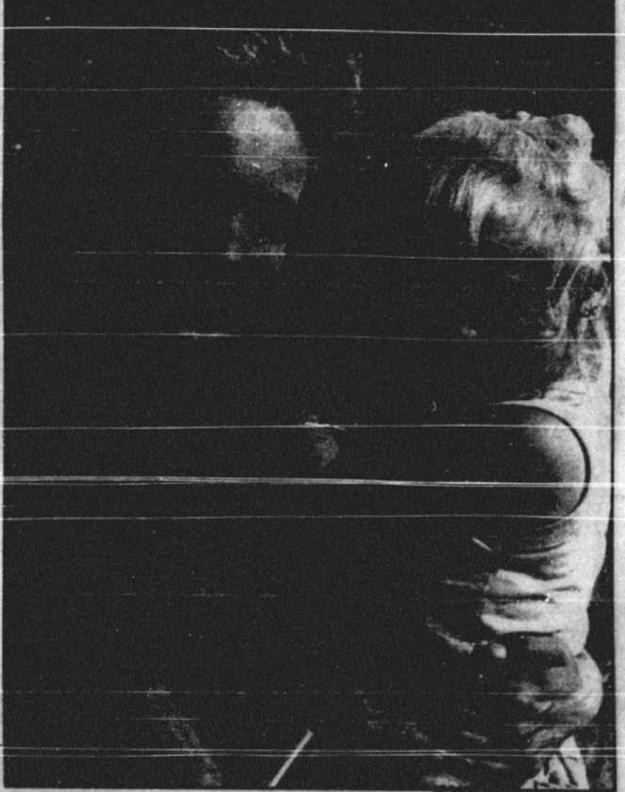
Shallotte Getting Second ZIP Code, P.O. Announces

The U.S. Postal Service has approved a new ZIP Code for street delivery customers in Shallotte that will take effect July 1. The ZIP Code will change from 28459 to 28470.
 The ZIP Code for Shallotte's post office box customers with box numbers 1 through 3999 will remain 28459. The ZIP Code for post office box customers at the South Brunswick Station will remain 28470.
 Everyone affected by the change will receive a notice from the postal service.
 "The new delivery ZIP Code will allow for the expansion of delivery and enable us to stabilize ZIP Code assignments in Shallotte for many years to come," Shallotte Postmaster Frank Bringoli wrote in a notice to postal customers.
 "This change will also allow us to more effectively direct the mail from the processing plant to your delivery unit, and thereby improve our ability to provide you with consistent high quality mail service," Bringoli wrote.
 Postal officials recommend that customers affected by the change start notifying all correspondents immediately. "You should change your ZIP code with your regular correspondents as you pay your monthly bills," Bringoli wrote.
 The postal service will continue delivering mail with the old ZIP code for 12 months. It will not be necessary to submit an official change of address to the post office.

LOW-COST VACCINATION CLINICS SET JUNE 25

Ash Family Lucky After Encounter With Rabid Fox

BY ERIC CARLSON
 Debbie Johnson was lucky. She could have died an agonizing death. Any of her three daughters might have met a similar fate. Or it could have happened to the young friend who came to visit them at their home in Ash last month.
 All four were lucky they didn't have to undergo a painful and expensive series of shots to treat a deadly disease that lurks in the wilds of Brunswick County.
 Unfortunately, the Johnsons' beloved dog "Buddy" wasn't so lucky. The six-month-old mixed-breed rottweiler unknowingly sacrificed his life to protect them from a fox that attacked Debbie in her front yard.
 The fox had rabies. Buddy had to be destroyed.
 It's a story being repeated with alarming frequency across North Carolina, where the number of confirmed rabies cases has doubled in each of the past two years. It is expected to do so again this year.
 In 1991, there were 24 animals found to have the disease in North Carolina. The following year, 49 confirmed rabies cases were reported. Last year, 106 rabid animals were found in the state, including the first dogs known to have the disease since 1968. Already this year, 82 infected animals have been discovered and health officials expect that number to reach at least 195.
 To combat the threat, the Brunswick County Health Department and local veterinarians have joined forces to sponsor a day of low-cost rabies vaccinations for dogs and cats, scheduled for Saturday, June 25, at four locations.
 "Vaccination is the single most important thing a pet owner can do to prevent their dog or cat from contracting rabies," said Greg Thompson, the county's animal control supervisor. "I can't stress enough the need to vaccinate your pets."
 Debbie Johnson learned that lesson the hard way.
 She had just come home from work when one of her daughters' young friends arrived on her bicycle for a visit. As she rode into the yard, the little girl's tire rolled over what appeared to be a dead animal in the yard.
 "She jumped off her bike and came running inside screaming and said there was a fox lying in the grass," Johnson remembers. "I figured it was something the dog dragged up dead. But when I walked toward it and stomped my foot, it jumped up and started snapping at me."
 The fox grabbed hold of Johnson's shoe and she began kicking at the animal to keep it away. Seeing the commotion, Buddy ran toward them and went after the fox.
 "I ran back to the house and the fox broke away and started chasing me," Johnson said. "Buddy jumped on it. They were fighting on the porch and Buddy ran off yelping a couple times. The fox had its back bowed up like a cat and was spitting foam all over the place."
 "If that dog hadn't started fighting with it, I'd have had a mess," she said.
 Eventually the fox ran off. They thought it went into the woods. So Johnson got into the car to go for help. But when she started the engine, she saw the fox run out from beneath the car and into the bushes.
 She drove to the home of a neighbor, who told her to keep the children away from the fox while he called animal control. When she returned home the fox was back in the yard again.
 "When I pulled in, it jumped at the car and tried to bite the tire," Johnson said. "It was between me and the house and kept jumping at the tire when I pulled in further. When I got near the door and stopped, I found out I had run over it and killed it."
 Animal Control Officer Vince Haley arrived at the Johnson home a short time later. He questioned Debbie about the incident and asked her to remove her shoes and socks, but found no wounds. He told her that Buddy would have to be kept under quarantine until a state lab could determine whether or not the fox had rabies.
 A few days later, Johnson got the bad news. Buddy had been wounded by a rabid fox. The dog would either have to be kept under observation for six months—at her expense—or be put to death. Health officials expected the worst for Buddy and (See ASH, Page 2-A)



DEBBIE JOHNSON and her four-year-old daughter Britany Ann recall a harrowing encounter with a rabid fox at their home in Ash last month.

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