

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Regional Waste Plan, Central Permitting See Real Movement

It was heartening to see real movement on two issues before the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners last week—beginning negotiations on a seemingly do-able way to meet the county's looming deadline for a new form of garbage disposal, and the first step toward implementing a long talked-about "one-stop shopping" system for getting permits to build homes and businesses.

The possibility of joining in a regional waste-to-energy disposal system with Bladen, Cumberland and Hoke counties at this point appears to have much more promise than the other two alternatives—finding a socially and ecologically suitable site for a new Brunswick County landfill, or hauling trash to a regional dump, like the one proposed for Columbus County but currently stymied by public protest.

Though there are still many questions to be answered and points to be negotiated, the option of joining in the regional BCH Energy Project seems to make the best long-term sense for Brunswick County in view of the certainty that future governmental waste disposal regulations will be more stringent (and expensive) than can even be anticipated at this point.

The commissioners' adoption of a "central permitting ordinance" is a healthy step toward implementing a long-overdue "one-stop shopping" system to obtain the numerous clearances from county agencies required before you can build a home or business. Ask anyone who's gotten stuck in the permitting maze and you'll hear a diatribe about how badly the system needs streamlining.

The solid waste alternative under study appears to take a "big-picture" approach to dealing with a universal problem, and the central permitting ordinance does the most important thing government should strive to do—serve people better.

Go Ahead, Make It Tougher To Be Crooked

Ordinarily we'd be inclined to argue against most any new statewide restrictions on small business, but one proposal before the N.C. General Assembly bears consideration.

The measure would require people who sell new merchandise at flea markets to be able to produce a receipt if requested by police. Failure to do so could result in seizure of the merchandise. Used goods—the traditional fare of flea markets—would be exempt.

Sound harsh? Ask a cop where's the first place he'll look if ten cases of Head and Shoulders "disappear" off a truck being unloaded at your local supermarket. Ask any honest flea market vendor what you should suspect if the guy two booths down from him offers you a brand new VCR valued at \$400 for the bargain price of, say, a hundred cash.

Flea market vendors interviewed on a recent television news broadcast said the new regulations wouldn't hurt them—responsible vendors don't sell stolen merchandise and always get receipts for what they buy anyway, they said. They added that they'd welcome the opportunity to help the good guys by leveling the playing field.

Consumers always end up bearing the financial burden for theft. If they make out like bandits on some hot goods one day, they'll pay the difference, plus some, on another day—at the grocery store, in taxes, in insurance premiums and in dozens of other ways.

There are too many regulations out there that make it hard to be honest; here's one proposal that would make it more difficult to be crooked. That's the spirit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

What About The Dog?

To the editor:

Mary Grissett's letter to the editor of June 30 concerning the little dog left to swelter in a car at the Briarcliff Mall left everyone hanging as to whether her prayers were answered for the owner to return hurriedly. Was the dog saved or did she have to abandon it?

I would like to say to Ms Grissett, and anyone else in a similar situation, that there are laws against animal cruelty, and leaving a dog in a hot car without proper ventilation is considered an act of cruelty. She should have called the police, who could have taken immediate steps to free the animal.

There have been occasions when I have encountered such a situation. First, I run inside the closest building, give a description of the vehicle and ask to have the owner paged immediately. If that doesn't work, I call the police.

Usually, one of these two methods succeeds in the animal being

rescued. If not, I have to say I would not be beyond picking up a rock and smashing a window to save the animal and worry about the consequences later.

But be warned—anyone who would so mistreat an animal is not a rational, thoughtful person in the first place, and you can almost be certain when they answer the page, they are going to be hostile and chew you out. Don't worry about that. Save the animal.

Patricia Hagan
 Black Mountain
 (More Letters, Following Page)

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

Betty Benton's Long Walk For Justice

Exactly one year ago Monday, Betty Benton lost a son and gained a mission.

Betty says her 26-year-old son James Popwell got into an argument at a Charlotte restaurant July 11, 1993. She says a 54-year-old grandmother walked to a car, loaded a gun and handed it to a 21-year-old male companion, who used it to shoot James dead.

I didn't quiz Betty too much for details as we talked in the back of a conversion van parked at Holden Brothers Produce. Betty needs answers more than she needs questions.

Here are just a few of the indignities Betty says she has suffered since the murder of her child:

■ Betty wasn't home when Charlotte police first tried to notify her that James had been shot. They called Betty's sister and said someone was dead and they thought it might be James.

When Betty called the morgue and asked if she could see the body, she was told she couldn't. She doesn't remember being given any reason for this. It was two days later when she was allowed to identify his remains.

■ She was told that her son's killers would go to trial after the first of this year. On Dec. 11 at 3 p.m., the district attorney's office called to



Lynn Carlson

tell Betty there was going to be a plea bargain, and the case was going to trial—the next day.

■ She asked to see her son's case file and was told, "I don't let the FBI see my files, and I'm not going to let you."

■ She was told that during the course of the trial, she must show no emotion whatsoever in the courtroom, or she'd be asked to leave.

■ At the end of the trial, no one from the prosecution made any attempt to talk to Betty. A victims' advocate followed the prosecutor down the hall and argued that Betty deserved an explanation of what had taken place in court and what it all meant. The prosecutor met with Betty but wouldn't let any other family members sit in. He told Betty to get on with her life.

■ Betty was notified by the state parole board when the female assailant became eligible for early release after serving only seven

months. She was notified three times, in fact, of three different dates. But Betty found a way to get off work and be in Raleigh on the right day at the right time and at her own expense. She is convinced that had she not, the woman would have been set free.

There will be a hearing every year the woman serves. In 1999, the shooter becomes eligible for parole.

All along the line in the criminal justice system, bureaucrats and officials, perhaps hardened by too much contact with death and cruelty, ignored Betty Benton's needs. For answers to dozens of questions. For information about what to expect, and when. For acknowledgement of the fact that the most precious life in her world had ended needlessly. For a little common courtesy from people on the public payroll.

They picked the wrong grieving mama to jerk around.

Betty left Sunset Beach on foot Monday at sunrise. She's walking to Raleigh to meet with Governor Hunt and tell him face-to-face that she's one of a majority of North Carolinians who's had it with the way victims and their families are treated. Her appointment is on Aug. 9.

She's working with a growing nationwide group called Citizens Against Violent Crime—they call themselves CAVE—which hopes to

form a coalition with other victims' rights groups. They plan to pool their resources and call in favors from their legislative contacts. If Betty is a fair example of their dedication to the mission, they can't possibly fail.

I've spent a lot of time hanging around courthouses, but never as a victim. I told Betty in the back of that van that I don't think she would ever have gotten that kind of treatment in Brunswick County or most small, rural communities where murder is not a daily occurrence—not yet, anyway.

I asked her why she picked Sunset Beach for the origin of her journey. James loved the ocean, she told me. He served in the Navy. A few years ago, he was in an accident and lost a leg. When he was recuperating from the amputation, he told his mother he wanted to be buried at sea.

His remains were committed to the deep off Sunset Beach. Betty knows the coordinates of his resting place, and some friends took her there on Sunday for the one last shot of inspiration she needed to set out on the long walk for justice—for the love of James.

If you want to join or learn more about Citizens Against Violent Crime, call them at 1-800-404-8964.



Moving, By Any Name, Would Be As Sweet

Three fingers whiskey
 Is the pleasure of drinkers.
 Moving does more
 Than the same thing for me.
 Willie, he tells me
 That does and thinkers say
 Moving is the closest thing
 To being free.

—Billy Joe Shavers
 Ahhhh...moving. In case you haven't heard (or somehow missed the advertisements) *The Beacon* has moved into bigger and better accommodations on Cheers Street in Shallotte, just around the corner from our old Main Street offices.

While this might require a temporary period of adjustment for some, it is a MAJOR improvement in working conditions for those of us in the news, advertising, production and office staffs.

The giant Goss Community press, which weighs about as much as the Battleship North Carolina, will remain at its present location, for obvious reasons.

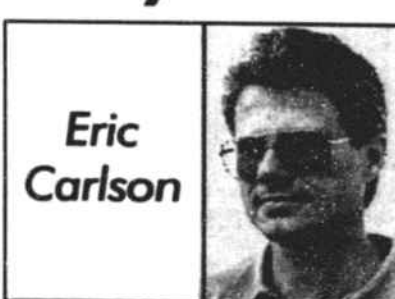
Let me assure those who never had the pleasure of visiting my old "office" that you did not miss much. Unless you have some sort of twisted affinity for cacophony and chaos.

Picture a fold-up table slid into the corner of our busiest hallway, with a file cabinet positioned so the drawers have to be closed to let the regular flow of traffic pass through. Put a computer, a phone, a police scanner and some books on the table and a couple of cardboard boxes underneath and, Voila! You've got my old office.

Next, position another table-computer-box "office" in the same hallway, close enough to allow the neighbors to hear every word of each other's telephone calls.

Now, for the appropriate sound effects, chain a wounded bull elephant to a nearby wall where he can emit loud groaning noises and blind you with a quartz halogen light-bar mounted on his head. This will simulate *The Beacon's* giant copy camera.

Finally, set up a steam locomotive on squeaky rollers in the next room.



Eric Carlson

Every Tuesday night, fire up the engine's boiler and jam the throttle wide open until it shakes the concrete floor.

And there you have it: Life in the impact zone of a newspaper press.

But that was last week. Today I'm sitting in my very own clean and comfy cubicle behind my very own desk (with real drawers) and carpet on the floor and bookshelves on the walls and even a window that lets real sunlight shine through. It ain't heaven. But it's close enough for newspaper work.

The move was a long time coming, but as it turned out, well worth the wait. After several years of significant growth and technological advancement, *The Beacon* had been seeking room to grow for quite some time, without much luck. We nearly moved to several locations that were either too expensive, too far from downtown, too big, too small, too run-down or not enough of anything.

Just as it seemed we might have to give up and wait for a new building to be constructed, our wonderful neighbors at the Stanley and Stanley law office announced plans to relocate. Not only was their nearly-new building the perfect size, but it practically adjoins the old *Beacon* parking lot.

So after much huffing and puffing and pushing and shoving, we've moved all the furniture and file cabinets and computers and light tables and other production equipment around the corner and up the stairs in just a few days.

Whew! Hope you like it as much as we do.

I realize that moving tends to twist some people's underpants into

a wad, but personally I don't mind a bit. I've been doing it for as long as I can remember.

No, I'm not an Army brat; more along the lines of a corporate refugee. Like the old Robert Johnson song said:

You may be high
 You may be low
 You may be rich
 You may be poor
 But when the Lord gets ready
 You got to move.

Which also applies to Lord DuPont, if you happen to be a rising young chemical engineer like my dad was. When Uncle D said move, we moved: from New Jersey to Chicago to Richmond to Cincinnati to Wilmington (Delaware that is) and back to Jersey.

I carried on the tradition after graduating from college, moving from Syracuse, N.Y., to Danville, Va., to Kitty Hawk to Manteo to Washington, D.C., back to Manteo to Wanchese to Nags Head to Kill Devil Hills to Hendersonville to nearby Edenville and finally here.

By the time I entered first grade (in my third home) I pretty much had the hang of moving and was beginning to appreciate some of the advantages it offered. Like always having plenty of cardboard boxes to build forts.

More significantly, each new address offered an opportunity for a public image makeover. Like when we moved to Ohio, the kids no longer joked about the day our Great Dane dragged me by his leash across a dozen rain-slick yards and through every pile of (shall we say) "droppings" in our Virginia neigh-

borhood.

In the days when "Ozzie and Harriet" ruled the TV screen, I was more than happy to be called by the family nickname I coincidentally shared with the "almost-Elvis" pop singer who became every little girl's heart throb, Ricky Nelson.

When we moved again during junior high school, the Nelsons were out and the Beatles were in. So I shortened the nickname to "Rick." This moniker had the right number of syllables (like John, Paul, George) and seemed to have the proper mix of maturity and cool.

Another move and two schools later, I began introducing myself by my given name. This had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that another Eric C. happened to be the greatest rock guitarist of the day. (Even so, I was given the nickname "Derek" for a while after Clapton formed Derek and the Dominoes.)

Now that we've moved again, perhaps I should come up with a new pen name to commemorate this latest transition. Let's see, I've already been hung with some less-than-savory titles like "Earache" and "Air Wick" and "Ear Wax." But thankfully, none of those stuck.

Maybe I could start calling myself "Airwalk Carlson" after the famous footwear. Or "AWACS Carlson" after the radar spy plane. Or how about "Subcommandante Carlos" in honor of the masked Mexican revolutionary?

No. Too obscure. I need a name that everybody recognizes.

Wait. I've got it.
 Just call me O.J.

Worth Repeating...

I like work: it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours. I love to keep it by me; the idea of getting rid of it breaks my heart.
 —Jerome Klapka Jerome

Great men, great nations, have not been boasters and buffoons, but perceivers of the terror of life, and have manned themselves to face it.
 —Ralph Waldo Emerson