

A True Inspiration

She dropped out in seventh grade but went on to achieve a master's degree and a teaching career. Page 7-B.

They're Banking On It

Southern National and BB&T merge to form North Carolina's largest banking institution. This and other business news, 11-C.

Grid Time Again

Coach Yogi Hickman makes his WBHS debut as the Trojans face the Falcons in Pikeville, 1-D.



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Star Power

One of these youngsters is a Supply Elementary School student with a part in the upcoming motion picture "Little Giants." You'll find him in the yellow helmet and "under the sun" on Page 1-B.

SEPTIC REPAIRS 'TOO SLOW'

Health Board May Nix Supply School Opening

BY ERIC CARLSON

The Brunswick County Board of Health may prohibit the opening of Supply Elementary School if education officials don't move quickly to fix a sewage treatment system they knew to be in "a state of total failure" for the past five months.

At its regular meeting Monday night, the board directed county Health Director Michael Rhodes to meet with Superintendent Ralph Johnston this week to ask how education officials plan to repair the faulty septic system and to find out why it hasn't been fixed already.

Rhodes was told to inform Health Board Chairman Patrick Newton of his findings later this week. Newton said if Rhodes' findings indicated that the problem is not being addressed adequately, he will call a special board meeting to discuss whether or not to keep the school closed.

"I want to know if there is any health risk to any children at that school," said board member Bruce Quaintance. "We won't have another regular meeting before classes start. If that school is not safe, I say we should close it. Some kind of time limit needs to be put on them."

"I agree," said member Joey Galloway. "They've been winging it since March. They need to know they have a deadline to meet."

Five weeks ago, the health department official-

ly notified Brunswick County Schools that the "pump-and-haul" process used to dispose of sewage from Supply Elementary School since mid-March is acceptable "for emergency and temporary situations only," and not suitable for long-term operations.

"Supply Elementary School does not need to be reopened or operated until the wastewater disposal treatment system is functioning properly," said the letter from Environmental Health Specialist Bruce Withrow.

Employees at Supply Elementary, which opened just two years ago, informed health officials about obvious problems with its low-pressure septic system in mid-March. Health inspectors found the nitrification field in "a state of total failure" with all the underground sewage distribution trenches saturated and effluent spurting out of the ground whenever the system's pumps were turned on.

School officials immediately hired a private contractor to pump the partially treated sewage effluent into trucks and haul it away for disposal. The temporary treatment process has cost the school system more than \$18,000 so far.

"Our number-one consideration is public health," said Rhodes. "So far the pump-and-haul has done a good job. It's a reliable short-term so-

lution. What we haven't seen is progress on a repaired system."

Project architect Charles H. Boney Sr., told the *Beacon* last month he was confident it could be repaired before the school's scheduled Aug. 23 opening. But as of Aug. 8, Rhodes said the state officials who must approve the repairs had not received plans for the proposed upgrade.

"I saw Dr. Johnston quoted as saying those plans were already in Raleigh," Quaintance said. "Evidently that's not true."

Quaintance also expressed concern Monday that soil contaminated by sewage overflow might pose a health threat to students at the school.

"Has anyone run any tests on that dirt?" he asked. "I've had parents complain to me about their kids coming home with sewage on their feet. If that was my child, I would have a concern."

Rhodes said that "some sort of barricade" would have to be constructed at the school to keep children away from any areas where sewage effluent reached the surface of school property.

Newton said the health department should have acted sooner to force the school system to fix the failed sewer system.

"What happened? If this was identified in March, why hasn't there been any action?" Newton asked. "If this was a private individual, we would have sent him a letter telling him he had X number of days to correct the problem or shut down. We haven't put any pressure on them. Can't we give them some sort of ultimatum?"

Rhodes said the health department has done "everything it could" to encourage officials to move forward with repairs on the failed septic system "except shutting the school down."

"We never made that an option to them, did we?" Newton asked.

"Not yet," said Rhodes.

Board member Maliston "Moe" Stanley suggested that Rhodes make a "first-hand survey" of problems at Supply Elementary School and the board of education's plans to fix them. Rhodes said he would visit the site with Johnston and report his findings to Newton "by Friday."

The proposal was informally approved without opposition.

Repair Plan Said To Be In Progress, But State Officials Haven't Received It

BY SUSAN USHER

Schools Superintendent Ralph Johnston said Monday that after talking with architect Charles H. Boney Jr. he "anticipates" Supply Elementary School will be able to open at the same time as other schools.

Last month local and state health officials questioned whether the K-5 grade school should be allowed to reopen. A two-year-old wastewater treatment field that failed in mid-March still had not been repaired or a plan for its repair submitted for review and approval.

As of Tuesday, the N.C. Division of Environmental Health still had not received a proposed

plan for repairs from Boney Architects or the project civil engineering firm Talbert & Bright.

Last week Supply Elementary Principal Carolyn Williams assured *The Brunswick Beacon* the school would reopen on schedule.

Health Director Michael Rhodes said the health department and other parties involved are all working to meet the school opening deadline (Aug. 23 now for students, but with the possibility of a delay until Sept. 6), but that there are no guarantees.

"We're going to work in that direction and we hope everybody else is going to," he said last

(See SUPPLY, Page 2-A)

Short Of Cash, Education Board May Delay First Day Of School

BY SUSAN USHER

It's likely the Brunswick County Board of Education will delay the opening of school until after Labor Day, when it will know from the courts how much money is available to operate the schools during the coming year.

If a quorum is available, the board expects to meet at 8 a.m. today (Thursday) in emergency session to consider a proposed calendar revision that calls for teachers to return Sept. 1 and students to return Sept. 6.

"Right now the school system doesn't have a budget," said Superintendent Ralph Johnston. "We're operating on an interim budget resolution, which means we're spending only the bare minimum funds needed to operate. We have only limited savings to draw from."

He announced that the board was considering the option Monday night after the board and some school officials met in closed session with Attorney Glen Peterson to discuss litigation.

While state funds are flowing into the system, Johnston said, that money can only be used for specific purposes. County money is used to pay electric and other utility bills, to maintain buildings and grounds and to pay slightly more than 100 of the school system's 1,000-plus employees, and other expenses directly related to operation of the schools.

"If we start without a budget and what we can spend is only detrimental to the schools, I think the best thing to do is to wait and see what

happens," said school board Chairman Donna Baxter. "Where are we going to get the money to hire these people?"

On Aug. 29 Superior Court Judge Jack Thompson will hear arguments for and against overturning a Brunswick County jury verdict awarding the schools \$14 million, or \$4.8 million more than county commissioners had allocated for the 1994-95 budget year that began July 1.

"Until then," said Johnston, "the Brunswick County Schools do not know what their budget is."

The hearing is the latest stage in the ongoing funding dispute between the school board and the board of county commissioners. The school board took the commissioners to court for the second consecutive year, saying its budget allocation wasn't adequate to continue programs in place last year.

Thompson will consider motions by the county's attorney asking that he:

- judgment notwithstanding, lessen the sum awarded by the jury or grant a new trial because jurors allegedly did not follow the court's instructions in reaching its verdict;

- grant a stay of execution of the judgment until the appeal is final, so that the county does not have to set aside funds right away to cover the judgment;

- or grant a new trial on the basis of judicial error in not allowing certain evidence to be introduced during the jury trial.

Commissioners have said they (See ALL, Page 2-A)



Whatta Catch!

Rudy Hewett of Old Ferry Road near Holden Beach displays the odd fish he found in a net while shrimping with his son Larry off Summer Place in the Intracoastal Waterway Friday morning. Neither could remember ever seeing such a creature in this area, so they brought it to the N.C. Aquarium at Ft. Fisher. It was identified as a rough-backed bat fish (*Ogcocephalus parvus*), a solitary bottom-feeder normally found at depths of 180 to 400 feet. Aquarist Joe Spitzer said Tuesday that the fish was "alive and well" and will be put on public display in a month or so after being quarantined to make sure it has not parasites that might be harmful to other fish. An unusual find in shallow water, Hewett's find will be the second specimen of the fish ever displayed at the state aquarium.

STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

Body-In-Dumpster Rumor Puzzles, Annoys Authorities

BY ERIC CARLSON

The nude, fully clothed body of a teenage female in her mid 30s was not found in a dumpster near Longwood or Ash or Calabash or Ocean Isle Beach or at the Oxpen solid waste convenience site off Holden Beach Road, authorities said over and over again last week.

Repeat, a body WAS NOT FOUND.

"If I hear about it one more time, I'm going to scream," said the voice on the other end of the telephone at the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department Thursday afternoon. "There isn't ANY body in ANY dumpster ANYwhere!"

It was the rumor that wouldn't go away throughout western Brunswick County from Bolivia to the state line last week. At least a dozen people inquired about the alleged find at the *Beacon* office last week. Advertising representatives heard about it wherever they roamed.

"I heard it was in four different dumpsters in four parts of the county," said CeCe Gore. "Someone told me the body fell out of a garbage truck at Oxpen and they had shut it down and called investigators. Other people told me it was found in Ash and Calabash."

The more the story got around, the more bizarre it became. Some



said the victim had its eyes gouged out. Another claimed the fingers were cut off. A third said the dead woman was an informant for drug agents whose body was found (in a dumpster, of course) with a surveil-

lance wire wrapped around it.

Deputy Lt. Carl Pearson said he personally fielded at least 10 calls in the past two weeks inquiring about a woman's body being found in a dumpster. Each one had its own set of details about the incident, he said.

"The rumor mill was unreal," said Peterson. "First it was a white female. Then she had blonde hair. Then she was nude. Then she had her throat cut and there was blood everywhere. Every time we got a new location, I told a road deputy to go check it out. And of course, every time they arrived, there wasn't anything there."

"It was driving the road and de-

fective divisions wacko," he said. "Finally I had to tell the deputies that if anyone called, tell them there IS no body."

That's what a lot of people heard on their police scanners Sunday night, when the Emergency Communications (911) Center informed a BCSD shift supervisor that a Wilmington newspaper reporter wanted to talk to him "about a body in a garbage dumpster" at Holden Beach.

"Tell them there IS no body," the sergeant radioed back.

That answer wasn't enough for (See NO BODY, Page 2-A)