

LAST CHANCE SCHOOL

Brunswick Learning Center Offers Many A Fresh Start

BY SUSAN USHER

A willingness to try. That's all Principal Robert Rhyne is asking of students who come to The Brunswick Learning Center.

The center is the Brunswick County Schools' answer for middle and high school students who simply aren't making it in a traditional school setting because of high absenteeism or other inappropriate behavior. Most have fallen behind academically as well.

Center doors will also open to drop-outs who want to return to school.

Over the next several weeks Rhyne will continue moving quick-step, trying to build a school—pulling together a plant, a staff and a smooth referral process to bring in students.

If a waiver is approved, he hopes to open the center to students a few days late, after Labor Day, giving he and his staff time to pull together as a work team and to get the referral process working smoothly between the center and the four middle schools and three high schools that will be transferring students to the center. With or without more time, he says, "We'll be ready to roll when the time comes, and with a smile."

Plans call for temporarily locating the center for several months in five divided classrooms on the Brunswick Community College campus in Southport while other quarters are renovated. Pending final approval by the BCC Board of Trustees, the school expects to move into the white concrete block building on the former BCC campus at Supply that now houses the Brunswick County Literacy Council and the Department of Motor Vehicles School Bus Drivers Training office.

"We're going to need every inch of space we can squeeze out there," said Rhyne. "Right now we're planning on bringing in several mobile units as well. We're going to be short on space."

Because students will have to transfer buses to reach the school, the center will operate on a slightly abbreviated daily schedule, from 8:45 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The philosophy of the center is simple: In a new setting with a small, determined staff offering lots of individual attention, students will have one last chance to

make a fresh start, to work out any problems they have and become successful students.

When a student is referred from their home school, the parents or guardians, the student and Rhyne will meet.

"I will explain our program and what we have to offer, an alternative way to graduate from high school, to prepare for the workplace, for life," said Rhyne. "The student and his or her parent must both sign an agreement. The student must agree that he is willing to attempt to behave."

"We want a student to want to be here and to be willing to try. If they have to spend a few days at home to do that, they will."

The final placement decision is up to a school planning management team that includes representation from the student's home school and the center.

For most of the students who come to The Brunswick Learning Center, it is the school of last chance.

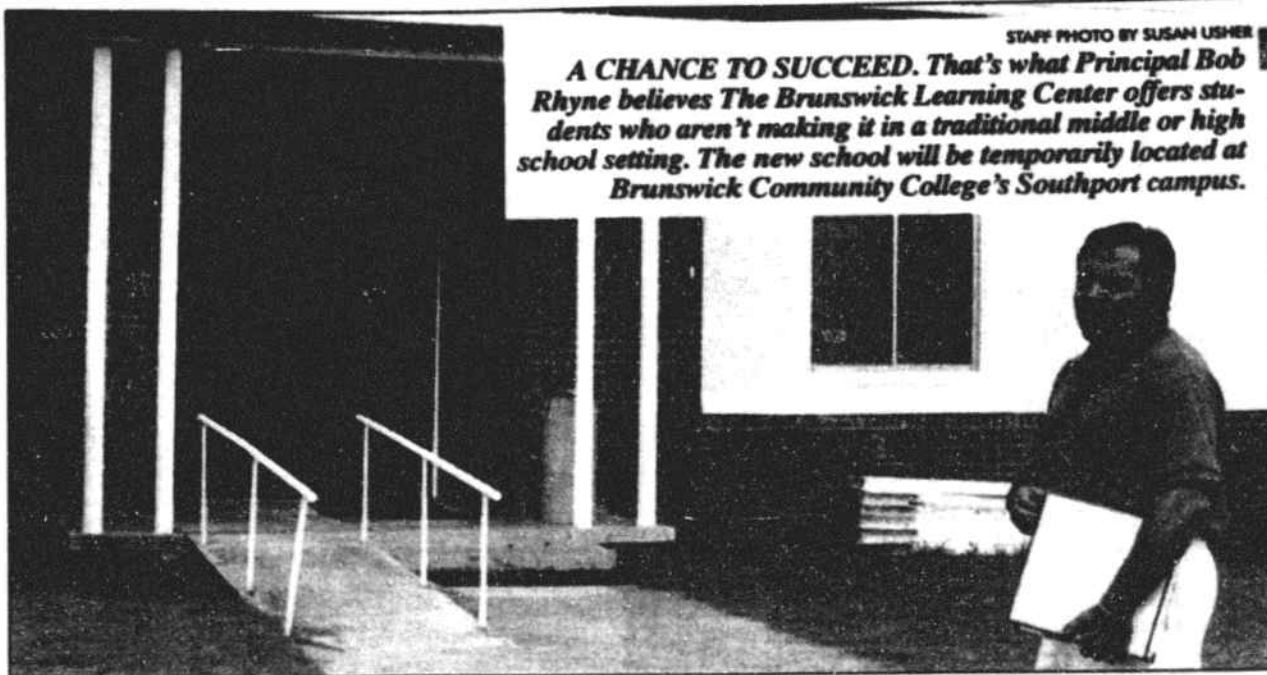
"If they choose not to sign or not to adhere to the contract," said Rhyne, "if they are under 16 they will be sent to the courts and if they're over 16, they'll go into the work force."

Rhyne is excited about the school's potential and is eager to see it prove itself within the school system and gain a permanent niche.

"We are going to be so successful," he predicts, seeing little comparison between the center and the county system's former Alternative School. "I don't see how we can fail with the staff we're pulling together and the total commitment I sense within the system to make it a success."

Rhyne cites his immediate supervisor, Assistant Superintendent Oscar Blanks, as an example. "He is willing to go to any lengths to make sure we have the staff and whatever else this program needs to succeed." The school will also operate under the supportive umbrella of the new Communities in Schools program.

Rhyne has had previous administrative experience at both the high school and middle school levels. A Brunswick County Schools employee since 1979, he has served as middle grades supervisor, principal of South



A CHANCE TO SUCCEED. That's what Principal Bob Rhyne believes The Brunswick Learning Center offers students who aren't making it in a traditional middle or high school setting. The new school will be temporarily located at Brunswick Community College's Southport campus.

Brunswick Middle School and assistant principal at South Brunswick High School.

Expecting to serve 100 to 120 students during the 1994-95 school year, the school will offer a basic curriculum plus vocational education and work force preparation skills. Instruction will also be computer-aided using a variety of software Rhyne expects to purchase as additional funding for the center becomes available. Seven computers will soon be in place, all for classroom use.

Rhyne is working with Brunswick Community College to arrange for students to take some vocational training through the college. The principal also wants to establish a community work-study program and, eventually, a job placement service.

Rhyne said the center will offer a teacher-student ratio of 1 to 10, topping out perhaps at 12 students in a class; ungraded classes; a "very, very strong staff," and

ready access to a guidance counselor, school psychologist, nurse and other support services available within the school system and from community agencies. Students will also participate in adviser/advisee groups for 30 minutes each day, a time set aside for building life skills such as self-concept and respect.

Once admitted to the school, each student will take diagnostic tests in math and reading.

"Classes are non-graded. We're going to teach these students where they are and move them along as fast as they choose to go," said Rhyne.

While there are plenty of different reasons students have behavior problems, Rhyne said a need for attention often figures into the mix.

"We want to show them they can get the attention they want by achieving academically. These kids for the most part have a lot of ability. I think most will zoom ahead when they start seeing they can succeed."

Tennessee Men Charged With Holden Break-ins

Holden Beach Police have arrested two Tennessee men in connection with a series of four break-ins that occurred Friday night.

Police Chief Robert Cook said authorities arrested Charles Joseph Merritt, 17, and Shane Anthony Pate, 20, both of Fairview, Tenn.

Each is charged with four counts of felony breaking and entering, and both men are being held in Brunswick County Jail under \$5,000 secured bond.

Cook said the break-ins occurred at 246, 250 and 262 Ocean Blvd. West and 241 Brunswick Ave. West.

The chief said the two suspects allegedly took approximately \$6,500 in items from the four homes. All of the items were later recovered.

The most valuable items taken were nine diamond rings valued at more than \$5,000. Rare coins and two pistols were taken from the same residence.

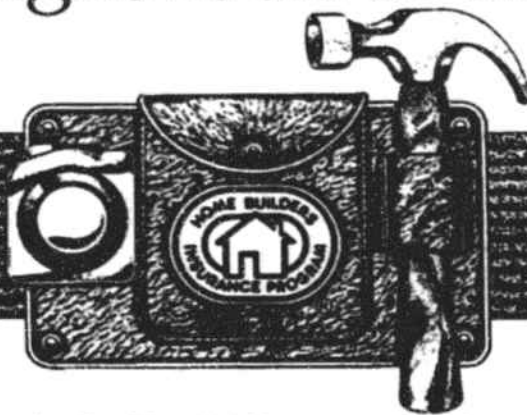
Reported missing from the other

three homes were a men's racing bicycle, two fishing rods, tackle box, bike helmet and cordless telephone, Cook said.

Cook said the suspects had been renting a home in the Holden Beach area. Most of the items reporting missing from the homes were found at the suspects' residence.

"Everything they got we recovered," Cook said. "Two of the rings were already in the hock shop in Myrtle Beach."

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