

Motive A Mystery In Murder-Suicide Of Grissetown Couple

BY ERIC CARLSON

Authorities are unsure of the motive in a murder-suicide Sunday night that claimed the lives of a Grissetown woman and a man who recently moved in to her mobile home on Old Shallotte Road, a Brunswick County Sheriff's Detective said Tuesday.

Julene Hill Wright, 47, was shot once in the head by Ernest Love, 48, who then turned the pistol on himself and fired a bullet into his throat shortly before midnight, Detective Tom Hunter said.

"There was no sign of a struggle," Hunter said. When sheriff's deputies arrived, Wright was found

sitting upright in an arm chair in front of the television with a bowl of chicken and rice soup in her lap, said Hunter. Love sat nearby on the couch, still holding the .380-caliber pistol in his hand.

Patrol deputies were called to the scene at about 11:18 p.m. when they were notified that a Wisconsin woman identifying herself as Love's mother had called the Brunswick County Emergency Services (911) Center to say "that her son had called her and informed her that he had just killed his wife and that he was going to kill himself."

The caller was unsure of the address, but she did

have a telephone number. Emergency workers used the phone number to trace the call to an address on Old Shallotte Road.

Hunter responded to the trailer along with deputies Johnny Earp, Keithan Horne and Joey Adams. They received no response to their repeated knocks on the door.

Looking through a living room window, Hunter reported seeing a woman sitting in a chair "with her head thrown back and what appeared to be blood on her face and body."

Not knowing whether the woman was still alive,

Deputy Horne immediately forced the door open, Hunter reported. That's when the officers found Love on the couch. They immediately called for a rescue unit and the county coroner.

"We were unable to detect vital signs from either subject," Hunter reported.

Although there was no suicide note, Hunter said evidence at the scene suggested that Love fired both the fatal gunshots. It appeared that Wright had just sat down to eat when Love "surprised her," Hunter said. She was shot in the upper left temple.

(See FAMILY, POLICE, Page 2-A)

BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Harassment Suit Against Chamber Is Dismissed

A sexual harassment lawsuit against the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce and two of its former presidents has been voluntarily dismissed in Brunswick County Superior Court.

Hollis B. "Holly" Richards, who claims she was fired from the chamber post in April 1992 "on account of her sex," failed to appear for an Aug. 29 court date, did not produce evidence requested by the defendants and had "differences" with her attorney, who asked to withdraw as her counsel, according to court documents.

Richards and attorney William R. Shell were scheduled to appear in court Aug. 29, when Richards was to have responded to a second request by the defendants to produce documentation and lists of witnesses supporting her allegations of sexual improprieties against her by chamber members. Shell appeared but Richards did not, according to court documents.

The requested information included Richards' medical records, employment history, tax returns and the names and addresses of witnesses referred to in her complaint, including two people identified only as "a local doctor" and "a married man."

Shell's motion to withdraw as her lawyer stated that "differences have arisen" between himself and Richards and that Shell "has obtained knowledge which makes it impossible for him to be able to continue to represent" her. Judge William C. Gore Jr. granted the motion.

The two former presidents have sought "appropriate sanctions" for Richards' refusal to respond to their discovery requests, but an attorney for the chamber said Tuesday she doesn't know if Richards will be ordered to reimburse the defendants for their legal expenses.

Attorney Jane Jackson of Winston-Salem, representing the chamber, said she is "pleased that this case will not be going any further." Because the lawsuit was dismissed "with prejudice," it cannot be refiled.

Current Chamber President Joe Stanley, who was not named in the lawsuit, said, "It's a real relief. I'm glad it's behind us and I hope it doesn't come back to haunt us."

Workers will be patching "spalls," or flaws in the bridge deck, starting at about 9 a.m. Monday, Collins said. Flagmen will direct traffic during the day; at night, partitions will be erected, along with stop-and-go signs, he added.

"We want to make sure people watch out and be aware of the people on the bridge," Collins said.

Three spans on the deck will require patching with epoxy which requires 24 hours' drying time. "If it gets rained on before it dries, we have to reapply," Collins said.

OIB Bridge To Have One Lane Closed During Repair

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Holiday Crab Hunt
Brandy Perry, age 8, of Bunnlevel and Daniel Horne, 5, of Raeford explore the shallow waters of the Intracoastal Waterway near Bricklanding Monday morning. Their families spent the Labor Day weekend camping across from Shallotte Inlet.

JUDGE DENIES MOTION Commissioners Agree To Appeal \$14 Million Award To Brunswick County Schools

BY ERIC CARLSON
Brunswick County Commissioners unanimously agreed to appeal a \$14 million award to the county board of education last week, claiming the judge did not allow the jury to consider the spending needs of both sides before ruling on the school funding controversy.

In an emergency meeting Friday afternoon, the commissioners agreed to take their case to the N.C. Court of Appeals after Superior Court Judge Jack Thompson refused to grant the county's motion for a new trial Thursday.

Thompson noted that there is no way of speeding up the lengthy appeal process, but said he would contact one of the court judges and "request a hearing at the earliest possible point."

County Attorney Mike Ramos said previous appeals of school funding battles have not been resolved before the end of the fiscal year in which they were filed. As long as the case is on appeal, the Brunswick Board of Education will have to run the school system on the same amount of county funding it used last year.

In deciding to appeal the case, commissioners expressed concern that the 10-cent tax increase needed to pay the jury award would put too great a burden on taxpayers, especially those on fixed incomes.

"That tax increase will be there next year and from now on if we



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON
SUPERIOR COURT Judge Jack Thompson makes his ruling on the county's request for a new trial in its funding dispute with the board of education.

want to improve education. But in my end of the county, a lot of people have to borrow money to pay their taxes. How are those people going to pay more?"

Citing the recently announced drop in student test scores, Commissioners' Chairman Don Warren said the county's share of school funding has increased steadily for years without a corresponding improvement in student performance.

"I think this board and other boards before us have done their part to upgrade schools," Warren said. "Test scores were higher in 1991 than they were in 1993. The school board needs to address other issues besides just money. They can blame whoever they want to. But they've got other problems besides funding."

Warren said he felt Judge Thompson was wrong in not allowing evidence about the board's budget process and the need to consider school funding in the context of other expenses. The county was specifically prohibited from telling the jury about the relationship between the money it spends and the tax rate needed to collect those funds.

Each \$500,000 worth of county spending requires roughly a half-cent worth of ad valorem taxes, according to county Finance Officer Lithia Hahn.

In its 1994-95 budget, Brunswick (See FUNDS, Page 2-A)

Sunset Taxpayers' Group Endorses Island Secession Plan

BY SUSAN USHER
A proposal to establish a separate island government, once considered a "perennial jest," appears to be gaining momentum among Sunset Beach island property owners.

On a voice vote Saturday approximately 100 Sunset Beach Taxpayer Association members enthusiastically supported Barry Lentz's motion to pursue secession of the island from the Town of Sunset Beach, with only one negative vote voiced. The SBTA Board of Directors is to poll island property owners and, if a majority favor the proposal, begin seeking legislation to make it a reality.

"I don't always agree with what you do, but I think this makes a lot of sense," said one full-time island resident.

Mayor Mason Barber dismissed the propos-

al as an attention-getting effort by the SBTA to rally property owners around a cause. "If they don't have a project they don't get any publicity," he asserted. "They're concerned about growth, but Realtors couldn't have bought the publicity they have brought this town."

When Warren "Bud" Knapp Sr., chairman of the SBTA's bridge committee, raised the idea of secession on the basis of "taxation without representation" at the SBTA's Easter weekend meeting, members defeated the motion 24-19, but only after lengthy debate.

Since then, a number of island property owners asked that the proposal be looked at seriously. Raymond Zetts, a retired educator, pulled together a committee of part-time and year-round island residents to study the feasi-

bility of establishing an independent island government.

The committee believes independence is feasible, he reported Saturday, but only if there is "a real commitment by a majority of island property owners." That commitment includes a willingness to use property owners' power and influence to achieve that end.

"I don't think we have any choice but to go forward," he said, echoing the group's general sentiment. "We've already lost control of the island; it's time to take it back."

"If we don't take control of the island, what's going to happen? We hope to be able to control our own destiny."

Suggesting taxation without representation, Zett's committee calculated that island property owners provide approximately 65 percent of

all town income, including property and accommodations taxes, yet are outvoted by the mainland majority of town residents and governed by a mainland-dominated town council "dead to island voices, island issues and island concerns."

Speakers also suggested the island isn't receiving the town trash collection and police services it needs during the season, is in danger of losing its status as a safe family beach with no distractions, is unique in having rising property values when surrounding communities are seeing declines, and faces the prospect of high-rise development, if the town chooses, if a new bridge is built that would allow transport of girders to the island.

Island self-government would still leave (See SUNSET, Page 2-A)

MURDER SUSPECT ACCEPTS PLEA BARGAIN IN DAVIS KILLING

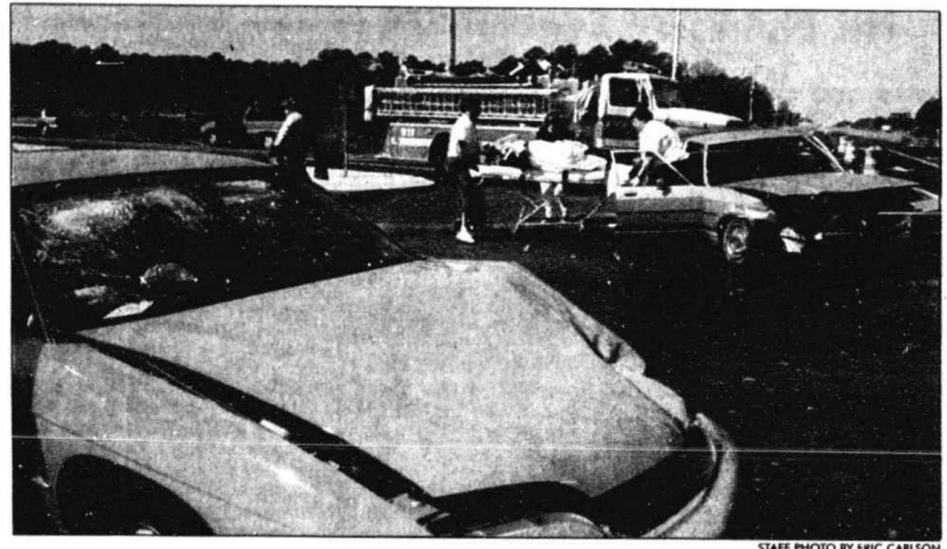
BY ERIC CARLSON
One of four men charged with murder in a gang-style killing last November pleaded guilty to conspiracy Thursday morning (Sept. 1), joining five other "peripheral players" who have agreed to testify against co-defendants in the case.

Nicholas Lavoir Smith, 17, of U.S. 17, Bolivia, pleaded guilty to a charge of conspiracy to commit assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill inflicting serious injury in the brutal slaying of Charles Wayne "Butch" Davis.

Prosecutors say Smith was originally charged with murder because he was among the four young men who got out the cars when 10 people drove to Davis's mobile home "to teach him a lesson" that night.

Five other youths pleaded no contest to the same conspiracy charge as Smith last week. They allegedly stayed in the cars while Davis was being shot, kicked and slashed with a machete in the driveway of his home on Albright Road.

Although Smith remained in the car during the killing, he allegedly got out afterwards to summon his cousin from the scene, Assistant (See SMITH, Page 2-A)



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON
Treacherous Intersection
Brunswick County Emergency Medical Services workers remove a victim from one of the two cars that collided where N.C. 904 crosses U.S. 17 Monday morning. It was the first of two Labor Day wrecks at the Grissetown intersection, where many say a traffic light is needed. New Hanover County Sheriff Joe McQueen and his family received minor injuries in a similar crash there Monday afternoon.

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