

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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PAGE 4-A, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1994

Shallotte's Traffic Future: Something's Gotta Give

A long-range plan designed to improve traffic flow and ease congestion in and around Shallotte had something to annoy almost everyone who packed Shallotte Town Hall last week for a public hearing.

And it's understandable. If we lived in beautiful Brierwood, we'd share residents' fear that opening two new entrances would make their property more vulnerable to crime and vandalism. If we lived on or near Bluff Drive, we'd cringe at the prospect of that traditionally peaceful residential area being sliced by a second major east-west thoroughfare through town.

But something—maybe not this thing, but something—has to give. The Department of Transportation is trying to look 25 years ahead toward the type of street system that will be needed that far into the future. Anyone who remembers the Shallotte of 25 years ago would be inclined to wish somebody had given the matter more thought back then.

Highway planner Rick Blackwood told the group that if something isn't done to relieve congestion on U.S. 17 Business, it "will need to be seven lanes wide at some point in the future." According to his figures 17,000 vehicles use Main Street Shallotte every day, compared to just 10,000 on U.S. 17 Bypass.

Part of that problem is attributable to DOT itself. While plans for an overpass at N.C. 130 and U.S. 17 Bypass remained nothing more than plans year after year, retailers and restaurateurs wishing to set up shop on that choice piece of highway were forced to wait or start thinking about locating elsewhere. When there's more on the bypass to serve the traveling public, fewer cars will need to come into downtown Shallotte.

Still, that won't be a total solution. It hasn't been very long ago that merchants were expressing abject terror at the prospect of a Shallotte bypass which might quash local trade. The bypass happened but the quashing didn't. That's a good indicator that when you're dealing with Shallotte's traffic woes, you'd better keep an open mind and one eye trained 25 years down the road.

Alive, Well, Selling Books

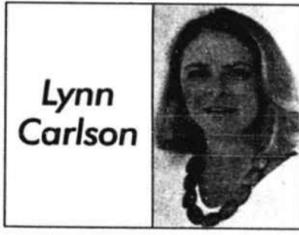
"The report of my death was an exaggeration," Holden Beach book-seller Jim Lowell told the mortified publisher of his college alumni magazine. And he wasn't quoting Mark Twain.

I was in L Bookworm on Saturday and Jim showed me an obituary headed with his name and, at least in part, describing his background. Except Jim was alive and seemingly well and eager to talk books and help customers on a busy afternoon.

It seems someone at the magazine got Jim's bio mixed up that of an old classmate who had a similar name and who had recently succumbed after a battle with cancer. The first part of the obituary fit Jim's description; the second, that of the dearly departed.

Jim didn't seem too outraged, even though the classmate was a childhood friend, and the magazine is published only twice a year so there's no chance of a timely retraction.

He says he's looking forward to reading all the nice things people are going to say about him in the sympathy cards they send Barbara...



Lynn Carlson

Foiks have a lot on their minds these days. If you don't believe it, look at our letters to the editor, which in recent weeks have spilled over past the editorial page, past our "op-ed" page, and on deeper into the paper.

It's a good sign—not just that Brunswick Countians prefer a political dogfight to any other sport (though there's a case to be made for that), but that people consider us a worthy enough medium to sit down and write out their thoughts to share with our readership.

That makes it hard when people call to find out why their letter to the editor didn't get published, or why it was made shorter than they intended for it to be. It's my job to deal with the letters, and I take it very seriously and spend more time with it than I can afford sometimes. The job is never easy.

It is our policy not to give letter space to people who want to thank specific contributors or the doctor who saved their lives, or to knock the business which overcharged them or the candidate they don't want elected in November. Some newspapers don't share these guidelines, a fact some letter-writers are quick to point out. But our policy works for us, and we're sticking to it.

If we allowed readers to use our letters as a forum for praising their medical providers, we'd also have to allow the opposite. We can't do that for a very simple and important reason. Your medical records are confidential (and rightfully so). We can't verify what you say about your treatment, good or bad. And if we let you praise your care, we'd also have to let you condemn it, opening both you and ourselves to a legal liability we know we're not in a position to defend, and you might not be either.

We also generally don't let our letters column be used as a way for readers to shower praise on specific individuals or businesses who give to causes—we know you appreciate what they do for you, we simply think it would be more appropriate for you to thank them directly. We wouldn't let you criticize them for saying no to you, and, by the same token, we don't want to be used as a means of giving free plugs. The letters, after all, are supposed to be about the community's many issues, not about individual agendas.

We don't let you endorse candidates in our letters column because, frankly, candidates and their zealots tend to take advantage of forums which do. We have an inch-thick file of letters, all nearly identical, from supporters of a failed candidate in the spring primary. Some well-meaning campaigner somewhere along the line apparently thought it would be a good idea to encourage like-minded individuals to blitz the *Beacon* as a source of free political advertising for the candidate. We didn't bite.

One of the main reasons we're able to bring you the news is the revenue we get from selling advertising. For that reason, we don't like to give it away. Also, keeping arm's length between selling ads and exploring issues is an important part of what makes us what we are—like it or not.

Then there are the simple limitations of space. When we get more letters in a week than we are able to publish, they must either be edited, held to the next week or not published at all. It's a tough call, but one we are compelled to make.

You keep on writing. We'll keep on trying to make fair decisions and reasonable policy about what gets published.

Whodunit? Ask Mr. Extreme Intelligence

"So whatever happened to Mr. Extreme Intelligence?"

This is a question I frequently get asked by a number of alert *Beacon* readers. (Actually, "two" is the number that springs to mind—as in Wayne and Artie at the Shallotte ABC store.)

Those who are as diligent in your newspaper reading as these two fine gentlemen will remember the day Mr. Extreme Intelligence got his name. The rest of you should turn to page 4A of the Oct. 22, 1992, edition, where you will find a letter in which a woman asked the following: "Okay, Mr. Extreme Intelligence Carlson. Who does a smart voter vote for...?"

Her question was posed in response to my extremely intelligent observations about the 1992 presidential campaign of Texas billionaire Ross Perot.

I pointed out that his entry into the race would allow us to determine how stupid voters affect American politics by casting stupid votes for stupid candidates who don't have a T-bone's chance in a kennel of being elected.

By innocently asking for some friendly advice, her letter forever established Mr. Extreme Intelligence as the supreme authority on how the "stupid factor" effects things in the world.

As Mr. Extreme Intelligence could have predicted, so many stupid votes were cast for Perot that we ended up with a president that most of us didn't want. Unfortunately, Ross Perot still hasn't figured out



Eric Carlson

how stupid that was. So he is likely to run for president again in 1996.

But first, he plans to spend a few million bucks starting his own weekly RADIO program, to be broadcast at the same time as "Murder She Wrote," America's most popular weekly TELEVISION program!

Mr. Extreme Intelligence isn't even going to comment about the stupidity of Mr. Perot's latest attempt to get attention, since even Mr. Moderately Dimwitted could tell you what a bone-headed move it is.

Instead, Mr. Extreme Intelligence wants to discuss the "stupid factor" as it relates to the upcoming murder trial of O.J. (Orenthal James) Simpson.

Not since the first round of Perot lunacy has Mr. Extreme Intelligence seen such a severe case of mass stupidity: To think there are actually people out there who believe someone other than O.J. (Obsessively Jealous) Simpson jumped out of the bushes and killed his wife and her friend!

Before all those stupid letters arrive insisting that O.J. MIGHT BE

innocent, Mr. Extreme Intelligence would like to point out some of the obvious facts that must be ignored and all the unintelligent fantasies you have to believe in order to reach such a stupid conclusion.

First, you have to believe that O.J. bought a 15-inch Stiletto knife as a collector's item (although he has no such collection). Then you have to ignore all the 911 calls Nicole made whenever "The Juice" went berserk and started tearing up her house.

Then you have to believe an innocent man, who just found out that the mother of his children was brutally murdered, would write an apparent suicide note expressing no shock at the crime while blowing goodbye kisses to his new Playboy centerfold girlfriend.

Next, you have to believe that O.J. (Obviously Joking) Simpson was really on his way to visit mom when they spotted his white Ford Bronco bolting down the highway (toward the airport) along with his best friend, a loaded gun, a wad of cash, a passport, a disguise and a shovel.

Then you have to ignore all the blood—in O.J.'s Bronco, on O.J.'s driveway, in O.J.'s sink, on O.J.'s shoes. Are you really trying to convince Mr. Extreme Intelligence that O.J. lost all that juice after cutting himself shaving?

You also have to believe that someone planted one leather glove (with O.J.'s blood on it) at the crime scene and put the other glove at his house (with the victim's blood on

it). In which case you must be prepared to accept the "rogue cop" theory, in which a 20-year-veteran of the LAPD somehow obtains blood from the murderer and the victim, smears it on a pair of gloves and plants them at the two homes because he doesn't like O.J. Simpson's looks (or something).

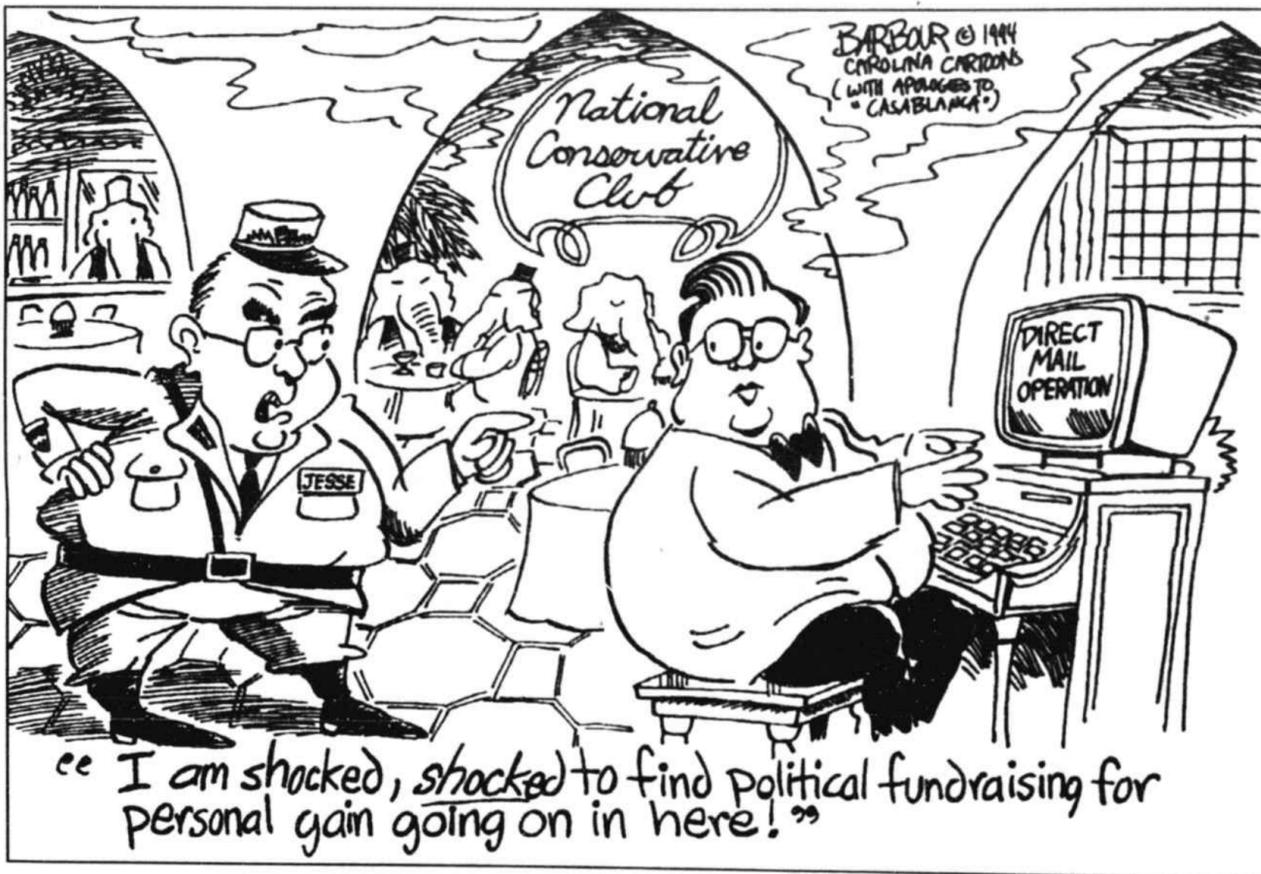
Finally, to maintain O.J.'s innocence, you must dismiss the entire science of genetics, which is going to show that he left some of his genes beside Nicole's body, while getting himself and his shoes and his car and his house and probably his jeans smeared with her genes.

Genetic fingerprinting will show there is about one chance in 20 million that somebody besides O.J. dropped his blood at the crime scene. That means, assuming a current world population of 5 billion, there are only about 250 people on the entire surface of the planet who could possibly have committed this murder.

Which means if O.J. didn't do it, Angela Lansbury is going to rack up a lot of frequent flyer miles trying to figure out who did. Although she might as well stay home in Cabbage Grove, since only one of those 250 people had a motive.

Mr. Extreme Intelligence has reached the conclusion that anyone stupid enough to believe O.J. Simpson might be innocent MUST be watching WAY too much "Murder She Wrote."

Perhaps you should consider tuning in to the Ross Perot Show.



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GUEST COLUMN

Keep Fire Chief Lyke At Sunset Beach

BY DEBORA VICKERS-MAWJI

You are a young mother with two children living in Sunset Beach. Suddenly you become aware that it is the middle of the night and the house is filled with smoke. The smoke alarm is wailing as you crawl across the acrid carpets toward your children. You grab them, run to the neighbor's house and call 911. The professionals are on the way. Everything is going to be all right! Or is it?

If you live in Sunset Beach, chances are you have been lulled into believing you are safe in the event of an emergency. After all, 911 is now in place and first responders are well trained, right? Wrong. Dead wrong.

The sad truth is that the Sunset Beach Volunteer Fire Department is in shambles. There are 18 poorly trained volunteers, and of this group only eight are active. These eight volunteers are expected to protect at least 4,000 residences. There are huge blocks of time when no one is available to help in an emergency. Help must come from neighboring communities like Ocean Isle or Calabash, who may or may not be available before someone dies.

Most of the equipment in Sunset Beach is obsolete and often out of service. They don't even have an ambulance, or a truck with a ladder that could reach the top of a burning building over 26 feet. That means no evacuation from three-story condos or tall homes. And if the Sunset bridge fails, there is no access to or from the island because there simply isn't enough funding for water rescue equipment.

I am a young mother with two small children living in Sunset Beach. The above "burning house scenario" could be me and my fami-

ly. My husband volunteers for the Sunset Beach Fire Department, and frankly, we are both terrified for the citizens of Sunset Beach. For the most part, people here are unaware of the time bomb they are living in.

Recently a highly trained firefighter and certified instructor named T.J. Lyke took the reins as Sunset Beach fire chief. He is knowledgeable in many areas, including fire safety, hazardous materials, CPR, and first aid. Among the many practical changes he has implemented are free classes to volunteers, who are required to attend twice a month. He has lifted the standards of the department in a few short weeks, and will continue to do so if given the opportunity.

The new chief has asked the town to consider making the fire chief position a paid one, so the citizens of Sunset Beach can be covered by at least one professional at all times. But due to the poor working relationship between the two departments in the past, town officials have justifiable concerns. For example, last year the Sunset Beach "Fire Board" authorized the purchase of a 1965 equipment truck which cost the department \$22,600. The truck is too cumbersome for the local roads, and has broken down on route to an emergency more than once. No one can afford to fix it. The 1969 tank truck often will not start because it is not maintained. The 1976 number-two engine is unreliable and often out of service. That leaves only one pumper that works, and that engine could easily be somewhere else when you need it most...

The town administrator has offered several useful suggestions as to how "the gap" may be bridged, and suggests town officials may be

receptive to helping improve the fire department if the new chief can prove his abilities. They know better than anyone with the rapid growth of Sunset Beach, there is a desperate need for an experienced hand at the helm of the fire department.

T.J. Lyke has been a firefighter for more than 15 years. He is a certified instructor at Brunswick Community College. He is capable of developing and administering a budget, keeping the department within OSHA guidelines, and "undoing" the mess he inherited. He is currently struggling to maintain (and hopefully improve) insurance safety ratings so the local people don't see their insurance rates jump as high as 30 percent. But he needs our help!

- T.J. Lyke wants:
- fire hydrants checked for pressure;
 - annual fire inspections on all commercial residences;
 - all hazardous materials marked appropriately;
 - water rescue for island resi-

dents;

■ a data computer base to coordinate evacuations in the event of a disaster (and to make sure people with special medical needs are helped quickly), and most importantly,

■ adequate equipment. The new chief works around the clock because this is his home and he loves it here. But he is being courted by a fire academy in Texas for \$30,000 per year. They believe he has the managerial skills to run the academy. It is simply not realistic for a professional to stay here and work for free. This man needs to be paid for the work he does, just like the rest of us!

It is only a matter of time before a terrible tragedy happens in Sunset Beach. Why should we tolerate such inadequacy? Why should we wait for people to die before we do something? Fire safety and emergency care are basic services to any community. And it's not just a government problem. It requires support from the community base.

Worth Repeating...

- My argument is that War makes rattling good reading; but Peace is poor reading. —Thomas Hardy
- Every intellectual product must be judged from the point of view of the age and the people in which it was produced. —Walter Pater
- In God's wilderness lies the hope of the world—the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. —John Muir
- A mugwump is a person educated beyond his intellect. —Horace Porter