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Nail-Biter

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TWO HOMES in the 900 block of Ocean Boulevard West, Holden Beach, are consumed by flames early Friday. Below, firefighters train a hose on the remains of one home's interior as a sofa burns in the background.

Fire Consumes Two Oceanfront Homes, Singes Others On Island

BY ERIC CARLSON

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.

No thought strikes fear in Holden Beach and other island residents like the idea of a major fire racing from house to house, propelled through tightly packed residential areas by a stiff sea breeze.

So, if a blaze had to destroy two homes and damage two others on the oceanfront Friday morning, at least it happened at a good time.

And thankfully, no one was hurt.

"If the wind had been blowing in

any other direction than it was, we would have been in real trouble," said Chief Doug Todd of the Tri-Beach Volunteer Fire Department.

The cause of the fire has not been determined, but the results were clear: Two oceanfront homes were burned to the ground. One neighboring house had its vinyl siding melted off. The other was singed black by the intense heat. Total damage was estimated to be between \$300,000 and \$350,000.

John Eldridge of 961 Ocean Blvd. (See BEACHFRONT, Page 2-A)



STAFF PHOTOS BY ERIC CARLSON

Highway Workers Find Remains Of Missing Man

BY DOUG RUTTER

The skeletal remains of a Mecklenburg County man who was reported missing 17 months ago were found Tuesday afternoon in a wooded area off N.C. 179 in Shallotte.

Shallotte Police Chief Rodney Gause identified the man as Samuel Travis "Sam" Herring, 56, of Pineville. Authorities do not suspect foul play, and believe the body had been there for more than a year, Gause said.

N.C. Department of Transportation workers who were surveying N.C. 179 discovered the remains around 1:45 p.m. in the woods behind Coastal Plaza shopping center, Gause said.

The skeleton and two suitcases were found approximately 30 yards off N.C. 179 and 40 yards from the access road behind the Maxway department store.

The State Bureau of Investigation assisted local police with the investigation. Gause said the skeleton was taken to the state medical examiners' office in Jacksonville for an examination.

Gause said police do not suspect foul play in the death of Herring. At the scene, they found a

"We don't think there was foul play because the suitcases were still zipped up, the clothes were still there; everything was intact."

—Chief Rodney Gause

wallet containing cash in his pants' pocket and a watch on his left wrist.

"We don't think there was foul play because the suitcases were still zipped up, the clothes were still there; everything was intact," Gause said. Authorities found Herring's driver's license in the wallet and his birth certificate in one of the suitcases.

Gause said both suitcases were filled with clothes and one also contained personal items including a toothbrush, razor blades and after-shave lotion.

Gause said police think the man died more than a year ago and he was "very surprised" that the body was not found sooner. "You could tell he's been there for a while because of the grass and straw and leaves around him," Gause said.

Herring was reported missing May 25, 1993, by Ken Messer, owner of the Camellia Motel in Belville.

Messer, a deputy with the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department and mayor of Belville, said Herring had lived at the motel for about six months before leaving May 24, 1993.

Messer said Herring was an alcoholic who had been treated for substance abuse about four or five times in the six months he stayed at the motel.

Herring did not have a job while he was living at the motel. Messer said he thought Herring was going to see friends in Shallotte when he left the motel.

ARMED STANDOFF ON OCEAN ISLE

Commissioner Blasts Release Of Man Who Threatened Cops

BY ERIC CARLSON

Ocean Isle Beach Commissioner Ken Proctor has called for an investigation into the "premature" release of a man who allegedly fired several shots in a crowded residential neighborhood, then held a rifle on a town policeman while threatening to kill him last week.

"As a town commissioner, I don't believe our police officers should be subjected to this kind of danger, and then have this kind of person walking the street a couple hours later," Proctor said Tuesday.

Proctor lives "within 300 feet" of William Earl Holden, 45, who was arrested after a showdown with police outside his Duneside Drive home Thursday night (Oct. 20). The commissioner said he was watching the scene unfold from his house and heard Holden yell, "I'm ready to die and I'm going to kill you," several times during the standoff.

Holden was armed with a loaded MAC-90 assault rifle when he was surprised and forced to the ground

by an Ocean Isle Beach officer after another patrolman encouraged Holden to set down his rifle and smoke a cigarette, OIB Police Chief Curt Pritchard said Tuesday.

Shortly after midnight, Holden was booked on one count each of assault on a law enforcement officer, communicating threats and resisting arrest, Pritchard said. Later that morning, Holden was back at Ocean Isle Beach. He had been set free on an unsecured bond.

"I saw him eating breakfast at (a local restaurant) this morning," Proctor said Tuesday. "This is the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen. I don't like it and I want something done about it."

Enraged by the decision to release the suspect, Proctor said he has left three telephone messages with senior District Court Judge Jerry Jolly, who oversees local magistrates. Proctor said the judge did not return his calls.

On Tuesday, Proctor said he spoke with Superior Court Judge

William Gore and was assured that the matter would be investigated and a bench warrant issued for Holden's arrest if necessary.

The Standoff

Proctor said he was at home with his wife Becky Thursday night when he heard three pairs of gunshots in the neighborhood at about 10:15. He said he told her to call 911 and went outside to see what had happened.

As he approached to within 50 feet of the Holden residence, Proctor said he saw Ocean Isle Beach Officer Wayne Downer get out of his car and walk toward Holden. Then Proctor said he saw the officer stop and noticed Holden was armed with a rifle.

"I saw Wayne get out of his car. He did not have his gun drawn," Proctor said. "Then I heard him say, 'Please mister. Don't shoot me,' as he moved back around the car."

When he heard Holden make the first of several threats to shoot the officer, Proctor said he turned and headed back. By the time he reached

home, "everybody was outside on their porch" watching the incident unfold. Proctor said he could clearly see Downer behind his patrol car with his sidearm drawn. He heard the officer say, "Please don't make me shoot you."

Meanwhile, OIBPD Lt. James Stewart was responding to the call of shots fired on Duneside Drive. According to his report of the incident, Stewart was returning to the island when a small van began flashing its headlights as it approached him on the bridge.

"So I stopped, thinking it may be involved in the problem on Duneside Drive," Stewart's report said.

A man pulled up beside the officer and handed him a 9mm pistol, saying he had just "grabbed it from Earl Holden on Duneside Drive." He said he had "taken it off the subject at the residence and that he may have another weapon."

When he arrived at the scene, Stewart said he could see Downer at

the rear of his car with his weapon drawn. Approaching with his lights and radios off, Stewart said he saw Holden "pointing a rifle at officer Downer" and heard him say "he was going to shoot his head off and anyone else who comes."

After checking to make sure no "civilians" were in the area, Stewart concealed himself and watched as "Holden would follow (Downer) with the rifle and continued to threaten to blow off officer Downer's head.

"If you come toward me I will kill you," Holden reportedly said.

Stewart continued to watch as Downer talked with Holden, who said he was going to lay the rifle across the hood of his car to smoke a cigarette. He put the gun down, but kept on hand on it as he stuck a cigarette in his mouth and lit it.

Making his way around the house, Stewart got behind Holden and slowly edged toward him. He listened to the two men talking and heard Holden repeat his threat to kill

anyone who came near. Seeing the cigarette growing smaller, Stewart said he holstered his pistol and prepared to make his move.

"Approaching him from the rear, I

(See MAN, Page 2-A)

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