

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Listen To Firefighters In Wake Of Beach Blaze

Things could have been worse. That's surely not much consolation for John Eldridge and Bill Mickey, both of whom lost oceanfront homes in the recent fire on Holden Beach, but it should be to all their neighbors. With just the slightest change in wind direction and velocity, a dozen other property owners could have seen their investment on the beach go up in smoke.

There seems to be widespread agreement that the 40-plus volunteer firefighters representing six departments on the scene did a superb job. Firefighters and townspeople say Tri-Beach Volunteer Fire Chief Doug Todd made a tough but sound decision in writing off the two fully engulfed cottages and concentrating efforts on saving the other houses in immediate peril.

If we truly want to give these valiant volunteers the respect they've earned, we should listen to them.

Todd warns that on some tragic day when an oceanfront blaze breaks out in a strong east or west wind, "someone will have to go down the road and decide where we should make a stand and try and stop it, because we're going to lose some houses in between."

He says that no matter how much or little water there is in the town's storage tank, it's a simple fact of physics that a dead-end water line running miles down the beach will have less pressure every foot past the tank.

His counterpart at Ocean Isle Beach, Chief Dave Harrell, told commissioners there last week that it's time to get firefighters and elected officials together to talk about water supply, equipment capacity and other firefighting assets and limitations—to make sure that as many safeguards as possible are in place before the next time the alarm rings.

All the South Brunswick beach communities have undergone accelerated new construction during the past year or so—an indication that it's time for each town to seriously inventory its firefighting capability in terms of manpower, equipment and water supply. In cases where there are shortcomings, property owners and their elected officials owe it to themselves to do whatever is necessary to help every department reach a comfortable level of efficiency before the next big one breaks out.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Island Said Small, Houses Too Close

To the editor:

(I am) sorry to have missed the town meeting at Holden Beach on Monday, Nov. 7. My husband has been quite ill over the past year, and we could not attend.

It comes as no surprise to me that builders and developers "spoke out" (mildly put) against the proposed change of the building code at Holden Beach.

Jim McSwain's was quoted: "We still haven't proved we have an overcrowding or density problem" Perhaps he has not been very observant! This island is small—the houses are too close together and too large.

I for one do not understand filling in on wetlands and building large houses. How can satisfactory septic systems be installed on filled-in land? There is beginning to be a smothering effect on the island.

Alan Holden's tear-jerking speech about "taking people's property and taking people's dreams" almost made me weep.

I have personally seen as many as 15 to 20 cars at one address. All these people are in one condo or house.

Green is a terrible thing to watch ruin a lovely place.

Helen O'Neal Stewart
Holden Beach

Wants An Inquiry

To the editor:

I am a new resident of Ocean Isle and take it to be a very safe place to live. I was shocked to read of a resident throwing his weight around with guns.

I want to back up Commissioner

Ken Proctor in his calling for an investigation into the "premature" release of William Earl Holden. Unless we are willing to back up our policemen, we will never be safe.

Risa Howard
Ocean Isle Beach

Rescuers Praised

To the editor:

Sometimes through the shuffle of everyday life, we forget to thank the people that mean so much to us.

I for one never thought too much about rescue squads and their functions, or how they got their training. I thought they were "just there." Boy, was I wrong.

These people spend many long hours training, responding to our emergency situations and giving of their own time to helping people in sometimes very serious accidents. I must say that not everyone can be a rescue worker. They have to be God-sent. They are very special people.

Just this week I had a very tragic accident on one of my jobs. These special people of ours rushed to give a helping hand. With their trained hands they lifted two men, performed CPR and other necessary treatments while being transported to The Brunswick Hospital. I thank them all.

I also thank the emergency room staff for their outstanding work in preparing one of these men for airlift to Chapel Hill. Words cannot explain our heartfelt appreciation. It was a job well done.

Harry Wilkes
Shallotte
(More Letters, Following Page)

Worth Repeating...

I doubt if the texture of Southern life is any more grotesque than that of the rest of the nation, but it does seem evident that the Southern writer is particularly adept at recognizing the grotesque; and to recognize the grotesque, you have to have some notion of what is not grotesque and why.

—Flannery O'Connor

Who Doesn't Need A Green Retreat?

Sanctuary. The dictionary on my computer offers these synonyms: asylum, preserve, haven, oasis, refuge.

A place to come home to, where we feel secure, where we can pull body and soul together. Humans need sanctuary; so do other animals. Sometimes we can even share it.

As part of the expanded environmental section of the 201 facilities plan completed recently for the South Brunswick Water & Sewer Authority, consultant Richard D. Brown, Ph.D., lead biology instructor at Brunswick Community College, studied the project area's wildlife population and habitat.

In his report Brown offered several suggestions that seemed to warrant sharing with a broader audience. They all have to do with providing sanctuary:

- developers should be encouraged to either leave natural corridors or create corridors to prevent "fragmentation" of wildlife habitat. Corridors would allow wildlife to move from one area of suitable habitat to another without "undue exposure" in open or developed areas;

- developers should try to retain natural vegetation instead of clearing the understory of woods when developing projects such as golf courses;

- the county and towns should promote environmentally sound development that works in and around natural habitats without destroying them;



Susan Usher

- the water and sewer authority should encourage cooperative efforts with schools, conservation groups, scout units, 4-H, etc., to use certain project areas (like the access road to the treatment plant) for habitat management;

- that the salt marsh "hammocks" or islands and strip along North Shore Drive and 6th Street on Sunset Beach island not be developed, but be preserved for migratory birds and Sunset Beach residents to enjoy.

On that same note, he "strongly suggests" that, to offset or mitigate the loss of habitat due to increased developed land, several parcels of land 600 acres or more in size be set aside now as "preserved parkland" for the benefit of wildlife and the general public.

"It is far better to 'think ahead' than to wish you had," Brown wrote, citing his experiences in another community.

Brown's recommendation to preserve open space and do it now struck home.

I'm convinced that only those who have lived both in the country and in urban areas can truly appreciate the value of a simple patch of woodland, a view of a marsh or the ocean, or a quiet spot by the side of a lake.

These are opportunities for sanctuary that we in Brunswick County tend to take for granted, but may not always have. We live in North Carolina's second-fastest growing county, by some reckonings, and see rapid change occurring all around us.

After freely enjoying the fields, swamps, beaches and waterways of home, adjusting to city life was a challenge during my year-plus sojourn in and around Toledo, Ohio, in the mid-70s. My escape from the downtown bustle and noise was usually one of the beautiful parks and preserves this business-oriented Great Lakes city had acquired over the years.

There were the usual playground areas, but what soothed me were the gladed woodlands with bicycle, hiking and cross-country ski trails, hills for tobogganing, lakes, an occasional lodge and other amenities. Greenways—small strips of parklands scattered in neighborhoods around the city—offered a safe place to fly a kite without getting tangled in power lines.

When seriously struck by the homesick blues, though, I'd grab a friend or two and we'd head north by bicycle or car past Detroit and

across the border into southern Ontario, to a nature preserve on a 10-mile-long peninsula near Leamington.

Point Pelee National Park is a major sanctuary for migratory birds and a "remnant" of Carolinian (yes, as in North Carolina) forest. Scientists have several theories of how it happens to be where it is, but I was never really interested. I went there because the place looks, sounds and almost smells like home.

For Canadians, Point Pelee is exotic, to some even disgustingly weird. But for homesick me its plants and animals were comforting-familiar. Pelee has black snakes, poison oak, prickly pear cacti and giant mosquitoes. It has a cattail marsh with a boardwalk for bird-watching. Its beaches on western Lake Erie are sandy instead of the more common pebble. The woodlands have vines so thick you could swing from the trees on them, trees whose names it seems I have always known.

A few hours or a weekend there and I would leave mentally and spiritually refreshed, cured of "homesickness," better equipped to appreciate and cope with urban life.

Sanctuary comes in many forms, but there's no doubting that all of us need it in our own time.

As Brown suggests, the time is now to be thinking of ways to preserve green space for the future, while there's land available in southwestern Brunswick County.



By George, I Think He's Got It!

What a crazy week in sports.

On the weekend before Election Day, three people dropped dead while competing in cross-country running events. (And those are just the ones we know about.)

At the same time, a 45-year-old minister climbed into a boxing ring and won the World Heavyweight Championship.

Like most sports fans, I would much rather see a religious leader punching it out than to watch almost anyone running, except maybe those animated bathing-suit mannequins jogging down the beach on "Baywatch." (Or is it "Babe Watch?")

People think boxing is a dangerous sport? Tell that to the two guys who had heart attacks and died while running in the New York Marathon. Or the New Hanover high school student who went into full cardiac arrest during a race in Lumberton.

Then take a look at George Foreman, the bald and grinning, junk-food gorging street preacher, actor and muffer huster who named his four sons George, George, George and George.

Foreman is not only alive and well after three decades of boxing. He just won a heavyweight title by scoring a legitimate 10th-round knockout against a champion fighter 19 years his junior.

In so doing, he certainly gained the respect of this graying 43-year-old columnist, who recently renewed his health-club membership and quickly discovered how fast your stamina fades at this age after a couple months without exercise.



Eric Carlson

I would be hard pressed to go three rounds with Strom Thurmond at this point. (Actually, that might be fun.)

The fact is, no sport taxes the body like boxing. If you don't believe me, try bouncing up and down on your toes and shuffling around in circles for a half hour, taking a 60-second break every three minutes.

Next, punch a heavy bag non-stop for 30 minutes, being sure to keep your thick, leather gloves up in front of your face between blows.

Now try doing both of those things at the same time while a 222-pound monster pummels every inch of your face and upper body with a sock full of BBs. Are you having fun yet?

Then imagine hitting the guy in the nose hard enough to knock him to the canvas. Good luck.

At its best, boxing is arguably the greatest sport on earth, the undiluted essence of athletic competition. Football, basketball, baseball, tennis, even chess and checkers are merely civilized ways of pitting one person or group against another without actually beating each other senseless.

Watching Muhammad Ali battle Joe Frazier or Roberto Duran's first

fight against Sugar Ray Leonard or any other bout between a well-matched pair of legitimate champions can be a human drama of the highest order.

Unfortunately, boxing at its worst frequently pits the skilled contender against the unskilled "punching bag," or the up-and-coming newcomer against the punch-drunk, overweight old man with a former title.

These so-called matches are sad spectacles that make promoters a lot of money but don't do much for the sport's reputation.

Which is what boxing fans fear whenever some once-great fighter like Ali or Duran or Larry Holmes or George Foreman announces he wants to "try for the title one more time."

Nowadays there are several "world championship titles" that are bestowed by different boxing associations and federations, so many that it's hard to keep up with them all. So not too many people had heard of Michael Moorer, who had earned two such titles.

But anyone who took a passing interest in the hype surrounding the fight knew that he was 26 years old and in the prime of his career. Foreman, on the other hand, had been starring in a failed situation comedy, advertising auto parts and preaching at his Houston, Texas, church.

Twenty years earlier, Foreman was the most powerful puncher of the day. Some say he was the hardest hitter of all time, having knocked out Joe Frazier to win the title. Then

he got beat by Ali and the little known Jimmy Young, which sent him into a fit of depression and semi-retirement.

Foreman wasn't taken very seriously when he announced his quest for another title, especially after losing to the mediocre Tommy Morrison last year. But with few inspiring fighters in the heavyweight division these days, Moorer knew that a match against the well-known TV pitch man with the big grin would bring in a big paycheck.

And then a miracle happened. Foreman actually knocked the guy out! He didn't win by a controversial split decision or with a questionable punch. He landed that old pile-driver right hand on Moorer's nose, and down he went!

Now everyone is wondering what George will do next. He's likely to make millions on commercials and endorsements, even if he never fights again. Which is probably a good idea, since any attempt to hold on to his title will eventually pit him against former undisputed heavyweight champion Mike Tyson, the convicted rapist with a bad attitude.

How would you like to be first guy to step into the ring with him after gets released from prison next May?

Please don't do it, George. You've proven your point. Announce your retirement. Go to Disney World. Get your face on the Wheaties box. Do a few movies. Have an athletic shoe named after you. Sell some more mufflers.

Get rich. Stay pretty.