

LOOKING BACK AT '94

# All-New Board Of Education Tackling System's Needs

(Continued From Page 1-A)  
 year, \$10.2 million. Commissioner Chairman Don Warren asked the state commissioners' association to lobby the legislature next year to allow school boards to levy their own taxes and establish their own budget.

**Money, Management Questioned**  
 Commissioners questioned not only school system finances, but its management as well. District 3 Commissioner Wayland Vereen in February called for the state auditor's office to conduct a performance audit of the school system's central office.

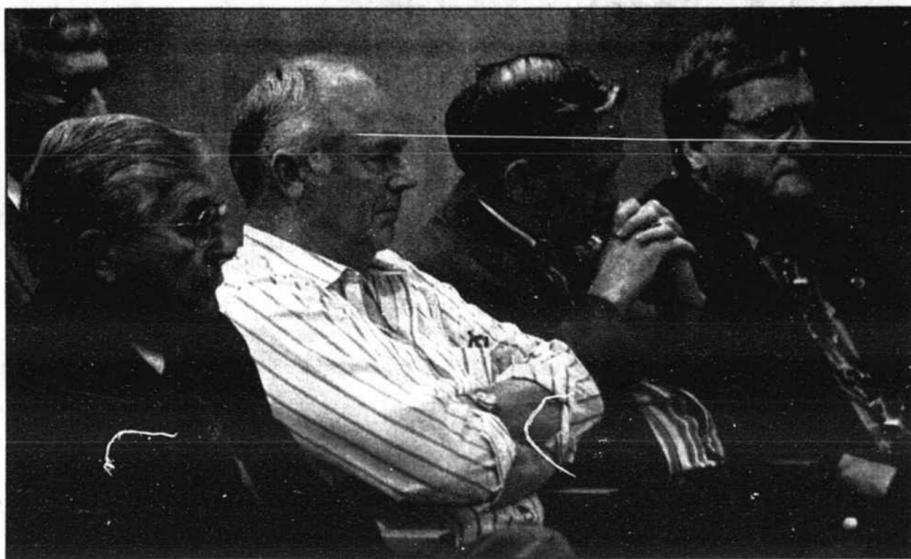
School board members endorsed the idea, if reluctantly, after Superintendent Ralph Johnston said the information could be beneficial. The two boards agreed to jointly request and fund the project, which was to begin in earnest in early January after surveys were mailed in December.

**All-New School Board**  
 In the May primaries, Democrats Thurman Gause (District 1) and Polly Russ (District 2) lost their party's nominations. Board Chairman Donna Baxter withdrew from race after the primary, saying she felt she had become "a hindrance" to the school system's progress. Her opponent in the District 4 Democratic primary, popular former chief civil deputy Liston Hawes, died too late for his name to be removed from the ballot. He drew 2,966 votes to Baxter's 4,232.

District 3 school board member Republican William Fairley announced in advance of the primary his plans to withdraw before the general election. He cited disillusionment and frustration with the board's decision to rescind a school improvement resolution that tied extra pay for school employees mainly to outcome, students' performance on standardized tests, rather than effort as advocated by system educators. District 5 Republican Yvonne Bright was unopposed in the primary, and became the only member still seeking re-election in November.

That set the stage for voters to choose an all-new school board of four Democrats and one Republican. Taking office on Dec. 5 were retired educator Clara Carter, later elected board chairman; businesswoman and PTA leader Glenda Browning, who became vice chairman; Olaf "Bud" Thorsen, a juvenile court counselor; William D. "Billy" Carter, a former county manager, and Pat Purvis Brown, a retired teacher and the only Republican.

School board members rewrote the system's policy



**EXPRESSIONS STERN**, Brunswick County Commissioners Tom Rabon, Wayland Vereen, Jerry Jones and Donald Shaw listen to testimony during the school board's appeal of its 1994 operating budget allocation. Commissioners' appeal of a jury's award of an additional \$4.8 million to the schools should be heard in February or March by the N.C. Court of Appeals.

manual, reorganized the central office to put more service providers in the schools, and used crime bill money to establish the Brunswick Learning Center for learners not served by the traditional school setting. By year's end the school had 86 students enrolled and a waiting list.

The school was one part of the system's response to lagging student performance on standardized state tests and the state Department of Public Instruction's annual report card.

**Putting Out Hot Spots**  
 The board also dealt throughout the year with "hot spots" that to many onlookers appeared linked to the board's decision in June not to renew the contract of

Assistant Superintendent William R. Turner. His contract had been extended in 1993 for only one year. As an assistant superintendent Turner oversaw school nutrition, maintenance and construction, all areas that made the news in 1994.

In June investigator Brian Shaw with the Raleigh legal firm of Richard Schwartz & Associates determined that the 1993 sale and delivery of used Southport Elementary School cafeteria equipment by the child nutrition director to a local restaurant owner was "improper and unjustified" and resulted from "serious misjudgment" by school employees through a lack of communication and lack of knowledge of proper procedures.

Based on recommendations in the report and his own

investigation, Superintendent Ralph Johnston reprimanded and/or temporarily suspended several employees. One employee initially accused of wrongdoing, maintenance supervisor Odell Benton, was fired, then reinstated following a grievance hearing.

A lawsuit filed against restaurant owner Jarvis Jones was dropped, with school board attorney Glen Peterson saying he intended to refile when his calendar was less tied up. As of mid-December the suit had not been refiled.

**Sewage Treatment Woes**  
 Supply Elementary School opened on schedule this fall, but at midsummer that didn't seem very likely. In July the Brunswick County Board of Health, not satisfied with school system efforts to repair the two-year-old school's failed septic system, warned that the school would not reopen if the system wasn't repaired.

That deadline was extended as work progressed, though repairs were not completed when students left for Christmas break. The school system was paying \$1,600 to \$1,800 per week to have wastewater pumped and hauled away for disposal.

Heavy rains swamped a treatment system at Waccamaw Elementary School, but a leaking 70-year-old clay pipe was promptly replaced and the system repaired under the direction of the school system's new maintenance and construction director, Dennis Carr.

Sewage treatment was also a concern for a new K-5 elementary school for northern Brunswick County that had been in the planning for 18 months as a means of relieving overcrowding and accommodating rapid growth in the area.

The outgoing school board had paid the State Ports Authority \$128,000 for a 32-acre tract on River Road (N.C. 133) in Belville knowing the site wasn't suitable for a septic system. It planned to connect to the Town of Belville's newly-built sewer system.

While procedural delays stalled the project, interest rates and construction costs spiraled, upping its cost.

A new school board had to delay award of contracts in December because it still lacked a letter from Belville committing to provide sewer service; the Local Government Commission still hadn't approved the county's plan to borrow against the school to pay for the \$8 million project on an installment plan; and not one company had submitted a general contractor bid, causing architect Charles Boney Jr. to readvertise for new bids.

## Clarification

Due to incomplete information provided by Brunswick County Sheriff's Department Chief Deputy Ken Snead, two staff promotions were left out of a Dec. 8 article on personnel reorganization in the department.

Narcotics detectives Billy Hughes and Kevin Holden have been promoted to the rank of detective sergeant in the narcotics division.

Snead apologized to the officers for the omission.

## Expect Warm Temps, Rain At Year End

Look for both temperatures and rainfall to exceed end-of-the-year averages, advises Shallotte Point weather-watcher Jackson Canady.

He forecasts temperatures ranging from the lower 40s at night to the lower 60s in the daytime. Expect at least three-fourths inch of rainfall over the next few days, he adds.

For the period Dec. 20-26, Canady recorded a maximum high of 63 degrees on both Dec. 21 and 24. The minimum low reached was 43 degrees on the 20th.

Canady measured 4.93 inches of rainfall as the southern Atlantic coast was buffeted by a winter nor'easter Dec. 22 and 23 which made for dangerous driving and a loss of some sand on most of Brunswick County's beaches.

# Eleven Lose Lives In Violent Crimes During 1994

(Continued From Page 1-A)

also a candidate for sheriff. The incident sparked a chase, a brief manhunt and two arrests. The driver was charged with failing to stop for a blue light and siren, reckless driving and driving while his license was revoked. Both he and his passenger were also accused of resisting arrest.

Early the following month, a "smooth-talking" con man believed to have forged checks and used stolen credit cards to steal more than \$40,000 was arrested in Calabash after he made off with \$2,900 worth of jewelry and credit cards from the home of a local businessman. The suspect, Michael Wayne Hudgins, was wanted for questioning in seven states in connection with frauds and forgeries dating back to 1985. He later pleaded guilty in Brunswick County to several felonies and was sentenced to seven years in prison.

The sheriff's department's newly formed Emergency Response Team was called into action to negotiate the release of a Leland woman and her child who were being held hostage in a mobile home by the father. He was armed with a shotgun and refused to release the two. After more than four hours of negotiations, officers used tear gas to storm the trailer, subdue the man and rescue his hostages.

**Drug Bust Nets 55**  
 In late March, Brunswick County Sheriff's Department narcotics officers arrested 55 people on charges involving cocaine, marijuana, alcohol and traffic offenses during a two

week crackdown on illegal drug activity. Undercover purchases and street interdiction traffic stops were conducted in the Phoenix and Navassa areas around Leland in what Lt. David Crocker called "one of many" such operations planned by the drug squad.

Detectives asked the public for help in locating a North Myrtle Beach, S.C., woman who left a Seaside nightclub shortly after midnight April 16 and was never seen again. Delores Shipp Melton, 38, was the mother of an 11-year-old child and a steady worker at a Myrtle Beach restaurant. Investigators fear she was murdered, but have been unable to find her body or make an arrest in the case.

**Ash Store Owner Murdered**  
 Residents of Ash were shocked to learn that Burns Everett Babson, 74, a well-known local store keeper, had been shot to death in an apparent armed robbery April 22. Three days later, a 38-year-old Robeson County man was charged with the murder after confessing his involvement in the killing to Brunswick County Sheriff's Detective Tom Hunter.

On the eve of the May 5 primary election, the race for the Democratic Party nomination to succeed retiring Sheriff John Carr Davis was said to be the most expensive political campaign in Brunswick County history, with the four candidates reporting more than \$61,000 in expenses. Deputy Lt. Ronald Hewett led the spending by a more than two-to-one margin over his nearest rival, retired highway patrol Trooper Jerry Dove. Hewett won the race with 42.7 percent of the vote, enough of a margin to avoid a runoff.

A part-time bartender at a Holden Beach tavern was shot to death May 7 in an altercation that ensued after he and several other men tried to eject a disorderly customer from the bar. A Latta, S.C., man was charged with murder in the killing of John Houston "Jet" Puckett. A district court judge later ruled there was only enough evidence to support a charge of involuntary manslaughter.

The next day, fishermen found the badly decomposed body of a 20-year-old Yaupon Beach man floating in the waters of Town Creek. Investigators have yet to make an arrest in the murder of Bryan Smith, who was last seen alive in the company of two British sailors outside a Wilmington Bar. An autopsy later determined that Smith's throat had been cut.

An 11-year veteran Brunswick County jailer resigned from his post after an inmate accused him of raping her. The State Bureau of Investigation determined that evidence indicated Deputy Sgt. Thomas Gore did not use force to assault the woman. He later pleaded guilty to a charge of having sexual relations with an inmate.

**Gilley Guilty Of Manslaughter**  
 In late May, after a two-week trial on a murder charge, a jury found David Dwain Gilley of Grissetown guilty of involuntary manslaughter in the barroom shooting death of a 28-year-old Columbus County man. Gilley claimed the gun he pulled on Juan Hernandez went off by accident during a struggle at an Ash tavern. The judge gave Gilley the maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. He was expected to serve about three years for the killing.

## Frink Murder Still Unsolved

A few weeks later, the mutilated body of a Shallotte teenager was discovered beside a hunting club road just south of the state line about 12 hours after her blood-stained car was found abandoned off Shingletree Road, near Hickmans Crossroads. Detectives said 18-year-old Amy Caroline Frink had been sexually molested, beaten, stabbed and run over with her car before bleeding to death. A joint task force of Brunswick and Horry County, S.C., police continues to investigate the murder with help from the SBI, the FBI and South Carolina's State Law Enforcement Division (SLED).

A man who police say was enraged over the alleged extramarital activities of his wife was charged with murdering one of her friends at his home in Shallotte. Michael Dwayne Miller, 33, of Shallotte was accused of entering the home of Oliver William "Dub" Gore and shooting him to death. Miller remains in jail awaiting trial.

## 'Gang-Style' Killing In Bolivia

In August, seven of the 10 youths charged in a "gang-style" murder of a Bolivia man were put on probation after agreeing to plead guilty in exchange for their testimony against three co-defendants. The 10 were accused of piling into two cars and driving to the home of Charles Wayne "Butch" Davis on Albright Road, where he was fatally shot, beaten and hit with a machete in his driveway. Faced with the testimony of several eye witnesses, the alleged trigger man Frank Lenail Ford pleaded guilty to second degree murder and conspiracy. He was sentenced to life plus 20 years. Two months later, Terrance Laquinn Jones received a life sentence after pleading guilty to second degree murder. A third murder suspect, Byron Henry Knowles remains at large in the Bahamas.

## 1991 Murder Is Solved

On August 30, a routine traffic stop near Charlotte resulted in the arrest of a man wanted in the 1991

murder of his wife at their home in Ash. Timothy James Keeler was returned to Brunswick County, where he later agreed to show police the shallow grave where his 29-year-old wife Rhonda Diane Keeler was buried. In October, he pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter and was sentenced to 15 years in prison. He was to be eligible for parole in 18 months.

Authorities were unsure of the motive in a murder-suicide that claimed the lives of a Grissetown woman and a man who had recently moved into her mobile home on Old Shallotte Road. Police said Julene Hill Wright, 47, was shot once in the head by Ernest Love, 38, who then turned the pistol on himself and fired a bullet through his throat.

Three weeks before the November election, the race for sheriff turned ugly with accusations of a "smear campaign" being conducted by Republican candidate James Brown against Lt. Ronald Hewett. Shallotte attorney Roy Trest accused Brown of circulating an X-rated videotape and a libelous letter accusing Hewett of allowing students to watch pornography in a police training class. Hewett and other students from the class denied the allegations. Trest said he planned to file defamation lawsuits against those involved.

In late October, a package of cocaine intercepted by the sheriff's department narcotics squad led to a series of arrests in a multi-state drug smuggling operation. Among those charged were suspects from Calabash, Carteret County, Cherry Grove, S.C., and Bluefield, W.Va.

## Hewett Wins Every Precinct

In an unusually heavy voter turnout, Deputy Lt. Ronald Hewett was elected sheriff of Brunswick County, defeating Republican James Brown in every one of the county's 22 precincts. On the day he took office Dec. 5, Hewett fulfilled a campaign promise to keep his department's doors open 24 hours a day. In a major reorganization, a dozen officers resigned or were not rehired. Chief Deputy John Marlow was transferred to another post and replaced with retired SBI agent Ken Snead.

## Cummings Sentenced To Die

Late in November, jury selection began in the first-degree murder trial of Daniel Cummings, who was accused in the fatal shooting of Ash store owner Burns Babson. Cummings was convicted and became the first person in 70 years to receive the death penalty from a Brunswick County jury.

Charges are still pending in what one detective called "a wild west shoot out" that left one man dead and two others wounded at a popular gathering place in Bolivia Dec. 16. Larry D. Brown, 34, of Old Ocean Highway, Bolivia, was pronounced dead at the scene. Two others were treated and released from a Wilmington hospital. Investigators believe the shooting broke out after Brown got into an argument with another man over a female friend.

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