

Bruce versus Devastation

Morrisville's police chief finds himself on the ropes, for fun

By Mary Beth Phillips

Morrisville Police Chief Bruce Newnam was attacked March 15 by a man who calls himself "Devastation" and almost strangled with a chain.

The act was witnessed by about 100 shouting people, including Newnam's wife, daughter and mother, and two Morrisville police officers.

It was Five-Star Wrestling at the Bethesda Community Center, and Newnam was eventually declared the winner of his match.

He has been involved in professional wrestling off and on since the late '70s, when Don Kanotte, a fellow police officer in the town of Elon College, helped train him to be part of the Central Carolina Wrestling Alliance.

"I wanted to supplement my income. A police officer on those days did not make a lot of money, and at the time I had two small children," Newnam recalled recently as he reflected on his early wrestling days.

He grew to love the sport, which requires more grandstanding than physical prowess. But besides putting on a show, he also uses some "real" wrestling moves he learned on the wrestling team at Bartlett-Yancey High School.

"It's just a hobby," he said. "Everybody has hobbies. I don't look at chasing a golf ball as very productive."

At first the Elon College Police Department required him to wear a mask to conceal his identity. But later, he was able to convince them, "It's a sport, like any other sport,

not an embarrassment to the municipality."

Some Morrisville officials have taken a similar view of Newnam's "hobby." In 1994, when the town had its first Day at the Park, Newnam invited Jerry "Kahn the Warlord" Kennett, mayor of Bunn, to have a professional wrestling spectacle.

The event drew about 500 people, but elected officials did not ask him to set up a repeat performance.

"It was my intention to help the Parks and Recreation Department, to make the event more successful, and give it a larger turnout," Newnam said.

Today he only wrestles two or three times a year. He has had trouble with his knees in the past few years, including several surgeries. But he looks forward to an event slated for June at Dorton Arena titled "Wrestling Legends."

"It's for people like me who were in it previously but just do it now occasionally because of age," Newnam explained. Wrestlers from all over the country will be invited to the event.

Newnam says you have to be in good physical shape to be a professional wrestler. "It's very tiring, very physical," he said.

Although there are professional wrestling schools, Newnam picked up what he knows from Kanotte and from "trial and error."

Some of his favorite moves are the leg take-down, where you put your legs around the opponent's and pull the opponent to the ground; the clothesline, where you

push the opponent against the ropes and then catch him with your arm across his neck as he bounces back. The suplex requires pulling the opponent over your head, and dropping him down on his back. Then there are the ever-popular body slams.

"You have to have experience to do this," Newnam added. "They would not let a lay person come into the ring. You can get hurt. I've seen people get maimed and put an end to their careers. The adrenaline gets to flowing, and mistakes can be made."

Another misconception is that the match is always rehearsed.

"You just use your expertise, put it in place. Everything is supposed to work out, but it doesn't always work out..."

"There's risks in anything. There's just as much risk in wrestling as in any other sport," he said.

Newnam has not accepted any money for his wrestling since becoming police chief. He just does it for enjoyment.

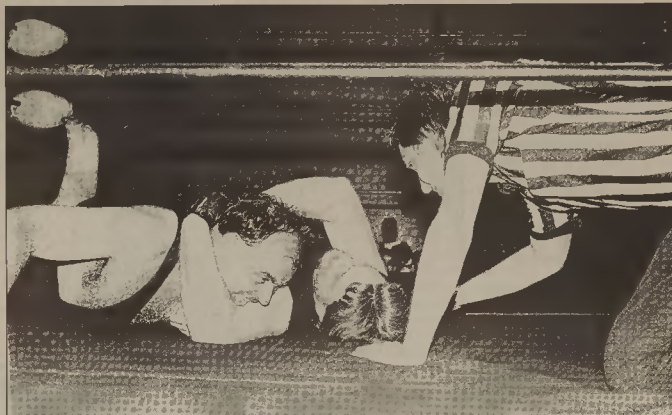
"I like it when you come out, and you've got all those kids around you, looking at you," he said.

Each match pits a "good guy" against a "bad guy." Of course, Newnam takes the good guy role. On March 15, he was dressed in his snooker bear hat and accompanied by his daughter, Leslie, 17, who was dressed in a police uniform.

As he paraded in to the match, he handed out candy to the group of youngsters in the audience.

"It's doing something to make people happy, something a lot of other people don't have the ability to do. While I still have the ability, why not still do it?" he said.

"Devastation," who had black circles under his eyes, was walked to the ring with a chain around his neck. During the match, he jumped out of the ring, grabbed the chain and went for Newnam's throat. It took several minutes for two referees to separate the wrestlers. It



FOR THE COUNT—Newnam's opponent grips him in a headlock during the action in a March 15 bout at Bethesda Community Center. But the

police chief wins when Devastation attempts to choke him with a chain outside the ring.

can be argued that Newnam might have lost the match if Devastation had not been disqualified for that rash act.

In his spare time, Newnam is also a member of the Mayberry Fan Club, and has fixed up an old Ford Galaxy to be an exact replica of the Mayberry Police Car on the Andy Griffith show. He has driven the car in parades, especially in Mt. Airy, the town where the series was filmed.

Newnam came to the Morrisville Police Department in 1984 as the town's only police officer, and also served as part-time water meter reader, grass cutter and sewer plant operator. (The town had four employees at the time).

He was promoted to chief about 11 years ago, and brought the department from a one-man operation to a department of 21 employees. The budget in 1984-85 was \$22,000 for the whole department. This year, it is \$597,594.

"This town has been good to me and my family," Newnam said. His wife, Phyllis, who is one of his biggest fans, is a Morrisville town commissioner.



THE GOOD GUY WITH GOODIES—Bruce Newnam hands out candy to children in the audience prior to the match.

Financing posed for sewer hookups

Continued from page 1

voiced "nay" to tabling the motion. "At least we had an option to do something," he said. "Now the situation is just as bad."

In other action at the board meeting, Ms. Broadwell reported that officials of the Department of Transportation had agreed to put in a guard rail at the corner of Aviation Parkway and N.C. 54 at Billy and Dot Hartness' property line.

The Hartnesses have requested the guard rail since the beginning of the project realigning Aviation Parkway. The town was prepared to spend \$3,703 to have the project completed if DOT did not come through with the funding.

Ms. Broadwell said she had assurances over the telephone that DOT would fund the project, but there was nothing in writing.

David Aillsbrook of DOT told her the project would need extra engineering work because of the radius of the intersection, but that he hoped the project would become completed by the time the road is opened.

The motion passed by the board included a fall-back proposal that if the state did not come through, the town would go ahead and fund it.

Moore also asked Hodgkins to update the board at every meeting of the progress of the project at DOT.

The board also awarded a contract for painting and stucco repair at the town hall to Bridges Painting Co. for \$6,837.

The board also agreed to sponsor a town clean-up day during "The Great Trash Bash" April 12 through April 25. Commissioner Phyllis Newnam made the motion to hold the event on April 19 at 9 a.m. and to invite members of the Chamber of Commerce and citizens of the town to come and help out.

Barbee and Sauls balked at the idea, and Barbee suggested inviting inmates to come do the work.

"My little service station pays \$5,000 a year in taxes, and the state can't figure a way to pick up the trash," Sauls said.

Finally, after Ms. Newnam called them lazy, they voted yes and said they would come help.

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