



Fraud puts stamp on program

Abuse hurts those who need assistance

By Terry Pope
County Editor

Shirley Weston steers an imaginary car across her office, gripping the wheel with both hands to demonstrate how someone who lives in Pennsylvania drives for hours to pick up food stamps issued in Brunswick County.

"To them it's worth it," said Ms. Weston. "Food stamps can buy a lot of crack (cocaine). It's a big business."

It goes on all over the country."

Last year, her office collected more than \$29,000 from persons caught defrauding the Brunswick County Department of Social Services of food stamps they didn't need. As one of two fraud investigators, her job is to track down the suspects and haul them to court.

Persons out to abuse the system often file for food stamps in several states, wherever they may have relatives or can open post office boxes.

She has found ones with homes in Florida, Tennessee, New York and South Carolina who defraud the county of up to \$580 a month in food stamps.

Often the stamps are sold illegally at below value to retailers who turn a profit by cashing them in, or to drug dealers who turn the federally funded paper slips into green cash. If caught, retailers also face prosecution.

"It's worth it," said Ms. Weston. "It's worth driving from the other end

of South Carolina for \$500. That does go on, especially with us being near the South Carolina border. It's very easy and convenient."

Dual participation cases are those where the clients receive food stamps in more than one state, and she worked six such cases in Brunswick County last year. Others may file false reports, make errors on their applications or mistakenly receive stamps due to administrative errors. Some defendants are given active jail terms, and all are ordered to repay DSS for what they have stolen.

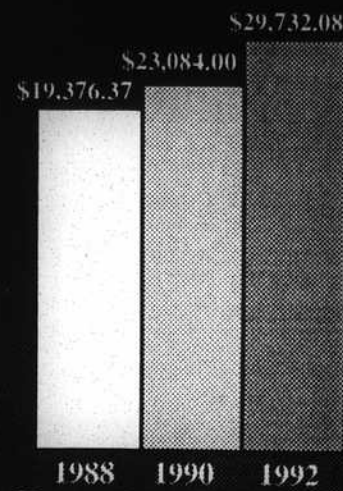
However, many Brunswick County residents who receive food stamps do need them to buy food for their families. Eligibility is based on income and the number of persons in a household. Approximately 2,418 county households received stamps valued at \$398,927 in December. Figures indicate that number is growing, up from 2,361 families in November.

"Without them, they would have problems," she said. "The majority of clients are truly in need. Those are not the kind of people I'm talking about when I'm talking about fraud."

DSS hired two investigators, who have both earned national certification, in 1988 and collected \$19,376 in repayments that year. The department also received \$18,814 in 1989.

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DSS Food Stamp Fraud



Figures from Brunswick County Year End Report Summary; Shirley Weston, Investigator

- Used to buy drugs, crack, etc.
- Sell to others for cash.
- Interstate fraud

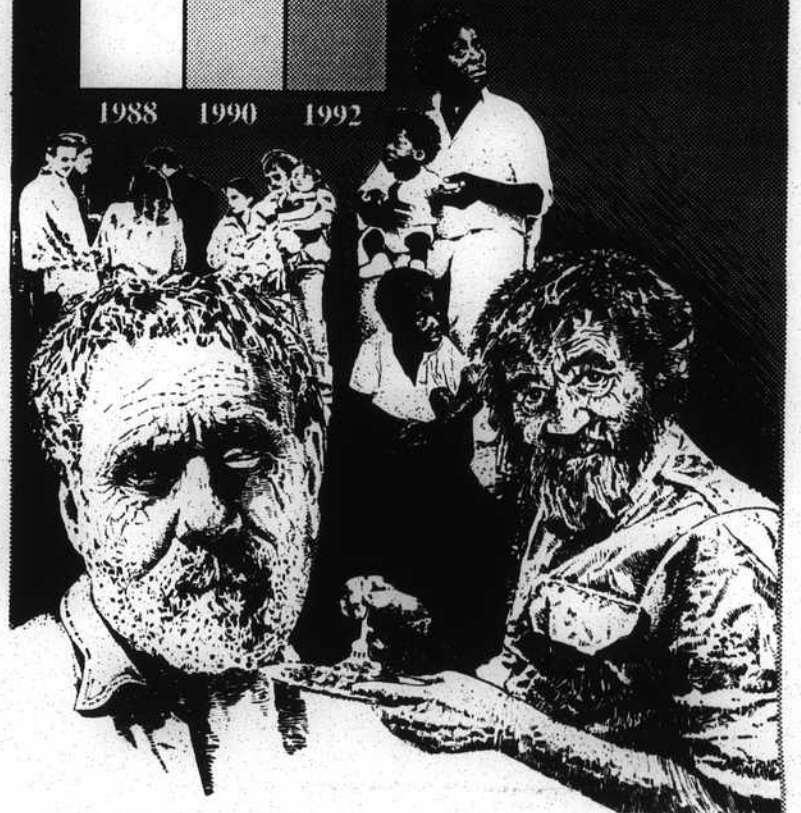


Photo by Jim Harper

A day's work ends with tamping a piling freshly installed at the end of the Yaupon Beach fishing pier. Reconstruction of the structure has passed the 450-foot mark -- roughly the half-way point -- and work continues with an eye toward opening for business in March.

Maybe in March

'Aggressive' schedule aims at CP&L restart

By Terry Pope
County Editor

Officials at Carolina Power and Light Co.'s Brunswick nuclear plant near Southport say they are working an "aggressive" schedule to restart one reactor unit next month and a second one in June.

But a problem with a large cooling system valve may push that plan a few weeks behind schedule.

Roy Anderson, vice-president of CP&L's Brunswick plant, said the company will know more this week when workers take the valve apart to determine what repairs are needed. If there are no delays, the company will restart Unit 2 around March 21 and Unit 1 by June 7.

"They have a lot of work to do, and there's only about seven weeks to do it in," said Stewart Ebnetter, Region II administrator for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

'You heard me asking, "Who is responsible?" There seems to be a little mix-up on who's in charge, but I think it's getting better.'

Stewart Ebnetter
NRC administrator

CP&L officials met with the NRC last Thursday to review progress on plans to restart the Brunswick steam electric plant. Both generating units have been shut down since April 21 of

last year when inspectors found faulty construction in the diesel generator building walls.

Engineers have used a low-density silicone filler to slope and to line the concrete walls where the problem area was discovered, a move that should provide permanent protection there, said CP&L's Morris Brown.

"We're in the process of learning what it's like to go through a rigorous startup," said Brown. "We are getting our operators ready."

Those operators are also visiting other plants and undergoing simulator training, he said.

The NRC will meet with CP&L officials again in early March to review plans to restart Unit 2. NRC staff will also observe how plant operators train prior to restarting.

"We're not here to requalify them," said Peter Koltay of NRC's operational readiness assessment team, "but

See Restart, page 16

OUTSIDE



Forecast

Showers and thunderstorms are likely Thursday and Friday, with high temperatures in the 60s and lows in the 40s. The extended forecast calls for breezy weather and partly cloudy skies Saturday and Sunday, with highs in the 50s and lows in the 30s.

Tide table

HIGH	THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11	LOW
11:23 a.m.		5:14 a.m.
----- p.m.		5:32 p.m.
HIGH	FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12	LOW
12:03 a.m.		6:09 a.m.
12:17 p.m.		6:27 p.m.
HIGH	SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13	LOW
1:02 a.m.		7:09 a.m.
1:17 p.m.		7:26 p.m.
HIGH	SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14	LOW
2:05 a.m.		8:14 a.m.
2:18 p.m.		8:28 p.m.
HIGH	MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15	LOW
3:07 a.m.		9:17 a.m.
3:23 p.m.		9:31 p.m.
HIGH	TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16	LOW
4:08 a.m.		10:16 a.m.
4:22 p.m.		10:28 p.m.
HIGH	WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17	LOW
5:04 a.m.		11:09 a.m.
5:15 p.m.		11:20 p.m.

The following adjustments should be made:
Bald Head Island, high -10, low -7; Caswell Beach, high -5, low -1; Southport, high +7, low +15; Yaupon Beach, high -32, low -45; Lockwood Folly, high -22, low -8.

Fight rumors disrupt schools

By Marybeth Bianchi
Feature Editor

Last week was not an easy one at the two South Brunswick schools on Cougar Drive.

Rumors of knives, guns, racial unrest at the high school and a possible riot in the middle school circulated throughout the Southport-Oak Island area for days, culminating on Friday when many parents either kept their children at home or picked them up early in the day.

Even so, it turned out to be a fairly quiet day with no major disturbances, according to school officials.

Leslie Collier of Long Beach and about 30 other parents joined a sheriff's department deputy and central office administrators in patrolling the middle school. She said they were there to send the message that they

See Rumors, page 16

Lewis new principal

Mose Lewis was named Monday night to serve as principal of South Brunswick Middle School the remainder of this school year.

The Brunswick County Board of Education unanimously approved the assignment as it met at Waccamaw Elementary School. The move comes after a week of unrest at the school in which rumors of a riot on Friday brought increased security to the school and emptied classrooms.

Lewis will be taking over for Les Tubb, who was granted a

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LEWIS