

'Power' should be shared

Sadly, the public may only be as powerful as public bodies want us to be

"Knowledge is power," declared Doshier Memorial Hospital trustee Robert Zukoski at the end of last week's board meeting.

He explained that Doshier must stay abreast of the whirlwind changes in the health care industry if it is to survive as an independent, community-oriented hospital.

The board had just wrapped up a closed session that lasted nearly an hour in which trustees discussed everything from formation of a local physicians group, to changes in the federal Medicare program, to the patient turnover rate at Doshier.

How do I know this?

I was standing outside the door and heard bits and pieces of the conversation -- just enough to become interested in what trustees were saying, and just enough to know that trustees should have been holding their talks in the open.

If knowledge can empower Doshier trustees, why can't it do the same for local residents that trustees are elected to serve?

The statute that trustees used to justify the closed session allows public bodies to meet behind closed doors to discuss "matters relating to the location or expansion of industries or other businesses in the area served by the public body."

The intent of the statute is to allow boards to conceal from the public the prospective location of an industry or business in order to protect the property value of that location. The intent is not to conceal from the public the type of industry or business that is locating in the area.

Furthermore, the proposed physicians group

Holly Edwards



doesn't yet exist as an "industry," a business, or even a loose association. Even if it did, the group would not occupy a physical location.

Doctors on the Doshier medical staff are considering formation of the group simply to enter into negotiations with managed care insurance companies as one entity -- they aren't going into practice together.

In short, trustees had no legal basis for calling the closed session. They simply wanted to discuss formation of the physicians group in private, and looked for the most convenient loophole in the open meetings law that would allow them to do so.

The school board apparently did the same

thing last week when it met over lunch with consultants conducting a curriculum audit.

Although the law says an "official meeting" occurs any time a majority of board members convenes to discuss public business, school board attorney Joe Causey noted that it allows boards to meet "socially" without publicly announcing the meeting.

In this case, the school board apparently wanted to discuss school matters privately with the auditors, so they served food and called it a social event.

These are just two examples of the frustration I have with the open meetings law. It is full of easily abused loopholes and, for the most part, only board members know to what extent they comply with the law.

I have a great deal of respect for many of the things both boards are trying to do. However, as a member of the public that is excluded when a board wrongfully calls a closed session, I'm offended and frustrated when a board attempts to conceal something that I, by law and common sense, have a right to know.

After all, these boards are simply the caretakers of organizations with which the public has entrusted them.

The open meetings law does not dictate that boards must call for closed sessions under certain circumstances, but simply states that boards are legally able to conduct their business in private under certain conditions.

If knowledge is indeed power, we members of the public are only as powerful as our public bodies want us to be.

Until mall freeze is over...

Those on the shopping list will suffer from my bout with shopper's paralysis

After much introspection and soul-searching, I'll have to admit one thing about myself: I'm a lousy shopper any time of year.

But, add the deadline pressure of Christmas and I'm reduced to a blithering idiot, wandering about lost and aimlessly, as if I were Dorothy, somehow transported to the limit of the Emerald City by a seasonal tornado of lunacy.

I'm at my worst any time of year when placed kicking and screaming in a shopping mall.

At Christmas time, I become semi-catatonic. I sort of zone out at the frenetic pace of these kingdoms of consumerism.

Listen, I know I should heed the chamber of commerce and shop at home and all, but at least around Christmas time, I usually find myself at the doors of Independence Mall in the city to the north, making my annual yuletide shopping pilgrimage.

To beat the crowd (I thought) this year, I would go early -- in November and at 9:30 a.m., when the devil in the navy blazer first slips the key into the gates of shopping hell, admitting the legion of shopping-damned. I travel alone on these missions, ashamed of my shopping ineptitude.

Arriving at the rapidly crowding mall parking lot at 9:20 a.m., I proceeded to my parking space. Yes, my parking space. You see, shopping places such an exceedingly strong drain on the few working gray cells I have remaining that I limit the prospects for losing my car by parking in the same place at the mall every time I venture there. Yes, every time, regardless of season, I park my car as close as possible to the big blue Number 2 sign nearest the Oleander Drive entrance to Belk's.

It doesn't matter if I plan to shop at Sears or Penney's, I park at Number 2 Oleander anyway. Most of the time the car is there waiting for me when I emerge, zombie-like, from my shopping assignment.

The shopping satan hadn't yet opened the doors to the cordon of condemned consumers that morning, so I found myself standing in Belk's foyer, being sized-up by a crowd of apparent shopping pros. They were all women.

There were women in stylish dresses and fine coats; women in jeans and Duke University sweatshirts. There were women pushing babies in strollers and there were women carrying briefcases. One woman was missing her two front teeth, yet managed to dangle a Marlboro

Richard Nubel



Light 100 expertly from her lips.

I felt conspicuous as these women sized me up, easily concluding a shopping illiterate had invaded their ranks.

These women were all impatient. They stood, peering every moment at their watches, complaining the shopping satan with his black-magic keys to the purchasing purgatory was late.

Finally, the appointed hour came and the turnkey himself was proved merely mortal as the throng of assembled shoppers-in-waiting sped by him, navy blazer and all, on their way to isles and gondolas filled with Christmas booty.

An excruciating dizziness overcame me as I

ambled in the doorway of Belk's, past the perfumers with their heady fragrances, out of the department store and into the main mallway.

On past Reed's, past Victoria's, her secret safe with me. Past kiosks, which appear from nowhere in season, past Camelot and Dalton's beyond Radio Shack and Foot Locker.

I felt nauseous. There was so much to see and so much to buy.

I couldn't decide. It's not that I couldn't decide what to buy; I couldn't decide which store to enter.

Then it hit me. Shopping paralysis -- an insidious syndrome. It occurs when crowds and odors and reflected light from speeding shoppers trigger a chemical imbalance in those of us with genetic shopping disorders. Shopping paralysis is manifested by a feeling of sheer terror, usually accompanied by cold sweats and crossed eyes.

I spun on heel, retraced my steps past door after door aburst with green and red. Picking up speed, I reentered Belk's, raced past the perfumers, into men's wear and out the Oleander exit to the blue Number 2 sign.

I had bought nothing.

Paralyzed, once again, I was a Christmas shopping failure.

But, pity me not. My malady is sad enough, but pity the poor unfortunates who have found their way onto my Christmas shopping list. It is they who will suffer most my yuletide bout of shopper's paralysis.



Time and Tide

60 years ago

December 4, 1935, and winter had been here. The temperature had dropped to 26 degrees and some out-of-season blossoms had been blighted by the cold. There was a note that boatswain Roy Robinson, in charge of the Oak Island Coast Guard Station for the past four years, was being transferred to Boston. There had been no Thanksgiving dinner served at the Brunswick County jail for the simple reason that the local bastille had been empty during the holiday period. A dozen men from the local CCC camp had given blood for a patient at the local hospital; and Dr. D. I. Watson had celebrated his 79th birthday with open house at his home.

50 years ago

A big, black headline across the front page of our issue for December 5, 1945, proclaimed "Brunswick Over Top In Victory Loan." The Leland Lions Club had received its charter, and Mack F. Jones was the first president. Dredging had been scheduled for the Brunswick River lay-up basin.

Members of the Cape Fear Pilots Association, who served as officers in the U. S. Coast Guard during the war, had gone back to civilian status; materials for installing streetlights at Shallotte had been ordered, and there was hope that these would be turned on before Christmas. And in the "Letters to the Editor" column, we deviated from our usual custom of banning poems to permit publication of tribute to a bird dog, recently deceased.

40 years ago

A pretty four-column photo of the luxury liner *Stockholm* dominated the front page of the *Pilot* for Wednesday, December 7, 1955. The picture was taken by Art Newton as the beautiful vessel steamed through the Southport harbor on her last visit of the year. Menhaden fisherman were enjoying unusually good catches, with the Southport boats being joined by others from up the coast.

A cotton referendum was scheduled for the following week; three Southport women's organizations were sponsoring Holiday House on the following Sunday; and there was off-season agitation for ferry service across the lower Cape Fear River. There was a report that Mr. and Mrs. Phil King were returning from Florida to make their home in Southport once more.

30 years ago

A crew for the Southport-Fort Fisher ferry had been hired, but the vessel had not yet been made available for this run. That was a front-page story in the *Pilot* for December 1, 1965. Mrs. Margaret McCracken was being honored by the Brunswick Baptist Association for her years of faithful service as missionary for that organization.

A front-page photo showed work progressing on the building now used as the Ocean Trail Convalescent Center in Southport; a front-page headline gave the reminder that Columbus County once was a part of Brunswick County; and one of the best stories we ever saw about a bazaar told of the coming event at St. Philip's here in town.

20 years ago

A couple of political announcements of interest were made in stories on the front page of the *Pilot* for December 3, 1975. Steve Varnum had been elected chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners, succeeding Franky Thomas; and Marvin Watson had been elected mayor of Yaupon Beach. The commissioners had voted to reinstate the position of county coroner.

A 12-foot pygmy sperm whale had washed ashore at Long Beach and a representative from the Smithsonian Institution had been here to examine the carcass; groundbreaking ceremonies were set for the following Sunday afternoon for the new St. Peter's Lutheran Church; and the Shallotte Christmas parade was set for Saturday of that week.

10 years ago

Two members of the *Pilot* staff had gone to Greensboro to see Leland's Chucky Brown play in his first collegiate basketball game. This was N. C. State vs. Kansas, ranked ninth in the national poll. Chucky didn't start, but he played a lot of minutes and scored seven points. We got an action picture and it ran in our issue for December 11, 1985. Fourteen women who had made significant contributions to various activities in Brunswick County had been honored at a banquet sponsored by the Agricultural Extension Service Advisory Council.

Robert Wilson had been reelected mayor of Yaupon Beach by fellow members of the town board; the Miss Brunswick County Pageant was scheduled for Saturday of that week at Shallotte Middle School; and McDonald's had opened for business at its new location at River Run Shopping Center, with grand opening ceremonies slated in January.

5 years ago

It was December 5, 1990, and the fifth Christmas flotilla over the weekend had inspired our "Waterfront" writer to the view that it was the event's "biggest success." Two of the participating yachts were shown in our page-one photo that week. Yaupon Drive was to become three-lane in May; Kelly Holden had been selected as new chairman of the county board of commissioners; and the commissioners had decided to advertise for someone to fill the county manager's post.

Recent overwash of dunes near the Swansquarter condominiums on Bald Head Island was concerning officials there; ham radio operator Alvie Lewis of Long Beach had been helping link local families with troops who had been sent to service in the Persian Gulf area; and design technician Steve Randone at the county planning department had created an oversize Christmas card for those troops, and it was being signed by many county employees.

How can we help you . . .

**In Case of Emergency
DIAL 911**

TOWN HALLS

- Southport.....457-7900
- Boiling Spring Lakes.....845-2614
- Bald Head Island.....457-9700
- Caswell Beach.....278-5471
- Yaupon Beach.....278-5024
- Long Beach.....278-5011

Government

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2230 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20615, (202) 226-2731
Rep. B. David Hedrick
Rm. 632 Legislative Building
General Assembly, Raleigh, NC 27611
(919) 733-5806
Rep. Dewey Hill
Rm. 1305 Legislative Building
General Assembly, Raleigh, NC 27611
(919) 733-5835
Sen. K.C. Selna
Rm. 2008 Legislative Building
General Assembly, Raleigh, NC 27611
(919) 733-5863

**Southport-Fort Fisher Toll Ferry
WINTER SCHEDULE**

(October 31-March 29)

| SOUTHPORT | FORT FISHER |
|------------|-------------|
| 8:00 a.m. | 8:50 a.m. |
| 9:40 a.m. | 10:30 a.m. |
| 11:20 a.m. | 12:10 p.m. |
| 1:00 p.m. | 1:50 p.m. |
| 2:40 p.m. | 3:30 p.m. |
| 4:20 p.m. | 5:10 p.m. |
| 6:00 p.m. | 6:50 p.m. |

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In State \$16.47 • Senior Citizens \$14.47
Out of State \$19.00 • Senior Citizens \$17.00

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