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Oak Island may be subject to state report on impact of coastal 'disasters' -- Page 2

School bonds

County asked to place issue on next ballot

By Holly Edwards
Feature Editor

Faced with more than \$50 million in school facility needs, the Brunswick County Board of Education will ask county commissioners to authorize a bond referendum that would fund all construction needs for the next ten to 20 years.

Although a dollar amount has not been established, a system-wide survey of facility needs conducted by the state last year concluded the school system needs \$51.4 million during the next decade.

"If we're going to go for a bond referendum, let's look at our facility needs for the next ten to 20 years and develop a plan to meet those needs over a long period of time," board member Billy Carter said during a special meeting Friday afternoon. "I think a bond referendum is a good way to include the community in planning for the future."

Board members acknowledged they would have to decide what they would spend the bond money on before asking the community to support a referendum.

"We need to do a lot of work and decide exactly what we need before we hold a bond referendum," Carter said.

If county commissioners agree to place a bond referendum on the ballot in November, school board members said they would try to determine how much money they need and what they would use it for by August.

"If you show people that you've got a need and you're going to be responsible for what you're doing, they will support you," Carter said. "This county's been very supportive of bonds when the need is shown, and I think the last bonds issued for school construction were in 1977."

The school board decided last month to use most, if not all, of the \$7.9 million in state bond money it will receive to construct a new elementary school.

On Friday, the board voted unanimously to hire a construction manager and an architect for the new school and directed school administrators to obtain at least five proposals from construction management companies and architects to present for board consideration at a special meeting later this month.

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A tricolor heron wades slowly and stabs at whatever seems like food in the Southport yacht basin these days. Soon he and other wading birds who wintered here will be joined by migrating cousins in the springtime rite of selecting a nesting spot on Battery Island.

Photo by Jim Harper

Occupancy tax doesn't have ceiling

...but Redwine sees 'diminishing return'

By Richard Nubel
Municipal Editor

No town or city needs to sacrifice any present or future portion of municipal occupancy tax revenues if a countywide occupancy tax for travel and tourism development is adopted, Rep. E. David Redwine said this week.

"There is no cap. Nothing says any portion of the occupancy tax has to go to anything," Redwine said.

Two weeks ago Redwine met with municipal leaders and representatives of the two county chambers of commerce to discuss a chamber-initiated proposal for establishment of a one-percent countywide occupancy tax to fund travel and tourism marketing efforts. The anticipated \$450,000 the one-percent tax would generate would be collected by Brunswick County, but passed to Travel Pack, a joint marketing and promotion venture of the Southport-Oak Island chamber and the South Brunswick Islands chamber. Chamber members say Brunswick County is unable to compete for tourist dollars with sur-

"This committee has to work within the law of diminishing returns. You can raise the occupancy tax so high people won't come here."

Rep. David Redwine

rounding resort areas with a budget of only \$70,000 annually provided by Brunswick County.

Municipal leaders have been laboring under the misconception that a six-percent cap governs all accommodations taxes. Some have said if the one-percent county occupancy tax were enacted, municipal interests could only impose a five-percent tax.

See Occupancy, page 6

Yaupon weighs six-percent fee

By Richard Nubel
Municipal Editor

Yaupon Beach will likely be the first municipality in the area to act in what may become a flurry of adjustments to local accommodation taxes this year.

Monday night, Yaupon Beach commissioners are scheduled to debate a resolution asking the N. C. General Assembly to raise the tax on short-term rentals in that town to six percent. Currently, a three-percent tax on hotel, motel and cottage rentals is charged in Yaupon Beach.

Long Beach, Caswell Beach and Southport also charge a three-percent accommodations, or occupancy, tax. Bald Head Island levies a six-percent accommodations tax.

A proposed resolution to come before Yaupon Beach commissioners Monday notes the town's three-percent "room occupancy and tourism development tax" was authorized by the General Assembly in 1992. The town generates about \$20,000 annually from the three-percent tax, most of which is used to maintain public beach accessways.

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'Look at where we're going'

Schools' Report Card includes 'no surprise'

By Holly Edwards
Feature Editor

The 1996 Report Card released last week by the state Department of Public Instruction holds no surprises, Brunswick County school officials say.

It shows student achievement in Brunswick County lagging behind the state average in each category, and student attendance in the county among the lowest in the state.

School officials say, however, they have been aware of school system problems for quite some time and prefer now to concentrate on resolving them.

"The Report Card doesn't tell us anything we didn't already know," said assistant superintendent of instruction Mary McDuffie. "We know we have a lot of work to do. But rather than look at where we've been, I think it's more advantageous to look at where we are and where we're going."

While performance of Brunswick County students in grades three

1996 REPORT CARD

	BRUNSWICK COUNTY	NORTH CAROLINA
Core Courses (high school)	35.3%	42.3%
Reading (Grades 3-8)	63.1%	68%
Math (Grades 3-8)	66.9%	69.6%
Writing (Grades 3-8)	55%	59.7%
SAT	926	950
Drop-Out Rate	2.97%	3.45%

*Scores reflect percentage of students who are proficient or at grade level in these areas.

through eight is somewhat below state average, the Report Card indicates that Brunswick County high school students scored well below state average in the core courses: Algebra I; Biology; Economics, Legal and Political (ELP); English I; U. S. History. Physical Science is no longer included as a core course.

While 42.3 percent of students statewide were proficient in these

courses, 35.3 percent of Brunswick County high school students were proficient.

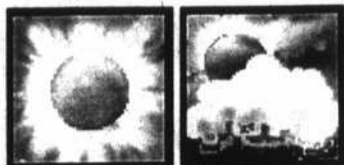
The Report Card also showed that 63.1 percent of Brunswick County students in grades three through eight scored at grade level in reading, compared to 68 percent statewide, and 66.9 percent scored at grade level in math compared to 69.6 percent statewide.

Fifty-five percent of Brunswick County seventh graders scored at grade level in writing, compared to 59.7 percent statewide, and 42.2 percent of fourth graders scored at grade level in writing, compared to 51.8 percent statewide.

Brunswick County school board chairman Glenda Browning said the Report Card shows the school system "isn't where it needs to be," but said she is optimistic about the future because of the new administrative team -- superintendent Marion Wise, assistant superintendent of operations Clarence Willie and McDuffie.

"We've worked hard to put people

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Forecast

The extended forecast calls for a chance of showers on Thursday & Friday with highs mid 50's to mid 60's. Saturday will be fair and cooler with highs in the 40's to mid 50's.

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