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'In the whole scheme of things, we dodged the bullet.'

HURRICANE WATCH

Dennis just a menace; little damage done

By Richard Nubel
Staff Writer

An estimated six inches of rain saturated Southport-Oak Island Sunday night and early Monday morning as Hurricane Dennis pelted this section of the coast with gale-force winds that gusted to 80 miles per hour.

But, Southport-Oak Island and the surrounding area was spared any substantial damage as

Dennis made his last-minute turn to the northeast and ran parallel to the Cape Fear coastline. Area municipalities Monday reported only downed limbs and debris. Some overwash was noted along the Oak Island oceanfront, most notably in the critically eroded 700 block of Caswell Beach Road.

"We're in pretty good shape, we really were lucky," Southport city manager Rob Gandy said at mid-morning Monday. Southport experienced only scattered power outages during the overnight onslaught. Power was returned to virtually all customers by 8 a.m. Monday.

At Oak Island, damage assessment crews sent out at 7 a.m. had little to report. East Beach Drive saw some overwash and standing water was present at intersections along Pelican Drive. Structural damage was limited to missing shingles and vinyl siding.

"In the whole scheme of things, we dodged the bullet," Oak Island town manager Jerry Walters said.

At Caswell Beach, commissioner Bob Spake, who has oversight responsibilities for both public works and public safety, was out early surveying conditions. Structural damage in that town

was minimal, he said.

About 18 inches of sand left a moon-like scene in the Caswell Beach Road 700 block.

"This is the worst of it, right here," commissioner Spake said, pointing to the area of overwash.

About two feet was cut underneath the pavement on the south side of the road, SR 1100. Spake said he did not know if the hurricane damage would

speed N. C. Department of Transportation's plans to sandbag and backfill south of the roadway. Right now that project is on hold until turtle nesting season ends November 15.

Although evacuation was ordered and Southport, Oak Island and Caswell Beach mayors all declared states of emergency, no public safety problems were reported during Dennis' brush with the coast.

"I would say 60 to 70 percent of the people evacuated," said chief Danny Laughren of the Oak Island Public Safety Department. "It was a little surprising. A lot of people left when we asked for voluntary evacuation. The evacuation process went smoothly, without traffic backup."

Voluntary evacuation from Oak Island was requested at 4:30 p.m. Sunday as rains began to buffet the area and winds gusted to 20 miles per hour. Co-mayors Dot Kelly and Joan Altman later declared a state of emergency as the storm intensified. The declaration established a 10 p.m. curfew and ended sale of alcoholic beverages at that time. Caswell Beach mayor Joe O'Brien issued a declaration of a state of emergency.

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Hurricane Dennis broke apart the remains of an 1893 wreck on Oak Island and wiped out three beach stairways, but did little damage overall along the strand. The Southport Baptist Church steeple went down early Monday, probably around 3:43 a.m. when a 69-mile-per-hour gust was recorded at the pilots tower.

Photos by Jim Harper

Town will save piece of history

By Richard Nubel
Staff Writer

As hurricanes go, Dennis was not much to study. But, the storm of Sunday and Monday may have made a lasting contribution to Oak Island's cultural and historical life.

When Hurricane Dennis visited its 45-to-60-mile-per-hour winds on the Oak Island shoreline, it slowly unveiled more of the aged ship's hull which has from time to time poked its way through the town's western beachface. Dennis dislodged a huge section of the 132-foot vessel, believed to be the German brig or three-masted schooner, and slammed it in two broken sections against the 13th Place West public beach access and a staircase to an adjoining cottage.

With these sections of the great sailing ship dislodged, the Town of Oak Island has early this week taken steps to preserve her and place her on public display.

Co-mayor Joan Altman said two underwater archeologists with the N. C. Department of Archives and History met with her and other town officials Tuesday to discuss relocation of the vessel's remnants. For the time being,

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Calm before the storm

Calm before the storm last Saturday morning, Southport Sunfish sailors massed for a round-Oak Island race in the yacht basin. More on that circumnavigation in the Waterfront column.

Photo by Jim Harper

Southport, others face decision Regional treatment plant is solid option

By Richard Nubel
Staff Writer

Municipal officials greeted Brunswick County commissioners' recent decision to facilitate new regional wastewater treatment ventures warmly.

Commissioners on August 11 gave the go-ahead for establishment of three regional sewer treatment plants in three phases, including one already planned for northern Brunswick County. Commissioners said the county would serve as lead agency for projects involving any town or community which wants to join the new regional efforts in the southeast and southwest as well as the on-going wastewater treatment project begun last year in the northern section of the county.

"This is a positive," Oak Island co-mayor Joan Altman said. "We have participated in, and have been very supportive of, the county's wastewater and stormwater management committee."

The regional wastewater management plan

"We've got a plant out there with a definite shelf life. We are looking at all the options."

Rob Gandy
Southport city manager

built around three central treatment facilities was a concept developed by an ad hoc committee that county commissioners formed in 1997 to address wastewater and stormwater issues. Former

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SAT scores rising

By Diana D'Abruzzo
Staff Writer

Brunswick County students are showing continued improvement on the national Scholastic Assessment Test, a positive trend that officials say will continue as long as schools push students to higher-level academic courses.

Scores on the college entrance exam, released by the College Board on Tuesday, show Brunswick County closing the gap between it and the state. On average, Brunswick County students scored 951 on the combined math and verbal test, while

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