

THE STATE PORT PILOT

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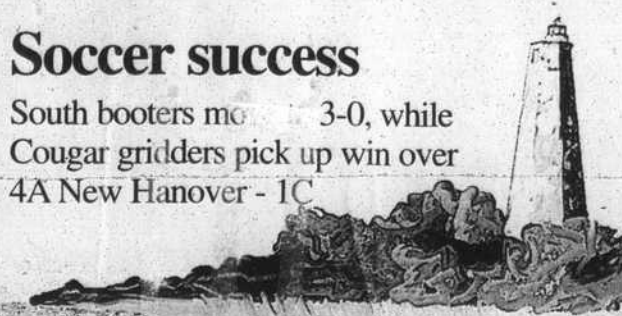
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Soccer success

South booters move 3-0, while
Cougar gridders pick up win over
4A New Hanover - 1C



September 8, 1999/ 50 cents



Fire fee districts okayed

By Terry Pope
Staff Writer

Two fire departments have become the first in line for fee districts, where property owners will pay annual assessments to better fund volunteer units.

Boards of directors at the Boiling Spring Lakes and Sunset Harbor-Zion Hill volunteer departments gained approval of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners Tuesday night to establish fire fee districts as allowed under special legislation adopted by the N. C. General Assembly in July.

That legislation was sought by commissioners as a means to boost funding for the county's volunteer departments rather than allocate funds from general tax revenues. The votes taken by Boiling Spring Lakes and Sunset Harbor-Zion Hill boards of directors were unanimous. Only a two-thirds majority of the board must agree to petition county commissioners, or residents can request a district after obtaining the signatures of at least 15 percent of residents in a service area.

County attorney Huey Marshall said the petitions will be given county tax supervisor Boyd Williamson this (Wednesday) morning so his office can start mapping district boundaries for the two departments. A public hearing must be held for each so residents have a say in which fire tax district they prefer to be placed. In some areas of the county, fire service districts actually overlap, so commissioners must draw specific boundaries with the help of county fire marshal Cecil Logan.

"Their service districts may overlap, but their tax districts will not," Marshall explained. "You can only be assessed in one district. With the public hearing process, I suspect you will hear from people at that time. The ultimate creator is the board of commissioners."

House Bill 651, ratified by the General Assembly on July 19, gives Brunswick County the authority to establish fire district fees tied to insurance. See Districts, page 7

TUNNEL VISION



This won't work. But kids figure all sorts of things out on their own, and these got along okay, too. They were having a good time at Middleton Park on Saturday as Oak Island got a reprieve after a week of worry over whether Dennis would return. More on Middleton Park recreation, and arts and crafts doings, in the Neighbors section.

Photo by Jim Harper

Oak Island bridge Fed agencies urged to drop study request

By Richard Nubel
Staff Writer

Seventh District U. S. Congressman Mike McIntyre has asked two federal regulatory agencies to withdraw their requests for additional study and let the second bridge to Oak Island project go forward immediately.

"The facts are clear," McIntyre said this week. "Oak Island and the residents of this fine community need a second bridge. As Brunswick County is the second-fastest-growing county in the state, a new bridge will not only relieve the growing traffic demands, but also serve as an important emergency evacuation route in case of future hurricanes. I am urging officials of the EPA (U. S. Environmental Protection Agency) and FWS (U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to work with local and state officials to move ahead with construction of this important project."

McIntyre said he made those points in letters recently to EPA administrator Carol Browner and FWS director Jamie Rappaport Clark. The congressman said he is awaiting their replies.

Though an original project schedule called for construction of a second bridge to Oak Island to begin in 1999, work on siting the bridge was halted early this year when EPA and FWS raised objections to all three proposed roadway routes that would have linked a western Oak Island bridge to N. C. 211 near Midway Road.

The two federal regulatory agencies said a direct roadway corridor between a proposed new bridge at Middleton Street and the Midway Road area on N. C. 211 would promote excessive sec-

'Fish and Wildlife and EPA trying to come up with new routes for the road is clearly not in the scope of responsibility of either agency.'

Joan Altman
Oak Island co-mayor

ondary development and would be detrimental to the area lying between N. C. 211 and the Intracoastal Waterway.

Oak Island and N. C. Department of Transportation officials favored three corridor route alternatives which most directly link a Middleton Street bridge with the Midway Road area are the least costly alternatives and will impact the environment least. They contend secondary development is occurring now, without a roadway corridor. Additional secondary development of the area, mostly residential and recreational, is planned by landowners and is inevitable, they say.

But, with their objections earlier this year, EPA and FWS demanded DOT reexamine three roadway alternatives which would route Oak Island traffic west, down Sunset Harbor Road. The federal agencies say improvement of that already developed roadway would impact the environment less severely. Oak Island and DOT officials say transportation needs - which include better

See Corridor, page 3



McINTYRE

Wetlands permit request may bog down Island shopping site considered

By Richard Nubel
Staff Writer

While those involved say the project remains highly speculative, a South Carolina developer has proposed to fill Oak Island wetlands to make way for construction of a Food Lion grocery store and Kerr Drugs pharmacy.

A U. S. Army Corps of Engineers public notice says Block 5A Long Beach Properties has filed a permit request to discharge fill material into 3.95 acres of wetlands on a 12-acre tract between SE 61st and SE 59th streets adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean.

The area identified by the Aiken, S. C., firm lies in the Turtle Creek residential development between Oak Island Drive and the oceanfront, but is zoned for commercial use, Oak Island town planner Don Eggert said.

"The wetlands to be impacted by the proposed work are freshwater maritime shrub swamp, grading into maritime wet grassland," the Corps of Engineers' public notice says. "They occupy the zone between the primary beach dunes and upland maritime forest. Functions of these wetlands include groundwater purification and recharge, flood and storm surge abatement, shoreline protection, sedi-

ment retention and wildlife habitat."

In addition to filling nearly four acres of the freshwater wetlands, now a familiar summertime hangout for alligators, heron and ibis, the developer has proposed to flood an additional acre for construction of a stormwater retention pond. In all, 4.95 acres of the total seven acres of wetlands on the parcel will be impacted by the development project, the federal permit application says.

Oak Island attorney Tom Heller said he represents a potential buyer of the property from Block 5A Long Beach Properties. Sale of the property, he said, See Wetlands, page 8



Photo by Jim Harper

The week between Hurricane Dennis I and Dennis-that-did-not-return brought fall-like weather to the community, and spawned autumnal sunsets on Oak Island.

Caswell hears merger option

By Richard Nubel
Staff Writer

A first public discussion of the possible consolidation of the towns of Caswell Beach and Oak Island will focus on financial considerations, Caswell Beach mayor Joe O'Brien said.

A presentation aimed at comparing costs of services homeowners would experience as residents of Oak Island to costs as residents of Caswell Beach will be presented at the first in a planned series of public consolidation discussions Thursday evening. See Merger, page 12

Tart accepts bond post

By Diana D'Abruzzo
Staff Writer

After two community leaders turned down the job of piloting Brunswick County Schools' push for an \$83.5-million bond referendum, a local school supporter has stepped forward to lead the effort.

Cynthia Tart, executive director of Communities In Schools of Brunswick County, has accepted the position of steering committee chairman.

"We are excited Ms. Tart accepted this position," said Joyce Parker Hewett, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Education. "It makes so much sense given the strong link with her work between the schools and the community."

"Ms. Tart is keenly aware of the critical need for community support and resources in order for our public schools to be successful in educating our children," Hewett said.

The board of education will meet at 5 p.m. today (Wednesday) in a called meeting to discuss the bond referendum.

Tart said the facilities improvement plan, which calls for more than \$80 million in school renovations and additions, is crucial to school system success.

"It is my belief that every citizen has a duty to contribute to the success of the bond referendum for the sake of our future and the future of our children," Tart said.

"The referendum will decide whether we have function-

See School bond, page 7

GO!

This week, *The State Port Pilot* launches Go, a page devoted to student-inspired writing, artwork and opinions gathered from schools across Brunswick County. Go will be a regular feature in the *Pilot* and can be found on the back of the Neighbors section.

