

under the sun

New Commissioner Known By Nickname, 'Candy Man'

BY SUSAN USHER

Jim Poole moved from the front edge of the data processing movement in the 1960s to state employment, then retired early for medical reasons. Now he's committed himself to a four-year stint in a demanding public service job.

In December the former Carolina Power & Light Co. mailboy was elected vice-chairman of the recently-seated Brunswick County Board of Commissioners. Like the other winners, Poole took the year-long campaign for commissioner seriously, yet still allowed his own personal brand of humor and warmth to come across clearly at forums and rallies. The work paid off with results of which any candidate could be proud—not only a comparatively new resident like Poole. He garnered 8,618 votes, trailing behind leaders Herman Love and Frankie Rabon, who collected over 8,700 votes each.

Since taking office, he's probably best known for the apothecary jar of candy that rests in front of him at board meetings with the label, "Help yourself."

"I thought it was a nice little personal touch," Poole explained, grinning all the while. "Ronald Reagan had had a lot of success with his jelly beans..."

It's led to the nickname "Candy Man" among regular audience members at the board's meetings.

The Wake County native gained his first campaigning experience in 1983, when he ran for a seat on the Yaupon Beach town board. Voters didn't like his advocating consolidation of the island's three municipalities, Poole said with refreshing candor, and therefore he was defeated.

In 1984, the campaigns of all county commissioner candidates sounded a common conservative theme by Nov. 6, the result of meeting with voters on a day-to-day basis. Enough so that the sole Republican member, Frankie Rabon, quipped later that the other members "sound like Republicans."

Poole said county commissioners are trying to act on what they interpret as the voters' desires in electing them. That message, he added, was that voters felt county government was "out of control" in terms of operations and spending.

That was the basis for several policy changes the board enacted earlier this month with a promise of more to come.

"We're not trying to get into the day-to-day operation of the county," Poole explained, but added board members will stay visible in regard to operations initially while they try to find out how the system presently operates.

"We want to get into a position where we can establish the policies we need to run it like we want it to run: efficiently and at the least cost to the taxpayers," he concluded.

Poole, 50, moved to Brunswick County in 1982 after early retirement for medical reasons from his position as a systems analyst within the N.C. Department of Corrections. Yaupon Beach, which he had visited regularly for years, looked like a good place to get away from the Raleigh rat race.

That was also the year he underwent the first of two operations for arteriosclerosis, a chronic condition in which hardening of the arteries restricts blood circulation through the body.

He and his wife of about 10 years, Barbara, moved into what had been the retirement home of his parents, James and Alma Poole, before their deaths. It's a small, comfortable home with lemon yellow siding, tucked into a side street off Sherrill Street and decorated with Barbara's needlework and lamps filled with shells Poole collected in long walks on the beach he's since given up. There's a fenced-in yard for Strudels, their one-year-old German schnauzer.

They aren't too far from family. An aunt, who has since moved away, was once mayor pro-tem at Yaupon Beach. An uncle lives nearby, along with other relatives.

As a state employee he was never involved in politics, though he was always interested in the community where he lived. Given the opportunity upon retirement, he wanted to make a contribution—and have a say.

"Being able to have an opinion that gets results" has been the best thing about being a commissioner so far, he added.

So far making that opinion count is taking up about 50 percent of his time, a time commitment he hopes will decrease after the first year. "And it's the kind of thing you could spend all your time on if you allowed yourself to," he added. For commissioners with regular jobs as well, the county post creates even greater demands.

Poole represents the commissioners on the Southeastern Economic Development Commission, the Lower Cape Fear Council of Governments (COG) and the COG aging advisory council. After his meeting with The Beacon last Wednesday morning, for instance, he had afternoon and evening meetings to attend on county business.

Sitting at his desk, he pointed to the two-drawer file cabinet Barbara presented him for Christmas, saying it was nearly full of county materials already.

Poole has a track record of seeing results from hard work. Just out of high school he went to work for Carolina Power & Light as a mailboy and soon became an engineering aide. He stayed with CP&L's engineering department while completing an international Correspondence School course in electrical engineering. He returned to the company after a two-year stint—1955-1957—on radar duty, spent "seasick" aboard a destroyer stationed along the DEW (Distant Early Warning) line along the 70th parallel near Newfoundland. He was in the reserves six years.

When he did well on a computer aptitude test, CP&L chose Poole to help get its new data processing department off the ground. He spent two to three years in training and helping program the utility's accounts.

A growing, and financially rewarding demand for trained computer programmers drew him to Blue Bell, a Greensboro clothing manufacturing firm, for three years as programming manager, and then to Control Data as a salesman of equipment compatible with IBM's large systems.

When Control Data backed off in the front of a strong IBM expansion, he turned to Raleigh and the then-small corrections department, which he had earlier sold Control Data equipment.

Now, out of the "rat race" of the state capital and on the firing line in Brunswick County, Poole tends to be forthright in his view of county government, as a sampling of his thoughts indicates. The water system, followed by helping citizens understand the upcoming revaluation, and fire and rescue funding are his top priorities for the next several years.

What does he have to say about these and other areas?

•In reference to pressures on the board of commissioners to fire County Manager Billy Carter—"We're not out to get Billy or anybody else." Board members are giving themselves time to observe and learn how county government functions.

•On the decision to promote Kenneth Hewett to water system director: "I think the water department is soon going to be the largest in county government. We needed a single person on top of it all, giving us infor-



DISTRICT 3 COMMISSIONER Jim Poole, shown here with the family dog, "Strudels," loves to play golf. He's also the youthful grandfather of three girls.

mation. He was the most familiar with it; we're going to see how it works."

•Property Revaluation: "It's a matter of educating the public."

•On fire and rescue: "Maybe we need to establish an 11-member fire and rescue commission that includes a county commissioner, a fire or rescue representative from each (electoral) district and a business representative from each district." He'd like to see fire and rescue volunteers develop and agree among themselves on any funding plan devised.

•On relationships with the board of education: "The most important thing is will we be honest with each other? I think these two boards will be. I don't think this (school) board would do that," referring to the start-up of several recent school programs without a source of funding for their second year.

•On himself: "I take my business seriously but not myself. Each person's kind of insignificant in the overall scheme of things."

When all is done four years from now, he'd like the people of Brunswick County to be able to say, "He was a good commissioner. It was a good board of commissioners,"—whatever those statements might encompass.



AT BOARD MEETINGS, he's earned the nickname "Candy Man" for obvious reasons.

"First I changed my body, then I changed my mind."



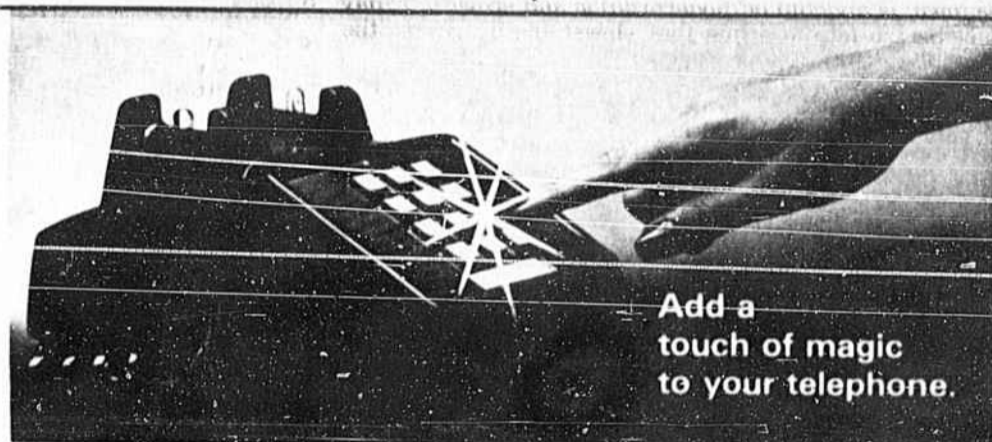
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