



BILLY CARTER
Has board's confidence

Commissioners Express Confidence In County Manager

BY SUSAN USHER

County Manager Billy Carter received the equivalent of a unanimous "vote of confidence" from the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners Monday night following an unusual evaluation conducted in open session.

Carter, who also had an opportunity to evaluate the board's performance during the past eight months, was voted a three percent merit increase in salary.

At Chairman Chris Chappell's sug-

gestion, each member marked a standard form evaluating the manager's performance in seven areas such as goal setting and organizational skills, public relations, and management style.

While acknowledging they had never worked with another manager and had no basis for comparison, all five commissioners said they rated Carter in the medium to high ranges of "standard" performance in most areas.

Their comments will be placed in

Carter's personnel file and reviewed during his next appraisal.

Thanking the board, Carter asked if he could consider their actions a vote of confidence.

"From what I hear tonight," replied Chappell, "you have a vote of confidence."

In the weeks immediately before and after the newly constituted board took office in December, rumors flew through political circles that a move was afoot to fire Carter. However, individual commissioners consistently

denied any such plan, saying they would allow time to form their own judgements of his performance.

In turn, Carter told commissioners Monday that they comprise one of the best boards he's ever worked with because members act together rather than individually.

"You've had your differences and spoken your differences, but you work as a unit once a decision is made," he said.

Carter praised their willingness to meet, become informed and question

all they hear.

But like any new board, he added, "You have had to get over what's been told you and what is fact."

Noting their lack of a basis of comparison in his evaluation, he suggested another yardstick for future appraisals: more familiarity with the specific responsibilities of the county manager and county commissioners.

He said he would accept their comments as "constructive criticism" (See COMMISSIONERS, Page 2-A)

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Murder Defendant Draws Life Sentence

BY TERRY POPE

An argument that started over a piece of "fried chicken" and led to the murder of a Long Beach man ended with a life sentence for a Welch, W.Va., native in Brunswick County Superior Court Monday.

James R. Stamper, 24, pleaded guilty Monday to second-degree murder in the Feb. 27 stabbing death of Samuel Allen Mabe, 23, a rehabilitation aide at Ocean Trail Convalescent Center in Southport and resident of N.E. 28th Street of Long Beach.

Defense attorney William Fairley said the stabbing death resulted from an argument "over a matter as simple as a piece of fried chicken." Southport attorneys Fairley and Steve Yount asked Judge Preston Cornelius not to issue the death sentence against Stamper, a West Virginia native who moved to Brunswick County last September to seek employment as a carpenter.

In a plea bargain agreement reached Monday, District Attorney Michael Easley agreed to the second-degree murder plea, saying that a first-degree conviction would be hard to obtain since the only aggravating factor in the case was that the crime was "so grossly cruel."

Stamper had been charged with first-degree murder by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department and Long Beach police officers the day following the 10:10 p.m. stabbing. Mabe had been stabbed 13 times with a butcher's knife that was never found when he staggered to a neighbor's house for help, said agent Tim Batchelor of the State Bureau of Investigation.

The victim was able to identify Stamper as his attacker, and gave Stamper's name to emergency personnel before he died at Dasher Memorial Hospital in Southport, Batchelor said.

Stamper was scheduled for trial on first-degree murder charges Monday. The trial was avoided after the defendant pleaded guilty before a jury was chosen. Fairley entered a plea of not guilty to the first-degree charges at an arraignment last

month. Mabe's parents had also requested that the death sentence not be issued in the case, Easley told the judge at Monday's sentencing hearing.

"Their concern, and they wanted me to bring it to the court's attention," Easley said, "is that they're not in favor of the death sentence. However, they would like to be heard at any parole hearing if he becomes eligible for parole."

Judge Cornelius ordered that both the district attorney's office and Mabe's parents be notified by mail by the N.C. Parole Commission in the event that Stamper does become eligible for parole. Stamper was not sentenced under the Committed Youthful Offender (CYO) act. He is not eligible for immediate parole since the crime carries a maximum of life, or 50 years in prison, and a minimum of 15 years in prison.

CYO status is eligible for persons under 25 who have committed certain non-violent crimes, making them immediately eligible for parole.

Stamper was sentenced to serve "the rest of his natural life" in the N.C. Department of Corrections and to receive counseling for a drug addiction problem. Dressed in a white T-shirt, navy blue slacks and tennis shoes, the defendant appeared in the courtroom Monday where he acknowledged that he was guilty of murder.

According to agent Batchelor's testimony, Stamper had met Mabe at Long Beach "only a week or so prior to the murder." There was some indication that the two had just eaten dinner at Mabe's house when the argument broke out, he added.

Stamper had picked up a butcher's knife during the "fight" and had "actually chased him from the residence and out into the yard," Batchelor said. After the incident, the defendant then fled to Wilmington, but later changed his mind about his plans and was walking to South Carolina to seek help from a girlfriend when he was arrested near the Brunswick County Government Complex on U.S. 17 by Chief Deputy

(See MURDER, Page 14-A)



VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS and rescue workers from Calabash to Supply responded when fire broke out Friday night in a golf cart storage area of the Oyster Bay clubhouse. Despite their containment efforts, the blazed leveled the structure.

Oyster Bay Strives For Normalcy After Blaze Destroys Clubhouse

BY SUSAN USHER

Electric carts were humming across the greens Saturday morning after a Friday evening blaze razed the Oyster Bay Golf Links clubhouse at Twin Lakes and sent a dozen firemen to the hospital.

"We didn't lose any operating time," said Larry Young, owner. "We originally thought it would be Monday, but the cart men came. They had carts on the course by 6:30 a.m. Saturday."

The course was not damaged. Site clean-up had begun by Monday and Young predicted construction of a new clubhouse would begin next week. "We're going to rebuild as quickly as possible," he added.

In the interim, crews moved in mobile office quarters this week that had been used at the Dunes Club at Myrtle Beach, S.C., during construction of a new clubhouse. "They moved out of them Thursday," said Young. "I was able to buy one."

Meanwhile, it was business almost as usual Saturday morning for golf pro Mike Kearns and staff. With the still-smoking ruin of the clubhouse as

background, they were operating the pro shop from the tailgate of a truck. Their "shop" was equipped with materials from Marsh Harbour Golf Links at Calabash, which Young also owns.

Young brought 30 carts from Marsh Harbour and borrowed about 10 each from several courses that didn't need their full complement this time of year, he said.

"Every little bit helps," he added, noting that the operation was "just trying to get back to normal."

Young estimated his losses at \$700,000, including the 84 carts housed on the first floor of the two-story structure where the fire apparently began.

"It definitely started in the golf carts, either in the charging system or the wiring," he said. "We're checking with the golf cart company about that."

When firefighters arrived on the scene, the fire appeared smaller than it actually was, said Jimmy Allison, fire coordinator for the World 600 at Rockingham and a Sunset Beach volunteer firefighter in the summer. After attempting to enter a small

steel side door, firemen used an electric winch to pry off the bay door to the first-level storage area.

Allison worked his way through the smoke to retrieve keys for the other door.

In the end, the gesture was futile. "If I'd known how serious it was I wouldn't have waited to find the keys," he recalled after his release from the emergency room. "I would have taken an ax and started breaking out glass."

Firefighters penetrated about five feet into the storage area, said Sunset Beach fireman Bob Constantine, not knowing the area was used to store golf carts.

"We couldn't see anything. You could hear it busting, the batteries popping. At first we didn't know what we were hearing."

When they first turned hoses on the fire, a cloud of thick black smoke accompanied by intense heat billowed back in their faces. The firefighters pulled out.

"The batteries were getting hot," recalled Allison. "It was too risky. The danger to human lives was too great."

Most of the firefighters wore portable breathing apparatus. But, low on air, most removed them immediately after stepping out of the clubhouse, said Calabash fireman Chuck Fogle, the third fireman affected by smoke inhalation.

Tim Carter said he "coughed, vomited and passed out."

That first blast was "when we got it the worst," said Fogle. "It got to me fast. I've been to a lot of fires but the heat on this was the most, the top five percent of any I've been too."

Firefighters were aided on the scene by volunteers hauling water and jugs of Gator Aid. Fire medics Jean and Alex Mearns of Bonaparte administered oxygen, saying the fire was an excellent example of why more such medics are needed locally.

Kearns was the only person in the clubhouse when the fire began, Young said.

"He was locking up, waiting for his wife to pick him up, when he noticed smoke coming from under the clubhouse."

Before the club pro could call the (See CROWD, Page 2-A)

Voters To Decide Future Of Tech Building Program

(See Related Stories, Page 10-A)

A proposed \$8 million bond issue for construction at Brunswick Technical College will be put before voters "as soon as possible," Brunswick County commissioners voted Monday night at the college's behest.

The date of the referendum and the wording of the question will be determined by the Brunswick County Board of Elections. Once approved by the voters, the bond issue would be conducted by the Local Government Commission.

Taking an earlier hint from the commissioners, college trustees approved a resolution Wednesday night calling for a referendum as soon as it can be scheduled. In turn, commissioners unanimously agreed Monday to call for the referendum.

The proceeds would be used to consolidate college programs at three locations in new facilities on BTC's permanent campus between Supply and Bolivia. Proposed facilities include an auditorium available for community use.

County Manager Billy Carter suggested the referendum several months ago during budget deliberations, saying it was the most practical means of financing a long-range building program.

OIB Vote Fraud Probe Ends With Clean Slate

BY SUSAN USHER

A two-year investigation of Ocean Isle Beach voting records by the U.S. Attorney General's office has concluded with no irregularities found, Ocean Isle Beach Board of Elections Chairman Martha Benton said Monday.

"All our voting records have been returned," she said. "No irregularities were found."

On Monday, April 18, 1983, SBI Agent John Willis served a subpoena on Ms. Benton ordering her to turn over voter registration lists and absentee ballots for elections in the

years 1978, 1980 and 1982. However, town elections are conducted in odd-numbered years, making it impossible to honor his request.

"They redrafted the subpoena and came back and asked for records from the years 1977, 1979 and 1981," said Ms. Benton, who has been chairman of the board since 1981.

Meanwhile, Willis also contacted Brunswick County Board of Elections Chairman Alforza Roach. On Tuesday, April 19, 1983, he told Ms. Benton a subpoena had been served on Roach, she said at that time.

In county, state and national elections Ocean Isle Beach voters cast their ballots at a county precinct, Grissetown.

At the time the records were subpoenaed, a state grand jury meeting in Raleigh was investigating charges of voting irregularities and ballot box fraud across the state. Records had been subpoenaed from several Columbus County precincts and towns earlier that month by the grand jury, the same body that handed down indictments in the Columbus County "Color" investigation.

Brunswick County Board of Elections Chairman Orle Gore did not know the status of the Brunswick County records originally subpoenaed.

Elections office personnel were out of town Monday and Tuesday and could not be reached for comment.

Willis referred comments to Doug McCullough, assistant in the U.S. Attorney General's office in Raleigh. However, he was involved in a case in federal court in Wilmington and could not be reached by press time Tuesday.