



OCEAN ISLE BEACH firemen direct a large-stream monitor on the blaze, which by 5:30 a.m. Tuesday had engulfed much of the Lewis Shopping Center complex.

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A NEW DOUBLE FIRE WALL stopped the fire at Shallotte Electric Supply, which reopened for business almost as usual Tuesday with some smoke and water damage. The seven remaining stores were razed, including four occupied by businesses.

## Blaze Guts Seven Stores; Wall Saves One Business

BY SUSAN USHER

Shallotte Electric Supply was back in business Tuesday morning almost as usual, the only one of eight connecting stores left intact after a pre-dawn fire swept through Lewis Shopping Center on the south side of Shallotte's downtown business strip.

Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan's fervent, "Thank God for the fire wall," echoed a sentiment expressed again and again throughout the morning as Shallotte Electric owner Alton Milliken, his family, employees and friends surveyed the supply store.

Shallotte Fire Chief Mike Arnold, soaked to the skin, tired and sooty, had few words. "It shows the need for fire walls," he said as he looked for rope to secure the site. "And we appreciate all the help we got."

Before daylight, fans were already venting smoke from the supply store's interior; inside some water had run down the fire wall and puddled on the floor. But the merchandise was intact.

The wall had been in place approximately a week, according to Milliken, and was almost completed. Vinyl sheeting still separated the work area from the rest of the store.

Vehicles slowed to a crawl as Shallotte Police closed the south end intersection to all but fire-related traffic. They rerouted morning traffic off U.S. 17 onto N.C. 179 and Bridgers Road.

By mid-morning Atlantic Telephone had temporarily rerouted and restored service to a half-dozen businesses which lost connections along with the burned-out stores, according to Jackson Canady of the operations office.

At the shopping center, fire adjusters, SBI and local investigators began sifting through the rubble for clues as to how and where the fire had started. Firefighters stood by throughout the day to put out hotspots as they popped up.

The fire destroyed seven stores, four of which were occupied: Shallotte Furniture Store, where the

fire apparently started; Poole's Towel Outlet; Tripp's Jewelry Shop; and Country Curl Beauty Salon. Begun in the early 1980s, the center was built before fire walls became a requirement of the state building code.

Milliken had recently bought his business's portion of the shopping center—the store and a detached warehouse—from its new owners, C & S Investments, Inc. Principals in the firm are Connor and Rae Cox and Tripp Sloane of Ocean Isle Beach. Milliken had built one side of the double firewall; they, the other.

A passing deputy sheriff, Carl Pearson, reported the fire to the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department at 3:59 a.m. Tuesday.

Once Shallotte firefighters were dispatched, there was hardly a pause before the county dispatcher began a litany that summoned mutual aid from the Ocean Isle Beach, Shallotte Point, Supply, Tri-Beach, Sunset Beach, Calabash and Waccamaw departments.

Within the hour there were 60 volunteer firefighters and 14 pieces of equipment on the scene.

Streams directing thousands of gallons of water over and into the structure slowed, but didn't stop the fire as it sped along the new, tarred roof, engulfing one store and then another.

"I don't think any of them could have done anything differently," said Logan at 7 a.m., as firefighters began rolling up and washing a maze of hoses that vaguely resembled dirty spaghetti. "They all fell in and worked together."

Thick, acrid smoke was rising from the debris as the dirty part of the firemen's work began—clean-up. Only an hour or two before flames and cinders were shooting, by several bystanders' estimates, up to 150 feet in the air. They cast an eerie golden sheen on the Shallotte River, which flows behind the shopping center.

"You could see the fire from the bridge at Ocean Isle Beach. It was a

glow in the sky," said Al Crawford, an Ocean Isle Beach fireman on the scene.

The blaze apparently began near the center of the shopping plaza, at Shallotte Furniture.

Logan said Deputy Pearson saw smoke across the highway and pulled into the shopping center to investigate.

"He said he saw the fire in the store and drove around back. About that time the rear door blew out. He drove on around to the front and the plate glass windows were shattering.

"It had been smoldering a while," he continued. "It may have been burning for 45 minutes or longer."

Only minutes later, as firefighters began pulling up with sirens blaring and lights flashing, flames burst through the roof, with the entire store engulfed. The fire spread quickly to Poole's Towel Center on the right and then ran into the fire wall at the electric supply. From the furniture store the flames also spread to the south, toward the jewelry store.

Owner Bill Tripp and his family watched helplessly as the store burned; they had been called too late to salvage any merchandise.

(See BLAZE, Page 2-A)

### BTC Graduation And Pinning Set

The sixth annual Brunswick Technical College graduation exercises will be held at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Shallotte Middle School.

Bobbie Varnam, who helped establish the college in 1979, will be guest speaker.

Graduates of the college's practical nurse education program were to culminate their year of study with a pinning ceremony at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Supply Baptist Church.

The pin, designed by the first BTC nursing graduates, symbolizes the nursing profession, the college and Brunswick County.

## ATMC To Add Cable Channels; Expand Service Areas In '87

BY SUSAN USHER

Atlantic Telephone Membership Corp. plans to expand and improve its cable television service in 1987, General Manager Russell Price told county commissioners Monday night.

In his progress report, Price said he expects the co-op to add 10 channels while waiting the way to clear for extension of service to a projected 2,000 to 2,500 potential new customers.

United Carolina Bank has agreed to finance the added channels, eight basic and two premium or extra-charge. ATMC has filed for approval from the Federal Communications Commission and expects to be able to construct the new facility during the first quarter of 1987.

The new channels will include, as part of the basic service, the Weather Channel, Arts & Entertainment, the Nashville Network, USA, MTV, the Black Entertainment Network and C-Span, or Cable News Network 24-hour news service, while

eliminating two duplicate channels. The Movie Channel and the Disney Channel will be added as premium services.

Price expects to propose at the next ATMC board meeting a basic service rate of \$11.75 at the time the new channels come on line. The current base rate is \$8.50.

The initial basic package would include a desktop converter as an incentive for customers. The converter would be "addressable" by computer from ATMC's office, he said, which means service could be directed to a new customer rapidly.

When ATMC was first issued the cable franchise in 1980, it anticipated federal aid in financing three continuous phases of construction, but the program was ended before the first phase of construction was ever completed.

Efforts to obtain private sector financing have been hindered because the co-op's mortgage agreement with the Rural Electrification Authority gives it first liens on cur-

rent and future properties.

"The result of this predicament," he said, "is we have many subscribers without CATV service living close to others who do have service," a serious concern for co-op officials.

But Price said he expects the federal government to soon release co-ops from these liens so they can seek outside financing.

"It's looking much better than it has for quite a while now," he said. With the new services and attraction of new customers, he added, "We should be coming out of red here in something like the second quarter of 1987."

Targeting of areas for service extension will be based on economics, or projected rate of return, he said. The co-op also plans to design Phase II so that there will be no more members without cable service living within 300 feet of members with service, and with a minimum (See CHANNELS, Page 2-A)

## EMC Adopts Compromise Stormwater Regulations

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

One of the most controversial, emotional issues ever to face the Environmental Management Commission was resolved Sept. 11 when regulations were adopted to control stormwater runoff, believed by many to be a serious pollutant of shellfish waters along the coast.

The EMC put to rest, at least temporarily, a battle between developers and environmentalists/fishing interests that has raged for over a year. Developers did not want the stringent regulations over a proposed area of one-half mile from the shoreline that were being recommended by their opponents.

Regulations approved last week were a compromise. After two votes rejected a 75-foot and a 1,000-foot distance as the area of environmental concern, a mid-afternoon proposal of 575 feet as the

regulated area was okayed by weary EMC members.

The new rules will apply to major construction projects within 575 feet of a marsh shoreline, that cover more than one acre, excluding most residences. The director of environmental management will have the authority to exempt projects that do not threaten shellfish waters.

Developments within 75 feet of the shore will be regulated more strictly than those beyond that distance. They will have to build lagoons to collect rainfall from the worst storm likely within two years, if impervious surfaces (rooftops, driveways, parking lots) account for more than 15 percent of the total acreage.

Developments outside the 75-foot area, but within the 575-foot zone, must collect rainfall if impervious surfaces exceed 30 percent of the total area.

The regulations will expire Dec. 31, 1987. Meanwhile, the 1987 General Assembly will provide funds for a reclassification study of the state's coastal waters.

Jerry Lewis, EMC member from Shallotte, who voted for the 75-foot AEC, said everyone at the meeting "voted their conscience," on a matter that has polarized Brunswick County and the state. "After the first two votes, I didn't think we'd get any action," he said. "I avoided everybody, because I didn't want to get in with either group, I was so confused. Then, about 3:00, someone showed me this new proposal and asked me if I could support it."

While Lewis said he did not participate in the voice vote on 575 feet, he is satisfied with the outcome.

"What bothered me all along was the staff saying at the August workshop that there is no evidence for

regulating beyond 75 feet," he said. "Beyond that, they said decisions would be based on policies or politics. I think they should be based on facts."

He said the positive action coming out of last week's meeting was the authorization of a study by expert and unbiased people of what waters might need to be reclassified. "For instance, the waters between Sunset Beach and Little River have been closed since 1964, but are still classified shellfish waters," he explained. "I think we'll see some re-classification, and we need documented reasons for the change."

Lewis said he believes more authoritative, reliable evidence is needed behind coastal controls on development. "If we'd done two years ago what we did yesterday (Sept. 10), we'd be in a position now to make intelligent decisions."