

Tax Office Pace Picks Up As Property Owners Pay Up

With the busiest season of the year upon it, Brunswick County's tax office has installed toll-free telephone lines for taxpayers who need help in either listing property for 1987 taxes or paying their 1986 taxes. "Everybody's busy," Tax Collector Nancy Moore explained Tuesday. "Let it ring and eventually someone will answer."

For information on payment of 1986 taxes, the local number for Atlantic Telephone Membership Corp. subscribers is 253-4351. Residents of other areas of the county may call toll-free 1-800-222-4593.

With Jan. 5 the last day to pay 1986 taxes without incurring a penalty, this is her office's most hectic time of year.

According to Tax Supervisor Boyd Williamson, a lot of property owners pay their taxes before the end of the year for income tax purposes; others wait and pay after Jan. 5 because the added interest their money earns offsets the penalty charged by the county.

This year, there's extra motivation for taxpayers to pay their bills before the end of the year. Starting in 1987, they will no longer be able to claim

local property taxes as an income tax deduction.

"We're getting mail by the mail bag," said Moore.

By Jan. 5, she expects to have collected 90 percent of the levy.

Payments postmarked after Jan. 5 are past due. A late interest fee of 2 percent is charged in January. For each month after that, the fee increases by three-fourths of a percent.

Those who don't pay property taxes can eventually face foreclosure by the county, with their property sold at public auction in the courthouse to satisfy the debt. The next

sale date is in February.

Before foreclosing, the county first places a lien on the property, which means it can't be sold by the owner without the tax having been paid first.

Brunswick County's tax rate may have gone down this year, but revenues will go up, according to Williamson.

A tax base of over \$2.2 billion and a tax rate of 59 1/2 cents per \$100 valuation brought in revenues of more than \$13 million last year.

This year, he said, the county's tax (See TAX OFFICE, Page 2-A)

10 Largest Taxpayers For 1986

PROPERTY OWNER	VALUATION	TAX AMOUNT
Carolina Power & Light Co.	755,701,228	3,809,887.09
N.C. Eastern Municipal Power Agency	252,588,813	1,275,573.51
E. I. Dupont de Nemours & Co.	232,606,102	1,081,618.38
Pfizer, Inc.	62,011,145	313,156.28
International Paper Co.	33,808,006	157,207.23
Odell Williamson	31,593,591	147,445.26
Federal Paper Board Co.	24,826,330	115,456.07
Bald Head Island, Inc.	23,947,461	120,934.76
Brunswick Electric Membership Corp.	15,108,647	70,259.86
Southern Bell Telephone & Telegraph	14,870,312	72,489.53

SOURCE: BRUNSWICK COUNTY TAX COLLECTOR'S OFFICE

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STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

PARROTS, lincnes and snakes were rescued from a smoke-filled Nature's Closet by Shallotte Rescue Squad Volunteer Dann Moore, Shallotte Police Officer Eddie

Reynolds and (in rear) Joe Stanley Friday morning. Moore was keeping the birds in her garage until the store could reopen for business.

Homicide Investigators Lack Motive, Suspect

BY ETTA SMITH AND SUSAN USHER

Law enforcement investigators lack both a motive and a suspect in the apparent stabbing death of a Yaupon Beach man whose body was discovered Tuesday morning.

Dead is Thomas Gilbert Sumner, 32, the son-in-law of Brunswick County Sheriff John Carr Davis.

"We're reasonably sure it was a homicide," SBI Agent Fred McKinney told reporters at a Tuesday night news conference at the sheriff's department. "We want to be thorough. All homicides are difficult when you don't have a suspect."

He said Sumner died late Monday afternoon or early Monday night, apparently from multiple stab wounds in the chest and abdomen. The exact cause of death is not known, pending results of an autopsy that County

Coroner Greg White said was scheduled Wednesday morning at Onslow Memorial Hospital in Jacksonville.

Sheriff's Lt. Douglas "Sonny" Padgett said he discovered Sumner's body at 10:20 a.m. Tuesday inside the victim's 1985 Ford van, which was parked off N.C. 133 on a cutoff leading to Orton Plantation and Brunswick Town State Historic Site, approximately 13 miles south of Beville.

Sumner had been reported as missing to the Yaupon Beach Police Department Tuesday morning.

According to family members, said Padgett, Sumner was last seen at 4 p.m. Monday.

"The last information they had was that he might have gone to Wilmington to take soil samples to the lab," he continued. Sumner was

employed by a Wilmington soil engineering firm.

When no uniformed officer was available to check for Sumner's van along the N.C. 133 route to Wilmington, Padgett said he decided to check it himself.

Six SBI agents have been assigned to assist the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department in the homicide investigation.

Agent McKinney said he didn't know what type of weapon had been used or whether a weapon or any other items had been recovered.

He also said there appeared to be no connection between Sumner's death and his kinship with Sheriff Davis.

Sumner's death is the seventh homicide to occur in Brunswick County during 1986.

Water Heater Said Cause Of Plaza Fire

BY SUSAN USHER

A defective water heater thermostat was the apparent cause of an early Friday morning fire that resulted in substantial roof damage to one building in the Resort Plaza shopping center on U.S. 17 South in Shallotte.

According to longtime Shallotte firefighter William Hankins, it was the first shopping center fire in town in which a major building was not lost.

Resort Plaza owner Al Willis, of Shallotte, said later, "If they hadn't caught it when they did, they probably wouldn't have stopped it."

An alert policeman and fire-resistant construction materials may have bought critical time for the firefighters who contained the blaze.

Shallotte Fire Chief Michael Arnold told the Beacon, "We were lucky, no doubt about it."

"The biggest thing is to get set up to fight it and not be an hour behind the fire. Still, the fire had been burning awhile around the water heater. It had burned the door to the closet and had melted the insulation around the wiring."

While the building has no fire wall, Willis said the construction materials meet fire code specifications. (See DEFECTIVE, Page 2-A)

Holden Beach Board Accepts Land Gift

BY ETTA SMITH

Holden Beach commissioners unanimously accepted a belated Christmas present of about 40 acres of land during a special session Tuesday morning.

During the 20-minute session called specifically to consider the gift, Commissioner William Williamson told board members his father, Davis Heniford of North Myrtle Beach, S.C., is donating all but about six acres of a 45-acre tract to the town.

Heniford has owned the property for about 20 years, said Williamson. He said the six acres have been set aside for the construction of the Marsh View Subdivision, and the remaining land would be deeded to the town.

The subdivision will have six 60x125 feet lots which will face Ocean Boulevard. The remaining 40 acres extend to the Intracoastal Waterway, bordering Dream Harbor Subdivision on the west and an undeveloped tract of land on the east.

Williamson abstained from voting on the motion to accept the donated land. The other board members with the exception of Lyn Holden who was absent, voted to accept the offer.

The subdivision will be located at the front of the property facing Ocean Boulevard, and the town's share will be on the second row. The donated property includes a 30-foot access area from Ocean Boulevard, Williamson said.

While much of the donated tract is marshland, Williamson said there's a large island on the north end facing the waterway. "There's a possibility that with the Corps' (U.S. Corps of Engineers) permission, the island could be used for parking," he said. He added that he didn't think permanent structures could be built on the property, but possibly walkways could.

"The island has been used as a spoil area for material dredged from the waterway," he added.

He said the town could negotiate with the Corps on the possible future use of the island part of the property for a waterway access.

Williamson said he didn't know the value of the land because it was in the process of being appraised.

DOT Personnel To Discuss Proposed Changes In Bypass

BY SUSAN USHER

The State Department of Transportation has tentatively proposed changing the link between the Shallotte bypass and the downtown business district from Mulberry Street to Smith Avenue.

DOT representatives will be in the Shallotte Town Hall council chambers Tuesday, Jan. 6, from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. to discuss the proposed revisions with affected property owners and other interested citizens.

The change was first recommended by the Town of Shallotte, according to George Brown, project design engineer.

Initially, DOT had proposed an intersection of the bypass with S.R. 1348, Mulberry Street.

However, in a July 16 letter to the state, Mayor Jerry Jones recommended against that location because the street, tucked between two businesses, is narrow with poor visibility.

"Tractor-trailers can't even make the turn," Jones said Monday, and

there is no traffic signal. "Which way are they going to go?" he asked. "They can't go any way but right—if they can get out."

Brown agreed the intersection is hazardous, saying, "It's awfully hard to see how to get out of there and awfully dangerous."

He said the Smith Avenue exit would give a much better tie-in to the middle of town and would have vehicles exiting at a traffic light.

Under the new proposal, Mulberry Street—or Road as it is called beyond the town limits—would be relocated on the north side of the bypass to the intersection with S.R. 1357. It would curve over to Smith Avenue, a distance of about 900 feet. Smith Avenue would be extended about 350 feet to intersect with the bypass.

A preliminary design has been developed to show interested persons next Tuesday.

Brown said the new plan should require about the same amount of property for right-of-way as the earlier plan, but from different property

owners. No right-of-way has been acquired yet for that section of the bypass.

He said adoption of the changes would depend to some degree on the public reaction they receive Tuesday.

DOT has rejected another of the town's proposals, for an overpass where the bypass will intersect N.C. 130 West near West Brunswick High School.

According to a letter from Mayor Jerry Jones, a proposed grade-level intersection "would pose a high degree of hazard and could result in a large number of accidents."

However, the state replied that the planned on-grade intersection with traffic signal should result in "safe and efficient operation."

It said no grade-separated interchanges were planned on U.S. 17 between Wilmington and South Carolina and one "would be out of character with improvements planned for U.S. 17 in this area of our state." Other (See DOT, Page 2-A)

1986 IN REVIEW

Public Access, Water System Expansion Top News

BY ETTA SMITH

Keeping pace with a decade of tremendous growth made the news in Brunswick County during 1986.

Disputes over access to beaches and the county's efforts to extend water service were the top newsmakers during the year.

On Sunset Beach and Holder Beach, citizens' claims to imminent domain ended up in the courtroom—in the form of separate lawsuits based on the concept of prescriptive easement.

And while that issue was being considered in the courtroom, county commissioners were considering how to spend a \$1.5 million revolving fund established to extend water laterals throughout the county and work continued on Phase II of the county water system.

Lawsuits Filed

In 1985, a complaint filed in Brunswick County Superior Court by the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association,

Albert N. Wells, Charles L. Smith, Whaley P. Hunt and Frank Nesmith against Beach Enterprises Inc., Sunset Beach and Twin Lakes, Inc., Edward M. Gore and the Town of Sunset Beach claimed an area that had been fenced in in 1978 to keep the public out should be public by virtue of imminent domain.

Plaintiffs in the suit sought a court injunction to bar the owners from restricting the public's use of the road extension or lot.

A similar case involving Holden Beach was filed by Concerned Citizens of Brunswick County Taxpayers Association, Raymond Cope and Royal Williams, against Jim Griffin, Holden Beach Enterprises and the Town of Holden Beach.

Plaintiffs in that suit also claimed that the public had the right to the use of a road that extended from the end of Ocean Boulevard West to the ocean.

Claiming the property west of this point had been closed by Holden Beach Enterprises by the erection of a

guard station, plaintiffs unsuccessfully sought a court injunction to keep the area open. According to the suit, numerous protestors were arrested for trespassing since the gate was erected.

The suit asserted the property should be public by virtue of prescriptive easement, a legal term meaning land used continuously by the public for at least 15 years.

After Judge Giles Clark denied the motion for an injunction in late May, a new suit was filed Aug. 13 in Brunswick County Superior Court. It asked the court to declare the area a public right-of-way and to declare that a prescriptive easement exists there.

Both cases were pending in court at year's end.

The issue of who should have access to certain areas of public beaches and by what means was also addressed by the state Coastal Resources Commission in 1986. That agency voted in September to ask for the inclusion of boat ramps in access requirements of the Coastal Area Management Act.

The commission conducted a survey during the year of 724 government and business leaders. The survey asked if additional access was favored, and the response was yes. Respondents to the survey also said they thought municipalities should not have to bear the cost of providing access, that it should be shared.

While public access to the beaches continued to be considered in the courtroom, the Town of Holden Beach became one of only 11 coastal governments to receive grants for public beach access construction from the state Department of Natural Resources and Community Development.

The town received \$60,480 in November to construct a regional access with 90-space parking lot, complete with restroom facilities and picnic tables. The facility will be built off Jordan Boulevard, where the old bridge used to be.

Also in November, the Sunset Beach town board (See COUNTY WATER, Page 3-A)