

National Postal Service Cutbacks May Cancel South Brunswick Branch

BY DOUG RUTTER

Federal funding cuts affecting the U.S. Postal Service may force cancellation of a proposed South Brunswick Islands station of the Shallotte Post Office.

Art Shealy, communications manager for the Columbia, S.C., postal division, said the budget cuts will cause a delay, if not cancellation, of the project.

The recently adopted Budget Reconciliation Act requires that the postal service reduce expenditures by approximately \$1.25 billion over the next 21 months. Shealy said this represents a cut of approximately two percent from the normal yearly budget of about \$30 billion.

The act specifically requires that \$430 million be cut from the operations budget and that the remaining \$795 million be saved in capital funds.

The South Brunswick Islands station was proposed as a branch office of Shallotte to serve the areas of Calabash, Ocean Isle Beach and Sunset Beach.

A site was expected to be announced sometime this fall but was never decided upon. The site selection process began April 15 with the postal

service accepting offers from individual property owners for an area to house the proposed structure.

Shortly after the federal act was passed, Postmaster General Preston R. Tisch announced that 50 percent of the capital projects scheduled for fiscal years 1988 and 1989 would have to be cancelled.

According to Shealy, "Projects not already under contract face the prospect of outright cancellation or a lengthy delay."

He said the length of the delay will depend on the "overall evaluation of need" as compared to other projects in the region.

The matter of which offices to cancel, delay or continue work on was expected to be decided later this week by "high-level postal officials."

Shealy said that following the decision of which offices to delay and cancel, he would compile an "impact study" relating how each proposed office would be affected.

He added that the budget cuts will also require that purchases of automated equipment designed to make postal service more efficient be viewed "under a microscope."

With regard to the cuts in capital investments, Shealy said the government has allowed expenditures of \$6.25 million through September of 1988 and expenditures of \$2 billion through fiscal year 1989.

He said that though original budget cuts handed down by Congress were later reduced by \$700 million, the postal service will still find it difficult to "make the cuts and still provide proper service."

"The postal service is behind the federal deficit cutting," he said. "We just wish we could make the cuts the way we want to do it. But that's not the way it came down."

Shealy said the legislative act required the postal service to make cuts and not increase rates or otherwise raise funds. He said postal service officials would have likely considered increasing postal rates to

raise additional revenues if it was left up to them.

Last year's cost containment program directed by the postal service saved approximately \$50 million, he added.

In addition to project delays and cancellations, the cutbacks have also resulted in the closing of post offices on two successive Saturdays, Dec. 26 and Jan. 2, with the possibility of additional weekend closings in the future.

Shealy said some offices which are currently operating for more than eight hours a day may also have to cut back extra hours or be reduced to six-hour days.

He said cutting out Saturday delivery or any other delivery would be a "worst case scenario." The effects of two-day mail build-up on Mondays, he explained, would be "catastrophic."

"All options are being looked at," said Shealy, "but stopping normal mail delivery is at the bottom of the list on possible operational cuts."

In the middle of capital investment and operational cutbacks, postal service employees will also feel certain effects from the budget amendments.

According to Shealy, it is the intention of the postal service to keep all full-time employees working on a full-time basis. He said they may work different hours, but that their total number of hours should not (See POST OFFICE, Page 2-A)

Sunset Bridge Closed Monday

The Sunset Beach bridge will close to vehicle traffic for six hours Monday, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., so repairs can be made to its superstructure.

Brunswick County Bridge Maintenance Supervisor J.H. Hayes said four hollowed caps on the mainland side of the bridge will be replaced during the one-day operation.

"This work is pretty routine and there's no danger with it right now," he noted. "We think it could be dangerous if we let it go."



SANTA CLAUS may have left this sign for Holden Beach area residents, who were sometimes naughty and sometimes nice in 1987.

'Town Hall' Sign Raises Eyebrows

Clayton Robinson says a sign declaring his partially-constructed building on N.C. 130 as the future site of the North Holden Beach Town Hall "has raised more than a few eyebrows."

And although recent history of the Holden Beach greater metropolitan area concerning incorporation and annexation may lead some to fret, two principles in the case maintain that the sign is "just a joke."

Robinson, who by his own admission opposed the incorporation of North Holden Beach since it was first proposed in June 1986, called the sign a "practical joke."

And Cletis Clemmons, who was instrumental in

getting the North Holden Beach incorporation bandwagon rolling earlier this year, described the sign on Robinson's property as a "funny little scene."

Both said they had good ideas who may have put the sign up, but when asked about it, neither was in the mood to tell secrets.

Robinson said residents have not stopped asking about the sign since it was erected by mysterious gremlins on Christmas Eve.

"I may just knock it down one of these days," he said. "But everybody's gotten a little chuckle out of it. It's given them something to talk about now that Christmas is over."

Clerk Of Court To Hear Cawcaw Motion Jan. 20

BY RAHN ADAMS

The future of the Cawcaw Drainage District could be decided in three weeks, when Brunswick County Clerk of Court Diana Morgan reviews the county's request for reactivation of the abandoned drainage district.

According to Ms. Morgan, a "formal hearing before the court" is

scheduled for Jan. 20 at 10 a.m. in Bolivia.

Ms. Morgan said the basic issue to be decided is whether or not the clerk of court's office acted properly in 1976 when it dissolved the drainage district.

"If everything is very clear-cut and I don't have any questions in my

mind about any of the issues, I could make a decision right away," Ms. Morgan said Tuesday.

She added that her decision would be made "within a matter of days at most," if not at the close of the hearing.

Ms. Morgan said County Attorney David Clegg last week filed a "mo-

tion in the cause," which was signed Dec. 21 by Brunswick County Commissioners Chairman Grace Beasley and Brunswick County Soil and Water Conservation District Chairman James Bellamy.

In addition to requesting the hearing, the motion petitions Ms. Morgan (See CLERK, Page 2-A)

1987 IN REVIEW

'Winds Of Change' Felt Throughout The Year

BY RAHN ADAMS AND DOUG RUTTER

On the very first day of 1987, Brunswick County residents got a taste of the year to come, in the form of a winter storm that brought change through turbulence.

An investigation of local cocaine dealing, county and municipal efforts to create water policies and elections created their own turbulence, as did a sweep of personnel changes in key positions throughout the county.

Winds Of Change

The Jan. 1 storm, combined with astronomical factors, lashed Brunswick County's east-west aligned beaches with gale-force winds and unusually high tides.

Although damage was less than expected, the New Year's Day storm flooded canals and streets in barrier island communities and ate away at oceanfront dunes. Long Beach was worst hit, with damage estimated at \$6 million.

Another off-shore storm caused concern on Jan. 5 but did no further significant damage.

Several days later, state and federal emergency teams inspected storm damages in Brunswick County to determine the possibility of federal disaster aid. However, no federal aid was approved.

Old Man Winter wasn't through with Brunswick County, though.

To the delight of students, county schools closed Jan. 29 in anticipation of hazardous road conditions, even though the area received only a light dusting of snow from a storm moving up the coast.

Another winter storm with gale force winds and freezing rain on Feb. 16 caused problems for Brunswick County motorists, utility companies, emergency and law enforcement personnel—but no problem again for students, as schools closed that day at noon.

Mother Nature took the area "by storm" again in mid-July with a severe thunderstorm that bore down mainly on the Ocean Isle Beach area. The storm—with lightning and winds of up to 65 mph—even damaged three airplanes at the Ocean Isle Beach Airport, flipping one of them completely over.

Even though Brunswick County wasn't approved for federal disaster aid earlier in the year, local farmers found out in March that at least they would get some relief. The Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service announced that Brunswick County farmers would receive nearly \$163,700 in federal disaster aid because of weather-related losses in 1986.

Where There's Smoke...

Playwright Tennessee Williams must have been thinking of Brunswick County when he wrote "Summer

and Smoke," as the western section of the county discovered that the two terms went together in 1987.

A 5,000-foot column of smoke from controlled burning and stagnant air was measured over much of western Brunswick County in July. A large stable air mass and smoldering organic matter combined to cause limited visibility on the highways and respiratory problems for some residents.

A group call Citizens Against Toxic Shenanigans (CATS) formed to oppose controlled burning and air pollution.

As a result of the public's concern, major paper companies in the area agreed to start no new fires in Brunswick, Pender, Columbus and New Hanover counties until weather conditions improved.

But in August 50 to 60 CATS supporters urged Brunswick County Commissioners to help get the county

back on the state's high hazard list, so that some types of large-scale controlled burning could be more strictly regulated by the state. Commissioners took no action.

1987 was relatively kind to firefighters who in previous years had seen more than their share of forest fires. Forest Service officials said the 1987 fire season started off more slowly than in 1986 due to rainy weather conditions.

But April 13 turned out to be an unlucky day for firefighters. A blaze destroyed 256 acres of pine woodlands between Mill Creek Road and Danford Road near Bolivia after burning out of control for four to five hours. Earlier the same day, firefighters also contained a 20-acre fire off Cumbee Road in Supply.

Arson Suspected

Unfortunately, not all fires in 1987 were as easily explainable as controlled burnings and woods fires.



BEACON FILE PHOTO

IT TOOK ONLY a few hours for the New Year's Day storm to work over the beleaguered end of Shallotte

Boulevard and an adjoining house, the Outrigger, at Ocean Isle Beach. The house has since been relocated.

State and local law enforcement agencies said arson was the cause of similar early morning fires that destroyed two Shallotte doctors' offices on Sept. 14.

The blazes were at Dr. Karen Paine's former office on Forest Drive and Dr. Pat Hewett's Brunswick Chiropractic Center on U.S. 17 just south of the town limits.

"Highly combustible" material was found on the scenes of both fires.

At year's end, neither arson case had been solved.

In an apparently unrelated matter, Dr. Paine also was in the news about a month after the fire destroyed her office. She was indicted Oct. 13 by a federal grand jury in Fayetteville on charges of Medicaid, Medicare and mail fraud.

Information on 23 patients used to support the 89-count indictment specified more than \$25,000 in public and private insurance payments Paine allegedly received for services that were not performed.

The case is still pending in federal court. Fire officials also aren't entirely sure about the exact cause of an October house fire that eventually claimed one life in the Sunset Harbor community.

An elderly couple—Joe and Pearl Faircloth—were critically burned when their home was destroyed in the fire that apparently was caused by a kerosene heater.

Both were rushed by air ambulance from The Brunswick Hospital to the Burn Center at N.C. Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill. Mrs. Faircloth died there in November, while her husband remained in serious condition.

Burning At Sea

Not all fires were confined to dry land. In October, the five-man crew and 56 passengers of the Calabash-based charter boat "Capt. Jim" were forced to abandon ship about five miles east of Little River Inlet when the vessel caught fire and later sank.

Eight nearby fishing boats quickly came to the rescue and plucked the 61 people from the water. No one was seriously injured.

Although the cause of the fire is still under investigation by the U.S. Coast Guard, owner Jimmy Stevens said he thought the blaze was caused by an electrical short. A preliminary investigation by the Coast Guard determined that the Capt. Jim had all required safety equipment on board at the time of the accident.

In late June, a 35-foot charter fishing vessel—the "Salty P" captained by Gary Carr of Holden Beach—caught fire and sank about a mile from the

(See FIGHT, Page 5-A)