

# Students Take Close-Up Look At Local Government, Economy

BY SUSAN USHER

A select group of 75 Brunswick County ninth-graders took a close-up look at how local government and the economy operate last Friday in a day-long seminar at the Brunswick County Government Center.

"Commissioners have large ears and hear from a lot of people and try to carry out the will of the people by setting policy," County Manager John T. Smith told one group of students gathered to learn more about county government.

The 75 teen-agers—25 selected by the social studies faculty at each county high school—were divided into two groups most of the day, one which examined local government agencies, and the other which heard from various industries on their influence in the local economy.

In the seminar on economics, for example Susanne Sartelle, executive director of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, created an imaginary town in which business and government worked together to address community needs. She also fielded questions on topics ranging from tourism's impact on the county to litter control.

Afterwards, students enthusiastically joined in a simulation coordinated by Dr. Luther Lawson, associate professor of economics and associate director of the Center for Economic Education at UNC-Wilmington. It's purpose: "Simply to let you know you have rights," he told the students.

The teen-agers drew cards with scenarios of consumer concerns and then had to figure out where to go for help in resolving the problem. Some found quick remedies, others had

none, and in some instances, even the "professionals" in the agencies didn't know where to send a young consumer for help, banishing him to "limbo," at least temporarily.

"If you have a problem, where are you to go first?" asked Lawson as the teen-agers tried various strategies. "It's up to you."

Joining Smith for a discussion of how the county can "grow better, not just bigger," was Stuart Bass, a county planner, who described some of the regulations and programs that help governments guide quality growth. Grace Beasley, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners, was unable to participate because of family illness.

Smith told the students that growth brings with it problems, or challenges, for local government that require funding to address. These include public education on the issues, protection of the environment and providing a good environment, which includes dealing with both solid waste and human waste, and developing the infrastructure such as roads and utilities required to keep pace with growth. "To grow better we must have these things," he stressed. But, as with septic tank regulations, he added, it sometimes require "restrictions that get people ill."

"They don't like to be restricted; they want to do what they want to do," he continued.

Coldwell Bankers-Willetts- South Wind Realty representative Dorothy Kelly described real estate as a local industry "that probably touches all of you in one way or another."

Students in the local government

section also heard from Social Services Director Jamie Orrock and Health Director Michael Rhodes Barrett on the services those agencies provide and the problems they encounter.

Orrock, astride a railing so as to be closer to the students, said social services doesn't have the money to offer the programs it needs and noted trends in human needs spending for the elderly increasing with time.

To provide daycare for children of mothers who are in a work or training situation, for example, the agency receives \$189,200, but could easily spend \$250,000 to \$300,000, he said, "and still have people on a waiting list."

As for Aid to Families with Dependent Children, another agency program, he debunked a popular myth. "Women do not have babies to get more welfare," he said, spelling out how little difference in income another child makes in the household's income.

"Getting on social services is not an answer to anyone's problem," he said. "Most of the people who are on it don't want to be—they're unhappy, the taxpayers are unhappy and the office has a high turnover of employees—they don't like it either."

Times have changed and the agency serves no "typical" family, he noted. "Ten years ago of for working people to get welfare. Now just as many do as don't. There's no way you can make it on \$3.35 an hour if you have a family."

Barrett-Rhodes told the youngsters that the Brunswick County Health Department "is the only agency that tracks you from birth to death," since it tracks vital statistics. "The health department touches everybody at one time or another," he continued, through vital statistics or its personal and environmental health programs.

Of those the federally-funded Women, Infant and Children's (WIC) Nutrition Program is one of the most successful in the nation in lowering infant mortality rates. "It's the most beneficial program available now."

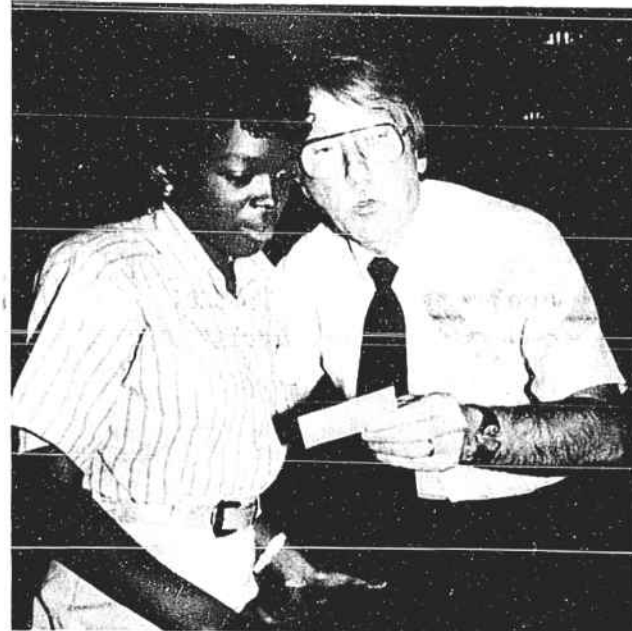
Earlier in the day, both groups of students toured the Brunswick County Jail, speaking with Chief Deputy John Marlow of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department. They also observed a mock driving while under the influence trial that featured Cathy Singletary as defendant, Yvette Murray as plaintiff, Billy Gurganus as bailiff, Sharon McPherson and Diana Morgan as clerks, Glenda Warren as court reporter, Judge William C. Gore and attorneys William Fairley and Roy Trest.

The economics group also heard from George Booth of CP&L's environmental lab on the role of the plant in the local economy and about his particular work area.

Linden Mathews-Boone, community schools and social studies coordinator with the Brunswick County Public Schools, said participants were quite pleased with Friday's program.



KEEPING TABS on how girls and boys fare in competition for redresses/no redresses are Kim Yeoman of Brunswick High School. The girls edged the guys by two. North Brunswick High School and Allen Hewett of West



STUDENT SHERRIE MOORE seeks advice from Dr. Luther Lawson in a simulation game on resolving consumer problems in which definite answers—redress or no redress—were rewarded with candy bars. However, when helping agencies couldn't figure out where else to send them, students ended up in "limbo."



RICKY LEWIS of West Brunswick High School and Clint Delcorado of North Brunswick High School petition West social studies teacher Paul Pendleton for help. He was representing both federal government

channels and private consumer organization channels. In the background, other students seek help from Esther Troy, or state and local governments, business and trade associations.

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