

Build Tables Or Walls?

Approximately 100 local Christians met at Antioch Baptist Church Sunday to learn about their new Buddhist neighbors, including how to witness to them, Page 5B.

Island Living

Supplement included in this issue.

Fishing Is Looking Up!

With the King Classic on tap and Chris now history, local centers say fishing conditions look promising for the holiday weekend, Page 12-C.

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SBI Agents Say Varnam Was Key Witness In Local Cocaine Probe

BY RAHN ADAMS

Four State Bureau of Investigation agents, a Greenville police detective and a Florida agent testified as defense witnesses Monday in Brunswick County Superior Court, as the sentencing hearing began for a Supply man who faces up to 790 years in prison for cocaine trafficking.

Dale Varnam, 37, pleaded guilty April 21 to 18 counts of trafficking in cocaine and 18 counts of conspiracy to traffic in cocaine. Ten of the charges involve more than 400 grams of the controlled



VARNAM

substance, while the remaining 26 counts involve more than 28 grams.

After hearing about 1½ hours of defense testimony from out-of-town witnesses Monday, Judge E. Lynn Johnson recessed the hearing until later in the week because Superior Court jurors were scheduled to report for duty early that afternoon. Johnson said he understood that the non-jury sentencing hearing would be "somewhat protracted."

Defense attorney John Collins must establish that Varnam has provided "substantial assistance" to drug investigators in order for the defendant to receive a lighter sentence than is prescribed by state drug trafficking laws.

Without the judge's finding of substantial assistance, Varnam's

mandatory minimum prison sentence would be 532 years. In addition, each 400-gram count carries a \$250,000 fine, and each 28-gram count carries a \$50,000 fine.

Under questioning by Collins, five of the six lawmen testified Monday that Varnam has assisted them in investigating cocaine trafficking cases in Brunswick County, Pitt County and Florida over the past two years.

"It (Varnam's assistance) was very important," said SBI Special Agent Steve Surratt of Greenville. "He was very cooperative." Surratt was involved in the special investigative grand jury probe here that resulted in the indictment in June 1987 of 32 individuals—including Varnam—on cocaine trafficking charges.

SBI Special Agent John C. Rey of Greenville, who assisted in last year's Brunswick County investigation, said Varnam was "probably the most important witness" to appear before the special grand jury.

Both agents also stated that Varnam contacted other drug suspects and convinced them to meet with lawmen during the investigation. "Anything that was requested of him, he did," Rey said.

Malcolm McCloud, assistant supervisor of the Greenville SBI office, and Greenville Police Det. Steve Pass said Varnam helped lawmen arrest and convict two of Pitt County's major cocaine dealers, Fotios Kamsiklis and Petros Tholiotis, also known as "the Greeks." Both men also were indicted last year in

Brunswick County and pleaded guilty to cocaine charges.

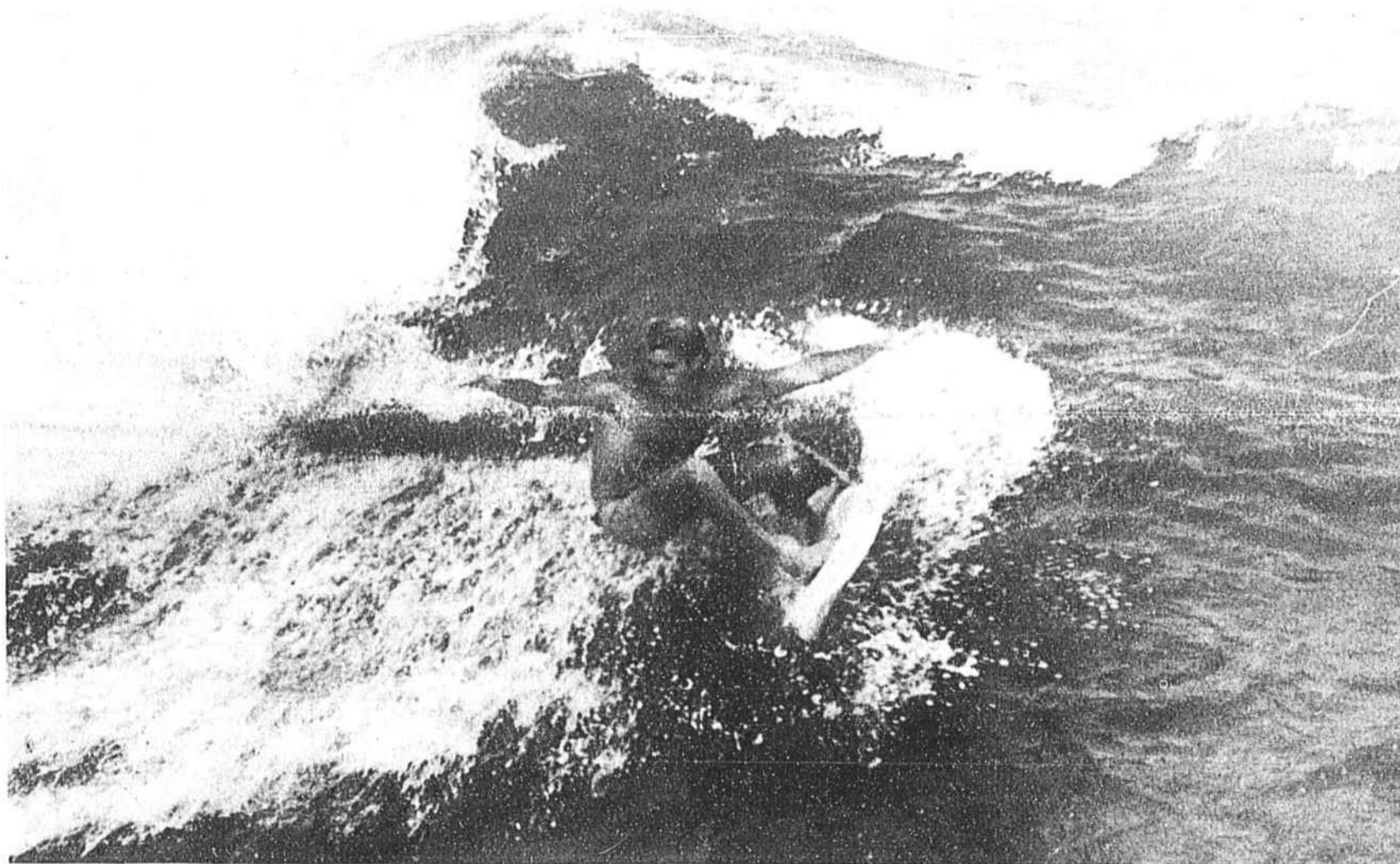
"He (Varnam) was completely cooperative," McCloud said. "He didn't hold back anything, and we never caught him holding back anything." He added that Varnam risked his own safety by wearing a hidden electronic transmitter or recorder when he met with the Greeks to set up cocaine buys.

Florida Agent David Waller testified that Varnam assisted Florida authorities in a drug investigation there last year. Also, SBI Special Agent Jerry Webster of Wilmington said Varnam gave him information in April 1987 concerning an on-going arson investigation in Webster's district, which includes Brunswick and New Hanover coun-

ties. However, under questioning by Special Assistant District Attorney Bill Wolak, all six lawmen testified they were aware that Varnam apparently was helping them in order to increase his chances of receiving a lighter sentence.

Surratt and Rey also classified Varnam as a major drug trafficker in Brunswick County. Wolak pointed out in his questioning that many of the individuals implicated by Varnam were either working for the defendant or buying cocaine from him. "There were more than he had sold to than he had bought from," Surratt said.

Although McCloud described Varnam as a "mid-level" dealer, he also (See VARNAM, Page 2-A)



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

Surfers Enjoy Side Effects

Surfers enjoyed good waves most of last week and through the weekend, thanks to Tropical Storm Chris. In this photo, taken last Friday at Holden

Beach Fishing Pier, Wes Cross of Buccaneer Hills demonstrates his skills to the pleasure of several onlookers.

Chris Gives County Passing Glance Only

Tropical Storm Chris didn't make much of an impression on Brunswick County as it hugged the coast of South Carolina and then raced inland, dumping a half-inch and up of extra rainfall.

The brunt of the storm was felt elsewhere, with power outages, tornadoes and other damage reported in the Piedmont. Local damage was minimal and appeared to concentrate in the Ocean Isle area.

As Chris plowed up the coast toward Charleston, some local residents bought batteries and secured small boats better than usual, surfers took advantage of the higher waves and Brunswick County Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan and other local officials monitored the storm's progress. Fire departments and rescue squads asked to have vehicles ready in the event the storm built in strength or changed directions.

Local conditions were at their worst Sunday afternoon when driving rain fell across southwestern Brunswick County, causing shallow flooding of island roadways, and high winds uprooted trees at the Ocean Isle Golf Course and flipped over a single-engine airplane at the Ocean

Isle Beach Airport.

The winds also overturned several heavy picnic tables said, Druid Roberson, building inspector for Ocean Isle Beach, with the damage falling along a distinct path.

"Line them (the tables) up with the airport and the trees and it's almost a straight line," he said.

On the island, Roberson posted "unsafe" signs at three oceanfront residences on the east end, all of which have been "chronic problems" during erosion events.

"The signs will remain until some sand is pushed up," said Roberson.

While some east-end erosion did occur, town officials said the storm was a "good test" of sand-bagging projects on the end of East 1st Street.

Chris added one to three feet to tides already abnormally high because of astronomical conditions, increasing the likelihood of shallow flooding and erosion already forecast for the weekend.

At Holden Beach, commissioners said the storm did very little damage and could have been a lot worse, especially at the east end which has suffered erosion problems in the past.

See CHRIS, Page 2-A)

State Director Upholds Local Interpretation Of Septic Tank Regulations

BY SUSAN USHER

Holden Beach Commissioners haven't decided whether to appeal a declaratory ruling from the state health director which upholds local interpretation of the state's septic tank laws.

The declaratory ruling, issued by State Health Director Dr. Ronald Levine on August 1, is in response to a petition received from the Town of Holden Beach on June 22.

Tuesday, Mayor John Tandy told the Beacon the commission hasn't reached any decision because

members have not yet discussed the ruling.

The town has 30 days from the day it received the ruling in which to file an appeal with N.C. Superior Court.

Holden Beach commissioners were concerned that a recent reinterpretation of the state's 1982 septic tank rules is adversely affecting an estimated 288 platted lots on the island.

Levine's ruling is based on the final decision he issued in May in a contested case hearing from Carteret County, A.B. Cooper Sr. vs. the

state's Department of Human Resources. The hearing addressed the issue of whether historical fill material should be considered as "naturally occurring soil" under state septic tank regulations.

In October 1985, Cooper was denied an improvement permit for installing a low-pressure pipe system on a lot on a finger canal in Atlantic Beach Isles. The lot was deemed unsuitable for a septic tank system because of the seasonally high water table and lack of suitable naturally occurring soil beneath the 40 inches of

historical fill (dredge material of fine sands and shell fragments placed on the lot more than 20 years ago).

Levine upheld that denial in his decision, overruling a recommended decision which he said was erroneous.

In the declaratory ruling he confirms his own decision that historical fill material is not "naturally occurring soil" and that a septic tank system cannot be installed in historical fill unless there is one foot of naturally occurring soil beneath that historical fill, that soil suitable

or provisionally suitable as to its texture, structure and drainage.

It also confirms the conclusion in the Cooper case that lots classified as unsuitable (in that case because of the unsuitability of the first foot of naturally occurring soil beneath historical fill) may be reclassified as provisionally suitable if engineering, hydrogeologic or soil studies indicate that an on-site sanitary sewage system can reasonably be expected to function properly.

In the Cooper case, Levine had ruled that the opinion of an expert hired

by Cooper that the system would serve adequately was not confirmed by such studies.

The state's position was based on its experience with systems placed in fill material and on an Environmental Protection Agency study that shows that septic tank systems on the finger fill canal lots of Atlantic Beach Isles have contributed to the degradation of water quality in the canals, the decision noted.

The ruling does not address the contention of Holden Beach that the (See INTERPRETATION, Page 2-A)

Coastal Federation's Lena Ritter To Meet With Locals About River

N.C. Coastal Federation President Lena Ritter, the Stump Sound shellfisherman who led a three-year successful battle against development of Permuda Island, will meet Friday night with citizens concerned about the future of Lockwood Folly River.

The meeting begins at 8 p.m. at the Brunswick County Fishing Club at Sunset Harbor, at the end of Sunset Harbor Road off N.C. 211 south of Supply.



Ritter

"They're asking anyone who is concerned about the river to attend," said spokesman Marlene Varnam of Varnamtown. "The commercial fishermen and the sports fishermen are working on this together."

One purpose of the meeting is to explore ways in

which local residents can organize and work together on behalf of the river.

Mrs. Varnam said calls have been coming in from concerned citizens all across the state regarding the river. Local fishermen are pulling together for what may be a fight, she indicated. "They're ready."

Closure in late August of an additional 153 acres of shellfishing waters in the river prompted the fishermen into action.

At a hastily called meeting approximately two weeks ago, they began collecting donations with which to pay for private testing of the shellfish waters, and possibly legal fees. In interviews with the Beacon, several shellfishermen said they suspect politics are behind the additional closure.

Oyster and clam beds lost in Lockwood Folly represent about one-third of the shellfishing areas which had been open in the river, which accounts for 40 percent of

the county's shellfish harvest.

In addition to clam beds and oyster relocation areas, the waters that were closed also included an area where Channel Side Corp. has proposed construction of a 50-slip marina as part of its 500-acre Lockwood Folly community.

The application for that marina project is currently under review by the N.C. Division of Coastal Management, with no answer due until after developers submit a sewage treatment plan for review and comment by the Division of Environmental Management.

Local shellfishermen are opposing the marina project and claim it will cause the closure of more oyster and clam beds in the river.

However, the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries is the only one of 14 state and federal agencies to comment in opposition to the project.

The lower Lockwood Folly River has also been nominated by both the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries and by citizens' petition for designation as outstanding resource waters. However, the Environmental Management Commission has not completed the rule-making process for consideration of those applications and has yet to consider them.

The N.C. Coastal Federation is a Newport-based nonprofit, tax-exempt organization which seeks to involve citizens in decisions about how coastal resources should be managed. It shares technical information and resources in an attempt to better represent long-term economic, social and environmental interests of coastal North Carolina.

Jim Bahen of the UNC Sea Grant College Program at Kure Beach and area members of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Board have also been asked to attend Friday's meeting.