

Fish Worth \$5,000

A trio of Holden Beach anglers walked off with \$5,000 Saturday, winning the South Brunswick Islands King Classic with a 32.2-lb. entry. The story and photos are on Page 10-C.

No Ordinary Day

Thursday wasn't an ordinary day for the Longs of Winnabow, with three siblings graduating from Brunswick Community College. Coverage, including a list of all graduates, is on Page 5-B.

Owners Keeping Posted

Property owner groups met Saturday at both Sunset Beach and Holden Beach to discuss the issues of the day. The respective stories are on Pages 2-A and 5-A.

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Varnam's 'Substantial Assistance' Results In Probation, \$2,000 Fine

BY RAHN ADAMS

"I've given you as much credit as I can," were Judge Lynn Johnson's parting words to Dale Varnam after the confessed drug trafficker received a probationary sentence Friday in Brunswick County Superior Court.

Johnson described Varnam's work with drug agents over the past 1½ years—one factor which kept him from getting an active prison sentence—as "a high-water mark perhaps unmatched in North Carolina." By finding that Varnam had provided "substantial assistance" to investigators, Johnson was able to give the 37-year-old Supply area resident a lighter sentence than is required by state drug trafficking laws.

Before the sentence was handed down, Varnam told the judge, "I just want to say I'm sorry, and that I'm willing to take whatever the court places upon my shoulders."

Varnam's Sentence

Varnam pleaded guilty in April to 18 counts of trafficking in cocaine and 18 counts of conspiracy to traffic in cocaine—charges which carried a mandatory minimum sentence totaling 532 years in prison and a \$3.8 million fine before they were consolidated by the state as part of the defendant's plea agreement.

Of the 80 defendants who have been indicted on drug trafficking charges by special investigative grand juries in Brunswick County since June 1987, Varnam was charged with and pleaded guilty to the most offenses. Indicted last June by the first investigative grand jury ever used in North Carolina, he initially was charged with a total of 44 trafficking and conspiracy counts.

After hearing defense testimony last week from 10 lawmen including Brunswick County Sheriff John C. Davis, Johnson sentenced Varnam to a \$2,000 fine and a suspended 15-year prison term, with five years of supervised probation.

Also, the judge ordered Varnam to perform 200 hours of community service work, to "in some way repay the

citizens of Brunswick County for your past misdeeds," Johnson said.

As part of his probation, Varnam is not allowed to possess or use any controlled substance, and he is not allowed to associate with individuals who use illegal drugs. In addition, he is required to supply breath, urine and blood specimens for testing on a regular basis.

Johnson explained in open court that he handed down the probationary sentence due to the defendant's high degree of cooperation with the state and the personal danger that Varnam would face if he were imprisoned with individuals he implicated in various drug investigations.

District Attorney Mike Easley told the Beacon after the hearing, "Obviously the state's position was different, and we asked for a substantial prison term, but that decision is always the judge's."

Closing Arguments

In his 15-minute closing argument Friday morning, defense attorney John Collins compared Varnam to pirate Jean Laffite, who was pardoned by the U.S. Government in ex-

change for help during the War of 1812. Later in his remarks, however, Collins noted that Laffite eventually returned to piracy.

"We're here to sentence a cocaine dealer, and he (Varnam) is nothing but a cocaine dealer," Collins said, but quickly added that Varnam "has taken extraordinary steps to come before the court and pray for forgiveness... He has worked hard for the state for a year and a half, and he's done well."

The attorney mentioned defense testimony by Brunswick County Sheriff's Det. Mike Speck, who said last Thursday, "He (Varnam) said he'd helped put the drugs on the street, and as long as he could, he'd try to help take them off (the street)."

Collins pointed out that Varnam's assistance to the state resulted in seizures worth \$1½ million—including the \$1.2 million Resort Plaza shopping center in Shalotte—and "hundreds of indictments."

He also pleaded that an active prison sentence of any length would (See VARNAM, Page 2-A)



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

Playing It Cool

John Lineberger of Dallas, N.C., didn't let Saturday's somewhat sticky weather get him down. He just shoveled sand until he reached water and kept cool while watching his kids play in the surf.

Two Killed In Labor Day Weekend Traffic Mishaps

Two Shalotte area motorists died in separate traffic accidents over the Labor Day holiday weekend, with both fatal wrecks occurring near Ocean Isle Beach.

A local teen-ager was charged with death by vehicle in one accident, while a Shalotte man was charged with driving while impaired in the other mishap.

Killed in the separate wrecks were Eric Shawn Ingram, 16, of Ash, and William Elliott Tripp Jr., 24, of Shalotte, according to Highway Patrol spokesperson Ruby Oakley.

The fatalities upped Brunswick County's highway death toll this year to 12, Ms. Oakley noted. By this time in 1987, 15 motorists had died on county roadways.

Ms. Oakley said the accident that claimed Ingram's life and injured

four others occurred Monday at 12:45 a.m., six-tenths of a mile south of Ocean Isle Beach on Gause Landing Road.

A 1988 Chevrolet driven by James Eric Hughes, 17, of Shalotte, was traveling at approximately 70 mph when it went out of control in a curve, struck a tree on the right shoulder and overturned, Ms. Oakley reported.

She said Trooper B.C. Jones charged Hughes with reckless driving and death by vehicle. Jones estimated damage to the car at \$12,000.

According to Ms. Oakley, Ingram was a passenger in the right front seat. Hughes and three back-seat passengers—Paula Dee Gray, 18, of Shalotte, Shelley Carmen Gurganus, 16, of Ocean Isle Beach, and Tara

(See FATALITIES, Page 2-A)

Truesdales Get Active Prison Terms

BY RAHN ADAMS

A Florida couple who admitted supplying cocaine for distribution in Brunswick County received 18-year prison sentences last week in Brunswick County Superior Court.

Jack Truesdale, 33, and his wife, Donna Truesdale, 39, both of Ft. Myers, Fla., were sentenced Friday by Judge Lynn Johnson. Their combined hearing followed the sentencing of Dale Varnam, who was one of two major cocaine dealers in Brunswick County that they supplied between 1984 and 1986 (see related story).

In addition to the active prison term, Johnson ordered that both defendants received substance abuse counseling while they are incarcerated. He also recommended them for work release.

Asking the judge to give them "substantial prison terms," District

"They shipped all this poison up to Brunswick County, not knowing or caring where it was going."

—Mike Easley
District Attorney

Attorney Mike Easley told Johnson, "They shipped all this poison up to Brunswick County, not knowing or caring where it was going," to support their own cocaine habits and to buy two Mercedes-Benz cars and several thousand dollars' worth of jewelry.

According to Mrs. Truesdale, the couple "liquidated" their assets after their arrests to pay debts. They have also filed for bankruptcy, she said.

While both defendants apologized for their offenses, Mrs. Truesdale ad-

mitted, "The things that Mr. Easley said about drug traffickers are so true... I didn't care; I never gave it a thought. But I am so ashamed that I could do anything that would hurt another life."

In August 1987, Jack Truesdale pleaded guilty to 11 counts of conspiracy to traffic in cocaine and six counts of trafficking in cocaine, according to the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office. Mrs. Truesdale pleaded guilty last August to four counts of conspiracy to traffic

in cocaine.

Both were among 32 individuals indicted in June 1987 in Brunswick County by the state's first special investigative grand jury.

In keeping with the couple's plea agreements, Johnson last week consolidated the Truesdales' charges after finding that both provided substantial assistance to investigators. Until that finding, each individual charge carried a mandatory minimum sentence of 35 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

On Aug. 29, Agent David Waller of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and SBI Special Agent Steve Surratt testified as defense witnesses. The sentencing hearing resumed Friday afternoon and included testimony from SBI Special Agent Corey Duber and Mrs. Truesdale herself.

(See TRUESDALES, Page 2-A)

Activist Tells Group It Can Make A Difference For River

BY SUSAN USHER

"You can make a difference," North Carolina Coastal Federation President Lena Ritter told approximately 100 people gathered at the Brunswick County Fishing Club at Sunset Harbor last Friday night to discuss the future of Lockwood Folly River.

Ritter was in Brunswick County to encourage local citizen efforts to organize a campaign to conserve the river for the harvest of shellfish.

She urged them to demand local and state officials act to protect the river.

A local group is being organized, with Annie Smigiel the president, Carson Varnam, vice president and Ada McDonald, secretary. The group is in the process of establishing a board of directors, selecting a name and establishing a membership structure.

After passing the hat Friday night the group had collected \$319.74.

While Ritter said after the meeting that the local group was "smart enough" to figure out what steps to take next and how to spend the

money, she did add that personally she would start socking money away "because if the state doesn't do what they're supposed to do, I would see them in court."

Among those present Friday night by invitation was Glen Peterson, a Leland attorney who lost his bid for the State House of Representatives earlier this year. During the campaign he had offered to help if the local people needed him, he said.

Varnam, who is also on the Coastal Federation board, told the group he'd been working the river for more than 40 years. "We have a lot of development and a lot of pollution, but I still believe we can work together and work out our problems."

Closure Boosted Concern
Lockwood Folly currently yields 49 percent of all commercial shellfish landings in the county, and is also popular with recreational fishermen.

Last month, following the sudden closure of an additional 153 acres of shellfishing waters in the lower portion of the river, about 50 citizens met at the fishing club and collected funds to pay for private testing of the

waters.

They were suspicious, in part, that the latest closure by the state was related to a 50-slip marina proposed nearby for the Lockwood Folly golf and housing development, but Division of Marine Fisheries Director William Hogarth Friday said the two things were unrelated, but that "the timing was bad."

Channel Side Corp.'s pending request will be considered by the N.C. Office of Coastal Management as soon as the sewage treatment plan is completed and reviewed by the Environmental Management Commission.

Work Through System

"You have got a big problem in Brunswick County with polluted waters," Ritter told the group gathered Friday. While outside another 30 or so people, including several candidates for public office, listened through large screened windows, she stressed, "But I think if you understand the process and use it, you can make a difference."

Ritter was speaking from ex- (See RITTER, Page 2-A)



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

LENA RITTER, president of the N.C. Coastal Federation and a community activist, urged area residents to "band together" to protect local shellfishing waters such as the Lockwood Folly River.

PBS Films Ritter Talk

A portion of community activist Lena Ritter's meeting Friday night with local citizens concerned about the future of Lockwood Folly River could appear on national television late next year.

A segment on Ritter will be part of "Coastlines," the last in the four-part "Conserving America" series being produced by PBS in conjunction with the National Wildlife Federation, according to Gary Hines, producer and editor for WQED, Pittsburgh, Penn., whose crew filmed most of Friday's meeting in the Brunswick County Fishing Club at Sunset Harbor. The show is tentatively slated to air on Sept. 29, 1989, with the exact date to be announced.

"We're in trouble; our environment is in trouble," he said. "The neat thing about doing this series is finding out that people are doing something about it."

Associate Producer Lisa Bibko said the series focuses on local heroes throughout America who are working to protect the nation's coastline, with the message that individual efforts can make a difference.

Lena Ritter was a Stump Sound shellfisherman in Onslow County when she learned of plans to develop nearby Permuda Island. She eventually led a three-year fight to save the island, which is partly owned now by the state, and is currently president of the North Carolina Coastal Federation. The nonprofit corporation has worked since 1982 to involve citizens in efforts to conserve and wisely manage the state's coastal resources.

"Lena Ritter is one heck of a lady," said Bibko. "She's the epitome of what this series is about."

UNC-TV in Chapel Hill is the state's PBS affiliate.