

# County School Comes Up Clean In September Drug Dog Search

BY RAHN ADAMS

The talented nose of "Buddy" the narcotics-sniffing dog may get a little more work on Brunswick County campuses soon, thanks to a slip of the tongue by Superintendent John Kaufhold.

At a joint meeting of the county's Board of Education and Health Board Monday night in Bolivia, Kaufhold casually mentioned to the gathering that the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department's drug dog had sniffed out two ounces of marijuana last week in a student's locker

at South Brunswick Middle School during the dog's first-ever use in local schools.

But as it turned out, the superintendent was only half right: The dog was used recently at South Brunswick Middle School, for the first time in Brunswick County; but the marijuana was found next-door—by school officials—at South Brunswick High School, not at the middle school.

"I'll have to take responsibility for that," Kaufhold said Tuesday of the mixup. "I confused the two cases."

Kaufhold explained that a 16-year-old male student at South Brunswick High School was caught attempting to sell marijuana to other students. School officials found the student with two ounces of the controlled substance "on his person," Kaufhold said.

South Brunswick High Principal Mose Lewis said Tuesday that the marijuana was turned over to the Boiling Spring Lakes Police Department following the Sept. 26 incident, as is required by the school system's drug/alcohol abuse policy.

The student, who school administrators would not identify, was expelled for the remainder of the school year, according to Kaufhold and Lewis.

Although she could not verify the specific case, Boiling Spring Lakes Police Sgt. Sandra Weldrick confirmed that school officials had reported a drug matter to police last month and turned over a quantity of marijuana.

Ms. Weldrick said arrest warrants were issued in that particular case. However, she referred further comment to the county. (See COUNTY, Page 2-A)

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## School, Sheriff's Department Take Precautions After Rumored Threat

BY RAHN ADAMS

It doesn't hurt to play it safe, even if there turns out to be no real cause for alarm.

That was the attitude taken by school officials and county lawmen last week after an unconfirmed threat of violence was reported Oct. 4

at Union Primary School near Shallotte. The school serves approximately 855 students in kindergarten through third grade.

Authorities said nothing suspicious happened last week on the school campus, located about five miles south of Shallotte on U.S. 17.

However, precautionary measures taken by the school gave rise to a feeling among parents that the "threat" was of real substance—a rumor which made the situation all the more difficult for school officials to handle.

Brunswick County Schools Assistant Superintendent William Harrison told the Beacon last Wednesday that Union Primary officials received a telephone call the previous day from someone who said they heard that a man had threatened a teacher at the school.

"There have been some unsubstantiated threats coming to us second and third hand," Harrison said. "We're taking every precaution we can to take care of it."

Although Harrison and other authorities would not elaborate on the alleged threat, Principal Clara Carter said it was "that the school was going to get shot up."

"With the things that are going on, you can't afford to take any chances," Mrs. Carter added, referring to shooting incidents at schools across the country, the most recent one occurring last month in Greenwood, S.C.

Precautionary measures included notifying the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department of the alleged threat; locking all outside doors to the school; not allowing children to leave the building without supervision; having school maintenance men help with "surveillance;" and loading buses on a "rainy day" schedule, Mrs. Carter said.

She noted that the building's doors could be opened from inside, in keeping with fire regulations; however, they could not be opened from the outside.

Rather than let students cross the parking lot unprotected to get on their buses after school, the vehicles were pulled up next to the building and were loaded one by one, as is done on rainy days, Mrs. Carter said. The loading schedule was used Tuesday through Thursday afternoons.

Many children, however, didn't get a chance to use the rainy day bus schedule. Mrs. Carter estimated that from 75 to 100 students were taken

out of school early last Wednesday, after their parents heard rumors of possible violence at the school.

When parents came to the office to pick up their children, they were told everything school officials knew about the situation at that time, the principal said. Reporters who called Union Primary last Wednesday were referred to the Brunswick County Public Schools office in Southport for comment.

Mrs. Carter said activity on campus was more or less back to normal Thursday and Friday, except that attendance appeared to be down somewhat, based on lower than normal lunch counts. Although she did not have exact attendance figures, she said some parents apparently kept their children home due to rumors about the alleged threat.

Chief Deputy John Marlow said a uniformed officer was sent to the school Tuesday after the matter initially was reported. He also noted that other lawmen, including himself and Sheriff John C. Davis, visited the school campus at various times later in the week.

"We're just using our normal routine, but we tell an officer that if he's in the area to make a circle (by the campus) and be visible," Marlow said Friday.

He emphasized, however, that no actual threat had been received by either the school or the sheriff's department.

"It's hearsay, but it's not something we're overlooking," Marlow said Friday, later adding, "It's because of what just happened in South Carolina... I think there's a reason to be concerned for the safety of little children."

Without revealing any details, Sheriff Davis said Monday that the man who allegedly made the threat was located last Wednesday at his place of work, which is not near the school. Lawmen watched the man closely Wednesday and Thursday, and kept him under "loose surveillance" Friday, Davis said.

The man was not approached by authorities, because "we didn't have

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UNION PRIMARY TEACHER Tom Simmons ushers students to their buses last Wednesday. The school used a "rainy day" loading schedule as a

precautionary measure last Tuesday through Thursday, after an unsubstantiated threat of violence was reported.

## Drug Bust Yields Four Arrests On Oak Island

BY RAHN ADAMS

Three Oak Island residents remained in the Brunswick County Jail Monday after they were arrested with a Swansboro man last week on cocaine charges.

According to Brunswick County Narcotics Squad Det. Sgt. David Crocker, the arrests were made on Oak Island last Wednesday night and early Thursday morning as part of an undercover investigation by the SBI, Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, Yaupon Beach Police Department, Long Beach Police Department and Wilmington-New Hanover County Vice and Narcotics Unit.

Crocker said approximately one kilogram (2.2 pounds) of cocaine and two vehicles were seized in making the arrests. The cocaine had an estimated street value of about \$104,000.

Arrested were William Rick Ben-

nett, 28, of Northeast 22nd Street, Long Beach; his brother, Harry Gordon Bennett, 26, and Robin Marie Whicker, 23, both of Norton Street, Yaupon Beach; and Leonard Alvis Johnson, 30, of Swansboro.

Arrest warrants on file at the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office show that both Bennetts and Johnson each were charged with conspiracy to traffic in more than 400 grams of cocaine and trafficking in more than 400 grams of cocaine. Ms. Whicker was charged with trafficking in more than 400 grams of cocaine.

Crocker said the undercover probe stemmed from information authorities received in April concerning the Bennett brothers.

Using an SBI airplane and several unmarked vehicles for surveillance last Wednesday around 8:15 p.m., an undercover agent bought a "quantity"

of cocaine from Johnson outside River Run Shopping Center at the intersection of Long Beach Road and N.C. 211, Crocker said. Johnson's 1985 Nissan pickup truck also was seized.

He added that lawmen then arranged for an undercover buy from William Bennett, who apparently realized at the last second he was being set up and drove past the drop-off point. Bennett was arrested around 10 p.m. after a five-minute chase involving eight patrol cars, Crocker said. The suspect was forced to stop near the intersection of Oak Island Drive and Keziah Street. A seven-car roadblock also had been set up at the Oak Island Bridge to stop traffic.

Bennett's 1988 GMC pickup truck was confiscated. Also, lawmen recovered 18 ounces of cocaine and a double-barrel shotgun which the suspect allegedly threw from his

vehicle during the chase, Crocker said.

The detective said Harry Bennett and Ms. Whicker were arrested last Thursday around 1 a.m. at their Norton Street residence, after authorities obtained a search warrant and used the sheriff's department's narcotics dog to uncover less than a kilogram of cocaine inside the home.

Johnson was released last Thursday from the Brunswick County Jail after he posted a \$10,000 bond. William Bennett was being held Monday in lieu of a \$750,000 bond; Harry Bennett, \$500,000 bond; and Ms. Whicker, \$30,000 bond.

All four made first appearances last Thursday in Brunswick County District Criminal Court. Probable cause hearings were scheduled for Oct. 19.

## VARNAM APPOINTED

### New State Fisheries Commissioner Wants To Help Protect Resources

BY DOUG RUTTER

As the newest member of the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission, local oyster dealer Carson Varnam wants to help develop programs which will conserve and protect coastal resources statewide.

The 56-year-old native of Varnamtown was appointed to the post last Wednesday as one of four members of the commission who must derive at least half of their income from commercial fishing. The commission is made up of 15 members, all of whom are appointed by the governor.

"Anytime you have such a position offered to you it comes as surprise," Varnam said last week following the appointment. "I feel like the commission can be a lot of help to the whole coastal area."

Varnam, a shellfisherman since childhood, has been a licensed seafood dealer in Brunswick County for more than 30 years. He currently owns and operates Carson Varnam Oyster Company in Varnamtown. He said he hopes to serve on the panel to the best of his ability and represent the county and state well.

One of his primary objectives as a member of the commission, he said, is to implement various programs which will help preserve the remaining coastal resources.

"A lot of things are being depleted because of demand. There's more demand and harvesting than there is replenishing," said Varnam. "If we don't begin to look into some pro-

grams it's gonna bear less and less all the time."

Varnam is vice chairman of the recently-formed group Save Our Shellfish, an organization of local fishermen trying to preserve shellfishing waters in the Lockwood Folly River.

Varnam emphasized, however, that he will not limit himself to serving the needs of local shellfishermen as a member of the commission but will look at the broader picture statewide.

"I think you have to take one thing as much as the other," he said, adding that needs of the state's shrimpers and recreational and commercial fishermen have to be considered in addition to those of local shellfishermen.

"I feel sure that some decision can be made so we can look into programs that can help a lot of different things," he continued.

Varnam is also a member of the N.C. Coastal Federation, an organization representing the state's fishermen, seafood dealers and processors, and is an active member of Dixon Chapel United Methodist Church.

The purpose of the commission, according to governor's press assistant Bill Furney, is to set regulations for the protection, preservation and enhancement of the commercial and sport fishery resources of the state. It can also authorize, license, regulate, prohibit, prescribe or restrict all forms of fishing activity and habitat alteration with respect to marine and estuarine resources in coastal fishing waters. The commission was reorganized last year to include more representation among commercial

and recreational fishermen.

Varnam will serve the final 12 months of a six-year term vacated earlier this year by shellfisherman Lena Ritter. The term will expire Sept. 30, 1989.

Ritter resigned the post in January stating that the "red tide" was preventing her from meeting the fishing income requirement. The requirement, however, only applies at the time of the appointment and not later in the term.

Rozell Hewett of Shallotte Point was named to the seat in March but was ruled ineligible shortly after the appointment on the basis that he was retired and no longer met the fishing income requirement.

Varnam's appointment has drawn the support of William Hogarth, director of the state Division of Marine Fisheries, as well as the other local member of the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission.

"That region is heavily dependent on shellfish," said Hogarth. "We feel like he has a good following down there. He seems to have a lot of respect of the people."

Varnam's work as a shellfisherman and his knowledge of the commercial fishing business, he said, were other reasons for the appointment.

"I think he can bring us a lot of years of experience, especially in the area of shellfishing," added Cash Caroon of Southport, vice chairman of the commission. "He's a good, decent, honest man who will do his best for the industry and our marine resources as a whole."



CARSON VARNAM stands outside his oyster house in Varnamtown. As the newest member of the state Marine Fisheries Commission, he hopes to help preserve the remaining coastal resources.