

Shallotte Voters Voice Differing Opinions On Wine Sales Referendum

BY DOUG RUTTER
Shallotte voters apparently have mixed feelings on the issue of wine sales in their town. Whatever their feelings, however, they will be asked to vote on the issue of off-premises sales of unfortified wines when they head to the polls next Tuesday.

Currently, the Shallotte ABC store is the only place in town where unfortified wines can legally be obtained. In order to be sold, however, those wines must be produced in North Carolina.

In August, town aldermen petitioned the county board of elections for the referendum at the request of four Shallotte grocery store managers, who were seeking permission to sell unfortified wines in addition to the fortified variety.

Managers of Hills, Wilson's, Food Lion and Piggly Wiggly pushed for the referendum, hoping to boost business in Shallotte and keep people from traveling to neighboring towns such as Ocean Isle Beach, Sunset Beach and Calabash for good table wines.

Fortified wines, such as Mad Dog 20/20 and Thunderbird, have an alcohol content between 14 and 20 percent. Unfortified wines, also called

dinner wines, have less than 14 percent alcohol.

Opinions on local wine sales elicited during an informal survey of Shallotte residents over the past two weeks ranged from strong support and strong opposition to general indifference.

A significant trend, however, was that all four residents in Brierwood Estates who were questioned favored the sale of unfortified wines in the town's retail stores.

"I'm in favor of it," said Bill Strauss. "All these folks in this neighborhood are that way. We have to go clear down to Ocean Isle to get regular table wines."

Helen Conrad echoed that opinion, stating, "I think it's perfectly ridiculous that everybody here has to run out of town to Ocean Isle or Calabash to do this."

Like several others, she said she favors the sale of table wines even though she does not drink them on a regular basis. She also noted that she believes the attitude which has kept

finer wines out of Shallotte until this point has also prevented the town from getting any top-grade restaurants.

Brierwood Estates resident Polly Russ, added, "I'm in favor of it for financial reasons. Shallotte might as well get the profit from the sales of it rather than the beaches."

Also focusing on the business aspect was Peggy Norris of Shallotte Estates. "I've got a bottle of wine in my refrigerator and I had to go all the way to Ocean Isle Beach to get it," she said. "It would keep business in Shallotte instead of going to Ocean Isle or South Carolina."

Neighbor Harold McKeithan added, "I don't see a thing wrong with it. If they can sell it with the higher alcohol content they should be able to sell it with less alcohol."

J.D. Lewis of John Street said the referendum doesn't matter to him one way or the other. "I really don't see the difference, to tell you the truth. If they don't buy it here they'll buy it someplace else. I don't care

because I don't drink it."

Also in favor of unfortified wine sales was Danny Browning of Forest Drive. "Everybody can buy liquor, they should be able to buy wine. I don't see what's wrong with it. I don't see why not."

Robert Hawes of Smith Avenue was the only person contacted who flatly opposed increased sales of alcohol in Shallotte and would agree to be quoted in The Brunswick Beacon. Several others said they opposed wine sales but did not want their name in the paper.

"I'm against it. They got too much of it already," said Hawes. "I voted against the beer and the whiskey when they brought that in."

A good percentage of the residents contacted said they didn't have an opinion on the issue, primarily because they don't drink

wine and didn't see any positive or negative impacts on the town.

Henry and Betty Carter of Main Street also said they weren't leaning one way or the other. "It really doesn't matter," said Mrs. Carter. "We're not against it and we're not for it."

The last referendum on this issue was held in May 1985. At that time, 66

percent of the people who voted opposed the sale of unfortified wines in retail stores. However, of the 334 registered voters in town at that time, only 127 or 36 percent cast ballots.

There are 653 town residents registered to vote in next week's election, according to the Brunswick County Board of Elections office.



Conrad



McKeithan



Browning



Hawes

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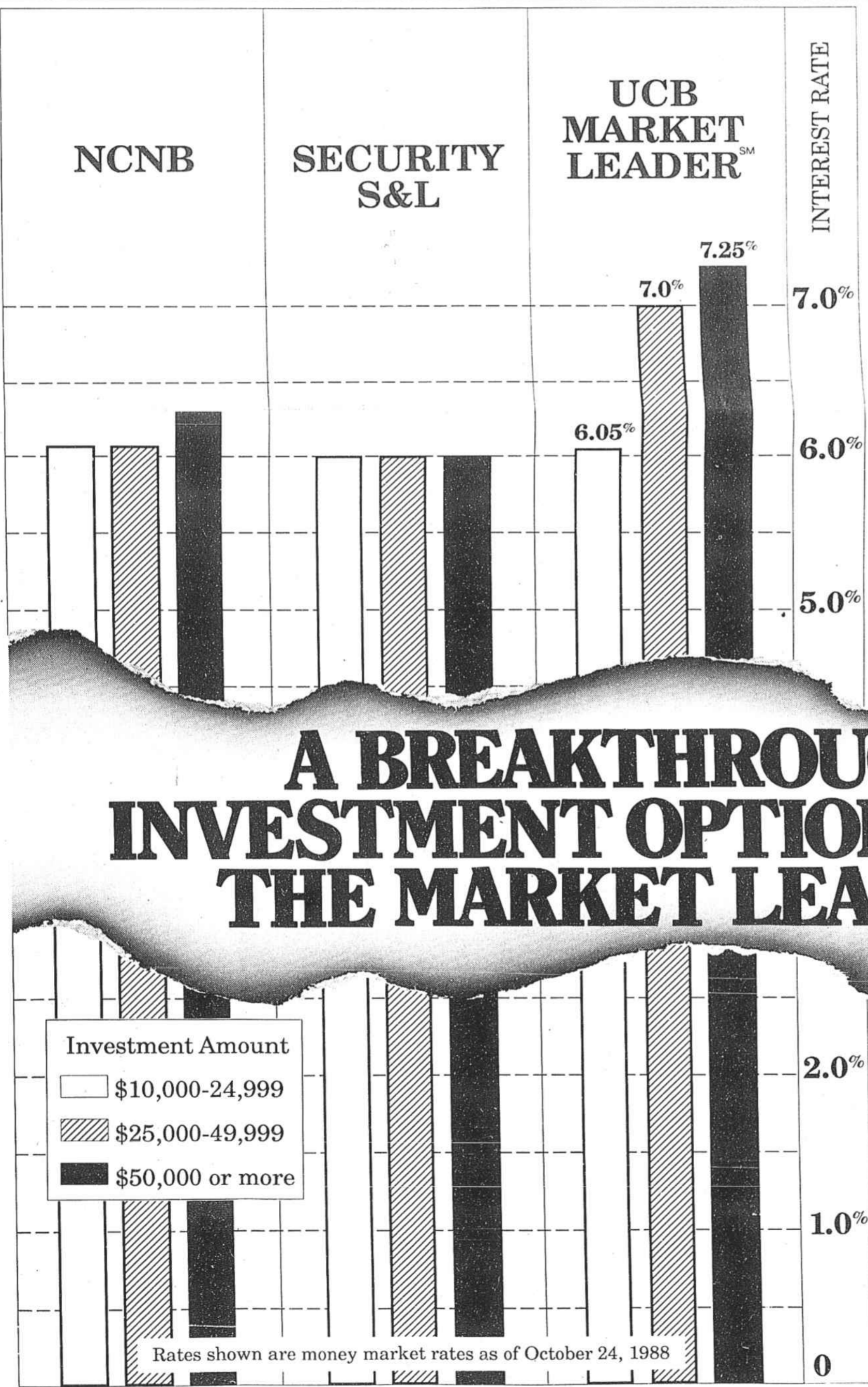
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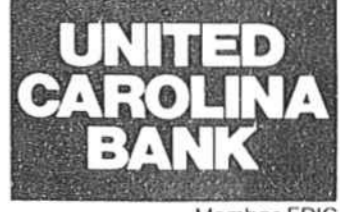
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