

Prosecutor Compares Special Grand Jury Probes In Brunswick, Bladen

BY RAHN ADAMS

While the 13th District Attorney's office prepares to wrap up its first two special grand jury investigations in Brunswick County, prosecutors are finding new weapons to use in their war on drugs here and across the state.

"As we use this law, we get better at it," Special Assistant District Attorney Bill Wolak told the Beacon last week. Wolak is one of only two special drug prosecutors in the state, both of whom cross judicial district lines to assist with major trafficking investigations wherever needed.

Over the past 18 months, three investigative grand jury probes in Brunswick and Bladen counties—the only ones announced so far in North Carolina—have resulted in the indictments of 110 in-

dividuals on drug trafficking charges.

In Brunswick County, 75 of 85 cases from the county's two investigations have been disposed of, with 73 of the defendants pleading guilty. Two cases were dismissed—one, because the defendant died before trial; the other, because the defendant was indicted as a federal fugitive.

Most of the remaining cases here are scheduled for the Dec. 12 term of Brunswick County Superior Court in Bolivia. Ten defendants remain to be prosecuted, while nine others await sentencing.

"It's kind of a delicate balance," Wolak said, referring to whether or not the drug prosecutions take precedence over other criminal cases pending in court. "Right now it's just a matter of finding court time."

In Bladen County, the state's third investigative grand jury indicted 25 suspected drug traffickers in June. Wolak said four defendants there have pleaded guilty;

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—Bill Wolak
Special Assistant DA

"They are about the same class of violators," the special district attorney said of the three investigations, "with the only exception in Bladen County being we were able to identify three separate organizations."

He added, though, that the Bladen County special grand jury also indicted two defendants on "continuing criminal enterprise" charges—a tactic that wasn't used in the Brunswick County investigations.

If convicted of continuing criminal enterprise, a defendant can be sentenced to life in prison. The prosecution basically must prove that the defendant profited from a series of drug offenses and that the defendant organized and supervised the involvement of at least five other co-conspirators.

On the federal level, North Carolina's continuing criminal enterprise law is known as the "drug kingpin statute," Wolak said, adding that the charge on either (See PROSECUTOR, Page 8-A)



Wolak

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STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

Early Christmas Present

Shamie Edwards receives an early present from Santa Claus following Saturday's annual Christmas parade in downtown Shalotte. The five-year-old daughter of Sam and Theresa Edwards of Brick Landing, Shamie was

one of the first children to greet Santa after he rode through town on a Shalotte fire truck. More parade coverage is inside this issue.

Demos' Control Ends With Executive Session; GOP Takes Over County Commission

BY RAHN ADAMS

For the first time since 1972, a Republican majority assumed control of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners Monday—but not until the old Democratic board held a final, apparently uneventful secret session.

During a 45-minute meeting Monday night in Bolivia, at least 100 individuals—most of them local Republicans—watched GOP commissioners Frankie Rabon, Kelly Holden and Gene Pinkerton take oaths of office. The meeting, which began in the commissioners' chambers, had to be moved to the Public Assembly Building due to the large crowd.

Minutes after the brief swearing-in ceremony, Rabon—the only incumbent to retain his commission seat in November—was unanimously elected as commission chairman for the coming year. Former Chairman Grace Beasley was unanimously elected vice chairman, replacing fellow Democrat Benny Ludlum in that post.

In the November 8 election, Rabon defeated Democrat Tom Simmons, while Holden and Pinkerton unseated Democratic incumbents Chris Chappell and Jim Poole respectively.

"I think it was expected," Pinkerton told the Beacon, in reference to Rabon's election as chairman. Pinkerton and Holden both said they did not seek the vice chairmanship due to their inexperience on the board.

The only other actions taken Monday by the new board were to unanimously reappoint County Manager John T. Smith, County Attorney David Clegg and Clerk to the Board Regina Alexander, and to unanimously accept bonds posted by Register of Deeds Robert J. Robinson and Coroner Greg White as a result of the re-election of the two.

At Rabon's suggestion, the board voted unanimously to table the re-

mainder of its agenda until the Dec. 19 regular meeting. "I didn't feel it was fair to Gene and Kelly to make a decision tonight, and then not know what was going on," Rabon said after the meeting.

Among other agenda items Monday, commissioners had been scheduled to review recommendations from the Brunswick County Utility Operations Board involving several special assessment district water projects, and to consider commissioner and citizen appointments to 11 local and regional boards.

No Action Announced

At the outset of Monday's meeting, Chappell requested the executive session to discuss "personnel." Apologizing to citizens who packed the commissioners' chambers, Chappell said, "It's something that's got to be taken care of."

The meeting reconvened in open session 20 minutes later in the Public Assembly Building, and Chairman Beasley indicated that no action was taken during the closed-door conference.

After the meeting, she declined to comment specifically on the personnel matter discussed in executive session, only to say, "It was important to Mr. Chappell, and I respected that."

According to an unofficial log kept by the Beacon, the former county commission met in secret for approximately one-quarter of its total meeting time in 1988.

In 40 meetings held during the year, the board met in open session for approximately 73½ hours and in secret session for approximately 24¼ hours.

Some 17 executive sessions were held throughout the year. Of that number, no action was announced after 14 of the closed-door meetings.

At a reception immediately prior to Monday's meeting, Rabon summed up the old board's performance with an unintended note of irony. "We

didn't accomplish everything we set out to do," he said, "but we didn't give up."

Service Cited

Ms. Beasley presented Chappell and Poole with outstanding service awards from the county.

Both men briefly thanked their families, fellow board members and the county staff for supporting them during their tenures on the commission. "They made the conversion from citizen to commissioner easier to make," said Poole.

The Yaupon Beach resident later told the Beacon that he intends to remain active in his community, although not necessarily in governmental affairs. "I plan to stay active any way I can," Poole said, "although I don't know what that'll be."

Chappell encouraged the local Republican Party to support their commissioners in order to make a "better government for the people of Brunswick County." And as a defeated Democrat he noted, "We've lost a battle, but we haven't lost the war."

Chappell later said in private that he intends to remain active in local politics. He also indicated that he may attempt to reclaim his commission seat in 1992, but he quickly added, "It's too early to make that decision."

Calabash Festival Proceeds Will Feed Hungry Families

Local residents will get a chance to help some less fortunate neighbors this Christmas season by supporting the upcoming Calabash Holiday Festival.

The festival will be held this Saturday, Dec. 10, in the field across from Trader's Village in Calabash and will run from noon until dusk.

In exchange for a free barbecue meal sponsored by the Calabash Merchants Association, visitors are asked to donate canned food or money which will help feed needy families in Brunswick County this Christmas.

All food and money will be administered by the Brunswick County Volunteer and Information Center. Last year's carnival raised about \$1,000 which was used to help feed approximately 350 area families, according to VIC Director Ouida Hewett.

In addition to the free meal, there will be plenty of arts and crafts exhibits and live music.

Mrs. Hewett said the West Brunswick High School Band will kick off activities at noon. Later in the day, a country band will provide the entertainment.

She expects several exhibitors including one selling Christmas crafts and one making holiday wreaths from grapevines.

In past years, the carnival has also included a boat parade in Calabash River. Because of the cold weather in December, however, participation was always low, and only four boats

(See CALABASH, Page 2-A)

State Health Board Refuses Holden Septic Tank Petition

BY DOUG RUTTER

The N.C. Health Services Commission last week refused to accept a petition from the Town of Holden Beach calling for revisions in state septic tank laws.

According to Holden Beach Commissioner Georgia Langley, who helped draft the petition, the denial was not a total loss.

The town is now in a good position to push for changes in regulations relating to wastewater treatment, she said. Langley, who helped draft the petition, presented it to the state board last Wednesday in Raleigh along with Jay Houston, consulting



Langley

engineer for the town's ongoing wastewater treatment study.

The petition was not accepted because of "inadequate language" and the fact that the state Division of Health Services is currently working on a revised set of regulations pertaining to wastewater treatment, according to John Barkley, agency legal specialist for health services.

Although it was refused, Langley said she was encouraged by what she heard from health commission members during and after the meeting. "Several of them came to me and said not to feel like this was a defeat," she said from her Raleigh home last Thursday. "I told them I would be back."

The town official said the local contingent was before the commission for two hours last week and was able to voice all of its concerns before the

board voted to refuse the petition on the recommendation of state Health Director Ronald H. Levine.

"The petition was denied, but the board was very pulled on it," added Mrs. Langley. "Most of them did not see what was wrong with accepting the petition."

With the state currently drafting its own revisions, she said the timing of the petition was bad. She added, however, "I think it had a great impact on that board."

Specifically, the petition called for changes in two sections of the state septic tank laws. The main thrust of the document was a request for changes in the law that requires at least one foot of "naturally-occurring" soil above the water table for a septic tank permit to be granted. It also sought amendment to (See HEALTH, Page 2-A)



STAFF PHOTOS BY RAHN ADAMS

CLERK TO THE BOARD Regina Alexander (second from left) administers the oath of office Monday night to newly-elected county commissioners (from left) Kelly Holden, new Chairman Frankie Rabon and Gene Pinkerton.