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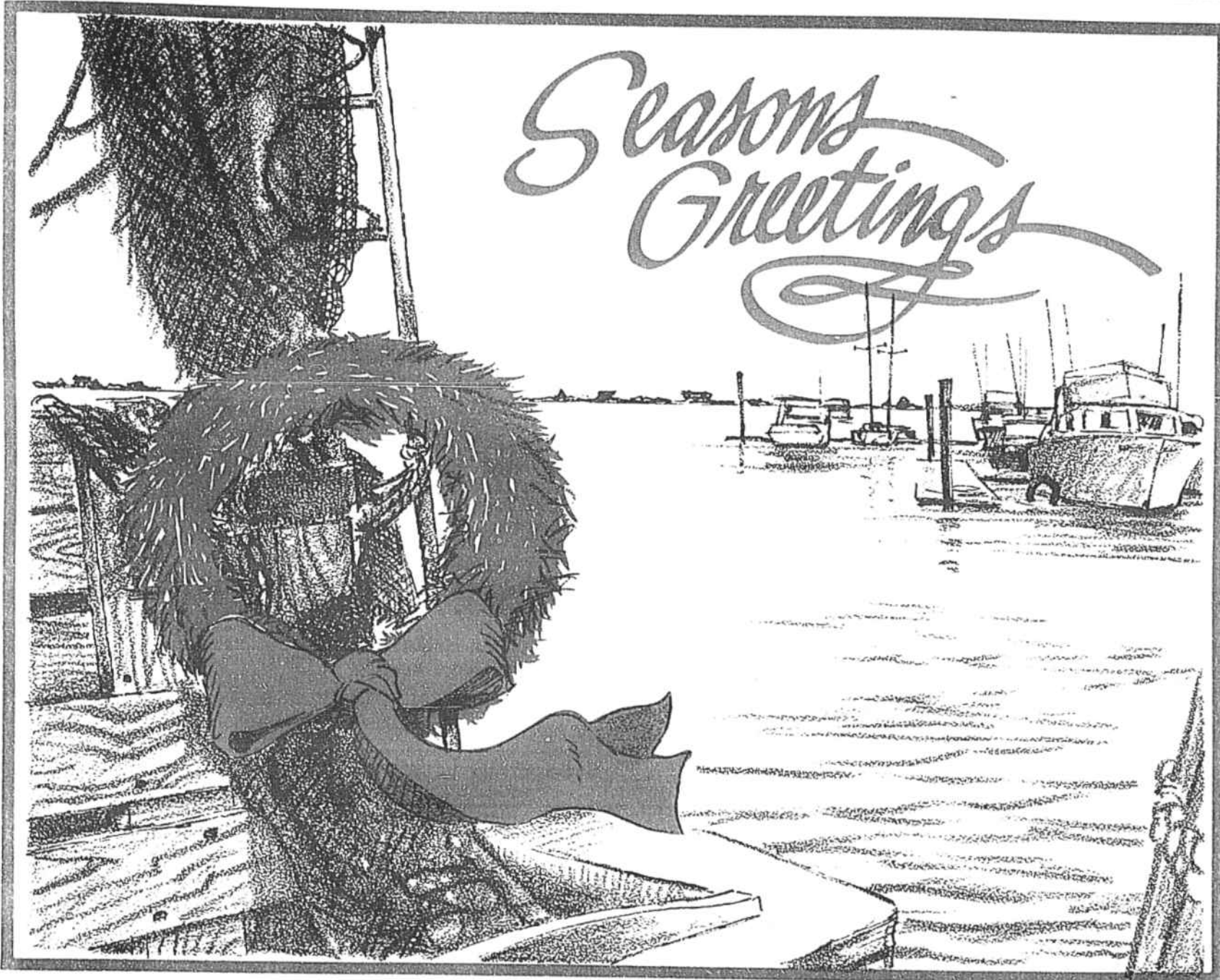


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Letter Hits On Divisive Issue At Sunset Beach

BY SUSAN USHER

An unsigned letter on Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association stationery mailed to town land owners last week purports to represent the view of a majority of association directors regarding annexation of property between the town limits and Seaside.

The letter, apparently mailed by SBTPA Secretary Minnie Hunt, strongly opposes the proposed annexation of Long Bay Development property at Seaside just north of the intersection of N.C. 904 and N.C. 179, and a portion of Sea Trail subdivision that would link the Seaside property with the existing town limits.

"This issue is extremely critical in determining the future of Sunset Beach," the letter states, characterizing the matter as "a choice between a quiet, single-family residential community, and a future town that will be driven by ever expanding commercial interests."

However, Association President Al Wells, contacted at his home in Troy, said neither the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association nor its board of directors authorized the letter. Also, the annexation issue has not been discussed formally by either group.

"I didn't know anything about the letter until I received it in the mail," he said, echoing the words of Sunset Beach Mayor Mason Barber, who serves as the association's treasurer.

Wells said the letter, along with several other issues, will be among items on the agenda for an SBTPA directors' meeting to be held as soon after Jan. 1 as can be arranged. He is in the process of relocating permanently to Sunset Beach.

Three other directors, all of whom live in the area, told the Beacon they were polled as to their opinion regarding the proposed annexation.

Directors Cletus Waldmiller of Sunset Beach and Alan Russ of Sea Trail, both of whom oppose the annexation effort, said it was Hunt who called them.

"I received a call from the person I imagine sent it out—Minnie Hunt," said Waldmiller. "She asked my opinion and said she was canvassing directors. She said she would send out a letter stating that the majority

of the board opposes the annexation."

Waldmiller said he didn't see the actual letter until his return Tuesday from a trip to Connecticut, but that in general he agreed with its content.

"She expounded on it a little; it would have been better just to state what it was," he said. "And the letter should have been signed."

Hunt, who also serves on the town council as finance officer, could not be reached for comment despite repeated attempts. Neither could another director, Fritz Dove of Charlotte.

Hearing Set

A Food Lion grocery store is proposed on the Seaside tract in question. However, developers say the chain won't build unless it can obtain permits to sell beer and wine. Since Brunswick County is "dry", for a permit to be issued the area must become part of a "wet" municipality. Principals of Long Bay and owners of a strip of mostly undeveloped property from the business tract to the town limits have requested voluntary annexation by Sunset Beach.

A public hearing on the request is scheduled for Monday, Jan. 9, at 7:30 p.m. at the town hall.

The letter urges property owners to either express their views at the upcoming hearing or to mail a coupon-like form to the town council for presentation at the hearing.

Mayor Barber took exception to the letter, saying he wanted "to set the record straight."

Whether there will be further commercial development at the Seaside intersection area isn't the question, he said, rather it is how the unzoned area develops. As it now stands "anything may be built there legally," he said, so long as alcoholic beverages are not sold.

Barber said he views the annexation request as a "golden opportunity" for the town to exercise some control to ensure responsible growth in the area.

"Without annexation we will have no voice in what happens at that intersection," he said. "There will be (See LETTER, Page 2-A)

County Employment Freeze Approved; Backdated Paving Orders Questioned

BY RAHN ADAMS

If you plan to look for a county job after the first of the year, you may as well look elsewhere for the time being.

Brunswick County Commissioners Monday night unanimously approved an indefinite freeze on county employment effective Jan. 1. According to Commissioner Gene Pinkerton, who requested the measure, the freeze will affect only hirings and not firings.

The unscheduled action came near the close of Monday's 1½-hour commissioners' meeting, the first actual decision-making session in which Pinkerton and Kelly Holden participated as newly-elected commissioners. All five board members were present.

The meeting, which was dominated by matters involving the county water system (see related story), also included discussion of three questionable Parks and Recreation purchase orders that were cancelled last month and appointments to numerous local and regional boards.

Commissioners also scheduled two special work sessions to discuss proposed capital projects and personnel reclassifications. On Wednesday, Jan. 4, and Thursday, Jan. 5, the board will meet with County Manager John Smith and other administrative staff members. Both sessions begin at 10 a.m. in the administration building.

Hirings Frozen

Pinkerton's motion to keep county

hirings in check indefinitely—with the exception of "emergency or administrative staff"—was approved without discussion, even though the issue was not listed as an agenda item.

After the meeting, Pinkerton explained that his intent was "to get a chance in some of these (upcoming) workshops to learn what the employment situation is." When asked if he thought there was too much "fat" on the county payroll, he replied, "That's what I want to look at."

According to Smith, the county currently has 425 employees. Most of the positions which were added over the past year went to the county water department, where additional workers were needed to keep up with the water system's growth, he said. "That (a hiring freeze) isn't unusual when you have a change of administration," Smith said. He added, though, that he didn't expect the step to be taken so soon after the new commissioners came on board. The freeze apparently is the first to be adopted here in recent years.

Smith said the commissioners' action was not an indication that the county was in poor financial condition, and he noted that finances now are "good." However, he added, "I think we can reorganize some of our departments and get more efficiency."

Orders Discussed

In another impromptu matter brought to the county board's attention Monday, Commissioner Benny

Ludlum suggested that the county employee who backdated three questionable Parks and Recreation purchase orders last month should be dismissed, even though the orders apparently were written at the request of lame duck Commissioners Chris Chappell and Jim Poole.

No action was taken. Instead, Rabon instructed Smith to investigate the matter further and report to the board on Jan. 3.

The three separate purchase orders, which involved the Shallotte, Waccamaw and Smithville Township District Parks, were for \$81,500 in paving work from a single Shallotte construction company. The funds were to come from Chappell's and Poole's discretionary accounts for park improvements.

The purchase orders, however, were cancelled due to Smith's concern that they possibly violated a state law that requires local governments to bid out projects that exceed \$50,000, since the three orders were processed on the same day and were for the same vendor. The largest of the three projects amounted to \$33,000.

Although the purchase orders were dated Nov. 15, they were submitted to the county finance department on Nov. 28 while Smith and the new board of commissioners attended a state conference in Chapel Hill.

The Shallotte and Waccamaw Park purchase orders were signed by Chappell, while the Smithville Park order was signed by Poole. All three

were approved and co-signed by Parks and Recreation Director Bobby Jones.

Smith told the Beacon Tuesday that the purchase orders apparently were "backdated," as Ludlum maintained. He also confirmed that there had been an apparent reason for backdating the orders, but he declined further comment until the upcoming commissioners' meeting.

County Finance Director Lithia Hahn said Tuesday she knew of no reason for backdating the purchase orders, since Chappell and Poole were authorized to sign them up until they left the board on Dec. 5. She also noted that Jones could have submitted the orders without the two commissioners' approval, due to board action which gave him that authority earlier this year.

Appointments Made

In other matters Monday, Rabon appointed Pinkerton and Holden to represent the commission on various local and regional boards—seats that formerly were held by Poole and Chappell.

Pinkerton will serve on the Emergency Medical Services and Cape Fear Council of Governments boards and the Southeastern Economic Development Commission. Holden will serve on the Parks and Recreation and Aging Advisory boards, and as chairman of the Solid Waste Committee, replacing Ludlum, who resigned the post last month. Ludlum, in turn, will represent (See COUNTY, Page 2-A)

Latest Drug Prosecutions Blend Of Old And New Cases

RAHN ADAMS

Ghosts from local drug investigations present and past reappeared last week, as three more "White Tide" cocaine traffickers and two old-time marijuana smugglers were sentenced in Brunswick County Superior Court.

According to the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office, Jeff Neil Simmons, 25, and Charles Lindberg Smith, 30, both of Shallotte, and Danny Lee Galloway, 30, of Route 2, Supply, all received split sentences from Superior Court Judge Carlton Fellers.

Simmons, Smith and Galloway were among 48 individuals indicted April 18 on drug trafficking charges

in what authorities called "Operation White Tide." The indictments were returned by the second investigative grand jury in Brunswick County and the state.

Also last week, Gail Wesson, 41, of Santa Cruz, Calif., received a five-year prison term in connection with a 1983 marijuana raid near Ocean Isle Beach. And Robert Meggett, 41, of Charleston, S.C., got a suspended sentence for his involvement in the 1982 Brixham II marijuana smuggling case.

'White Tide' Cases

After hearing evidence from SBI Special Agent Corey Duber, Judge Fellers found that all three defendants had provided "substantial

assistance" to investigators—findings which allowed the judge to hand down lighter sentences than required by state drug trafficking laws.

Until those findings were made and charges were consolidated for sentencing, each defendant faced a mandatory minimum sentence of seven years in prison and a \$50,000 fine for each charge to which he pleaded guilty.

Simmons entered guilty pleas Dec. 13 to three counts of conspiracy to traffic in more than 28 grams of cocaine and trafficking in more than 28 grams of cocaine.

He was sentenced to a \$1,000 fine and a suspended five-year prison term, with five years of supervised

probation. Also, he was ordered to serve six months in the Brunswick County Jail, with work release recommended.

Smith had pleaded guilty in July to two counts of conspiracy to traffic in more than 28 grams of cocaine and trafficking in more than 28 grams of cocaine.

He also was sentenced Dec. 13 to a suspended five-year prison term, with five years of supervised probation. He was fined \$500 and was instructed to serve a 90-day jail term.

Galloway pleaded guilty Dec. 14 to two counts of conspiracy to traffic in more than 28 grams of cocaine and four counts of trafficking in more than 28 grams of cocaine.

Like the other two defendants, Galloway was given a suspended five-year sentence, but with three years of probation. He was ordered to pay a \$500 fine and serve four weekends in the Brunswick County Jail.

All three defendants pleaded guilty as part of plea agreements with the 13th District Attorney's office.

Smugglers Sentenced

Both Wesson and Meggett are former fugitives who were located during the past year by authorities. Wesson was found in Washington; Meggett, in New York.

According to the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office, Wesson had pleaded guilty Aug. 31 to conspiracy

to traffic in more than 10,000 pounds of marijuana. In receiving the five-year prison term Dec. 13, she was given credit for 16 months she had already served.

The charge against Wesson stemmed from the May 16, 1983, seizure of more than 14,000 pounds of marijuana worth \$11 million at Lakewood Estates near Ocean Isle Beach. Four other persons were arrested.

Meggett—a former basketball player with the Harlem Globetrotters—initially pleaded guilty Feb. 14, 1983, to conspiracy to traffic in more than 10,000 pounds of marijuana but later did not appear for sentencing.

On Dec. 12, he was sentenced to a (See DRUG, Page 2-A)

Holiday Closings Noted

A number of area government offices and businesses have announced closings over the Christmas holidays, as follows:

•Offices at the Brunswick County Government Center in Bolivia and the Calabash Town Hall will be closed Friday, Dec. 23; Monday, Dec. 26; and Monday, Jan. 2.

•Brunswick County Schools remain closed until Monday, Jan. 2, when classes will resume their normal schedule.

•Sunset Beach Town Hall and Shallotte Town Hall will be closed Monday, Dec. 26, and Monday, Jan. 2.

•Holden Beach Town Hall will be closed Friday, Dec. 23; Monday, Dec. 26; and Tuesday, Dec. 27.

•Ocean Isle Beach Town Hall will be open as usual on Friday, Dec. 23, and Monday, Dec. 26, but will be closed on Saturday, Dec. 24.

•U.S. Postal Service offices will be closed Monday, Dec. 26, and Monday, Jan. 2.

•The Brunswick Beacon office will be closed Friday, Dec. 23, but will be open on Monday, Dec. 26, and operating on its regular publication schedule.