

Man Sentenced On Drug Count

A Columbus County man who was indicted on cocaine trafficking charges in Brunswick County's "Operation White Tide" received a probationary sentence earlier this month in Elizabethtown.

According to court documents on file at the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office, Leon Preston Parker, 25, of Whiteville, pleaded guilty Dec. 7 in Bladen County Superior Court to felonious possession of cocaine.

Judge E. Lynn Johnson sentenced Parker to a suspended five-year prison term, with five years of supervised probation. Also, the defendant was ordered to pay a \$300 fine and perform 150 hours of community service work within 12 months.

In April, Parker was one of 48 individuals indicted on drug trafficking charges by a Brunswick County investigative grand jury. He initially was charged with 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.

Court documents state that the trafficking charges were dismissed in Brunswick County Superior Court because Parker agreed to plead guilty to the lesser possession count. He also agreed to allow his case to be moved from Brunswick County to Bladen County to enter his plea and be sentenced.

The maximum sentence for felonious possession of cocaine is five years in prison. A trafficking charge involving more than 28 grams of cocaine carries a maximum prison term of 15 years and a mandatory minimum term of seven years.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

'Stranded' On Christmas Day

Christmas in the South Brunswick Islands may not match storybook images, but sunny days like Sunday more than compensate for the lack of snow. Just ask Jesse and Stephanie Tipton of Shell Point Village. In

bare feet and short sleeves, they spent Sunday afternoon shelling along the Holden Beach strand. The two moved here from Winston-Salem nine months ago.

Committee May Request New Agency To Coordinate Use Of County Vans

BY RAHN ADAMS

Although its update of the Brunswick County Transportation Development Plan (TDP) won't be completed for several months, a transportation steering committee is "leaning" toward asking county commissioners to set up a new agency to oversee the use of county-owned vans.

The steering committee, which is headed by Don Eggert, a county planner, last week reviewed six alternatives for meeting the county's human services transportation needs. The alternatives were presented to the committee Dec. 19 in Bolivia by a representative of Carter Goble Associates, the Raleigh consulting firm that is completing the

plan.

The eight-member committee is composed of representatives from county departments including Parks and Recreation, Social Services (DSS), Mental Health, Public Health and Planning, as well as Brunswick Community College, the City of Southport and the Town of Long

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Shallotte Sewer Plant Expansion Expected Within Next Few Months

BY DOUG RUTTER

Sometime this winter the first major expansion of Shallotte's five-year-old wastewater treatment plant should be completed, according to the consulting engineer for the project.

Proposed plant improvements will allow the town to lift what has been a long-standing "moratorium" on sewage treatment allocations to large commercial enterprises seeking entrance into town.

"It's real important," Shallotte Mayor Jerry Jones said of the proposed expansion. "If we're going to do any further developing and expanding of the town limits then we've got to do something about it."

J. Finley Boney of Raleigh, engineer for the town's sanitary sewer system, said Tuesday that designs for the expansion have been completed and are awaiting the review of various state agencies. He said he expects no problems getting approval of the plans by late January.

"They've had the plans since about the first of December," he said in a telephone interview. "I don't see why the property improvements won't be approved."

Boney, who designed the original town sewer plant which began operating in the summer of 1983, said the actual work at the plant should take 30 to 60 days to complete. "Certainly, before spring weather gets here, we ought to have an enlarged facility," he said.

The project entails expansion of the spray field. Boney said the town has the equipment and personnel to do most or all of the work involved.

"The town ought to be able to do it for \$30,000 or \$40,000," he said, compared to a cost of between \$50,000 and \$60,000 if a private contractor were hired. Mayor Jones said town employees will likely do at least a portion of the work.

The expanded irrigation field will be situated on part of a 27-acre tract of land purchased earlier this year across from the existing plant on Forest Drive in the northeast section

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Sunset Bridge Repairs Planned

Sunset Beach residents and visitors can expect some traffic delays most of next week when the state Department of Transportation plans to do some repairs to the pontoon bridge.

James Hayes, DOT bridge maintenance supervisor for Brunswick County, said work replacing bad decking boards will begin Tuesday, Jan. 3, and should continue through Friday, Jan. 6.

He said the repairs are not major, but will cause some delays. "Every hour or two we're gonna let everybody through," he said.

A LOOK BACK AT '88

Brunswick County's 'Tides' Turn With Continued Growth

1988 was a year of continued growth in Brunswick County, the state's second fastest-growing county. However, the year was marked by natural and man-made "tides" that respectively swept over positive and negative aspects of Brunswick County life.

The year opened with the county's shellfishermen battling a "Red Tide" which threatened the livelihoods they derived from once abundant coastal waters. And in the spring, "Operation White Tide" impacted another of Brunswick County's lucrative "industries"—the drug trade—by rounding up major cocaine dealers.

The county also was caught up in politics during this presidential election year. While Brunswick County rolled with the flow in state and national elections, the tide turned here in the local school board and county commission races, as voters sought change by rejecting most of the incumbents who sought re-election.

Tide Brings Drug Charges

Ten months after the state's first special investigative grand jury charged 32 individuals with cocaine trafficking in Brunswick County, 48 more people—including a former Ocean Isle Beach town official—were indicted April 18 on cocaine and marijuana trafficking charges in a continuation of what authorities called "Operation White Tide."

Among those indicted was DeCarol Williamson, 37, of Ocean Isle Beach, a local businessman and former town commissioner. Indicted on two cocaine trafficking charges stemming from drug offenses in 1984, Williamson pleaded guilty in May and was sentenced to a two-year prison term and a \$10,000 fine. He was paroled in August, after spending most of his prison term on work release.

Sept. 2 was an eventful day in the continuing "White Tide" saga, as three key defendants were sentenced in Brunswick County Superior Court.

Supply area resident Dale Varnam, who was identified by investigators as the major witness in the county's drug probes, received a suspended 15-year sentence, five years of probation and was fined \$2,000.

Varnam had pleaded guilty in April to 36 cocaine trafficking counts—charges which initially carried a mandatory minimum sentence totaling 532 years in prison and a \$3.8 million fine. He received the lighter sentence because he had assisted investigators for about 1½ years, providing them with information and also "working" undercover.

On the same day as Varnam's sentencing, a Florida couple who admitted supplying cocaine for distribution in Brunswick County received 18-year prison sentences.

Jack Truesdale, 33, and his wife, Donna Truesdale, 39, both of Ft. Myers, Fla., had pleaded guilty in August to cocaine trafficking charges. They were identified as the suppliers for Varnam and Alvin Bryan Willis III of Shallotte, who was sentenced to a 35-year prison term in December 1987.

By year's end, 79 of 85 cases from the county's two special grand jury investigations had been prosecuted, with 77 of the defendants pleading guilty. Two cases were dismissed—one, because the defendant, Robert Dale Clemmons of Supply, died before trial; the other, because the defendant, Francisco Navarro of Ft. Myers,



BEACON FILE PHOTO

SHELLFISHERMEN gathered at the Varnamtown docks during the height of the red tide infestation in February to take part in the state's oyster relay pro-

gram. Protection of resources in Lockwood Folly River was a source of controversy throughout the year.

Trouble At Lockwood Folly

A tide of a different sort, the red tide, infested local oyster and clam beds in the early months of 1988, leaving a bad taste in the mouths of local shellfishermen which became even more bitter as the year progressed.

A crushing blow was dealt over a two-week period in August, when all of Lockwood Folly River was shut down because of pollution. After 153 acres of prime shellfish waters were closed Aug. 17, the remainder of the river closed to harvesting on Aug. 31.

At year's end, however, there was some reprieve for shellfishermen as oyster and clam beds in the lower section of the river were opened and various state environmental agencies committed to helping clean up the river. That commitment followed an October meeting in Bolivia at which Preston Howard, regional supervisor with the N.C. Division of Environmental Management, said a state study and report recommending steps to protect the resources would be completed in late winter.

Shellfishermen Organize

Meanwhile, local shellfishermen and others concerned about water quality organized in 1988 to better fight their battles. Following a meeting in September which featured an encouraging speech from N.C. Coastal Federation President Lena Ritter, the local group Save Our Shellfish was established.

The organization, in part, stemmed from opposition to a proposed marina to be built on the river. Announcement of the marina proposal came shortly before the first river closure in August.

Channel-Side Corporation, developers of the Lockwood Folly golf course community, proposed building a 50-slip marina about 500 feet upstream of Galloway Flats, one of the best shellfishing areas in the county, and applied for the necessary major CAMA permit in April.

Suspicious that the marina and river closure were related, locals vowed to test the waters themselves. Annie Smigiel of Varnamtown, a shellfisherman who later became founding president of SOS, said at the time, "In my personal opinion, I think politics is behind a lot of it. I don't think it's polluted as they say it is."

Opposition to the marina became even greater in late summer when the state shut down the rest of the river. In addition to locals, State Rep. David Redwine and the state Division of Marine Fisheries spoke against the proposal, fearing that it could harm the few remaining resources in the river.

Action on the permit application was delayed in September when it was learned that Channel Side had not submitted adequate information on sewage treatment plans. In October, as water quality of the river became a county election issue, corporate officials announced that they were considering modification of the permit application for construction of a dry dock storage area only. At year's end, however, the original application was still pending, awaiting Channel Side's next move.

For area shellfishermen, the year started out as one of frustration as a toxic algae never seen before in local waters polluted shellfish in January and February.

The red tide, an algae usually seen in more tropical waters, moved to North Carolina via the Gulf Stream. It

crept into local waters in late January, forcing immediate closure of all shellfish beds.

In response to the devastation, state and local relief efforts provided both food and money for hundreds of shellfishermen suddenly put out of work.

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries started up its oyster relocation program in Lockwood Folly River, Shallotte River and Davis Creek and paid shellfishermen to move oysters from polluted areas to unpolluted areas where they could be harvested when the red tide was gone. The state also implemented its "Operation Red Tide" program which paid more than \$22,000 worth of overdue bills.

On a more local level, the Brunswick County Volunteer and Information Center and several areas churches helped feed families hurt by the red tide.

In early February, toxic levels of the algae began dropping dramatically and by mid-February waters were clear. On Feb. 27 local waters reopened to clamming.

Oystermen, however, never got a chance to return to the river after the red tide disappeared. While clams cleaned the tide's poisons from their systems in a relatively short time, oysters never completely purged themselves before the season ended on March 19.

When the season reopened Oct. 16, the river was closed—this time because of pollution—leading Varnamtown oyster dealer Carson Varnam to call opening day his worst in 33 years as a businessman. Varnam was later appointed to the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission to serve an unexpired term which ends Sept. 30, 1989.

Although local figures were not compiled, state estimates suggest that the red tide caused more than \$25 million in economic losses and that fishermen alone lost \$5.5 million. There were about 2,000 shellfishing licenses issued in Brunswick County in 1988, but it is unknown how many families here depend on shellfishing for their income.

When oystermen did venture back into the river, it was only to find much of the oyster stock dead—not because of the red tide. Rather, single-celled microscopic animals called Dermo were flourishing in the high salinity and warm temperatures of two local rivers. But with colder weather at year's end, their numbers were declining.

One of the few bright spots in an otherwise dismal year for shellfishermen, however, came in June when the Marine Fisheries Commission voted to keep mechanical clam harvesters out of local waters. The decision followed seven public hearings along the coast, one of which was held in Bolivia in May.

Oyster's Popular Still

While events took their toll on the local shellfishing industry, locals and tourists still paid homage to the popular oyster.

In October a local celebrity continued her domination in the field of oyster shucking. Cathy Carlisle of Boone's Neck traveled to Leonardtown, Md., Oct. 16 to capture the National Women's Oyster Shucking Championship. One week later, she won her third straight state shucking title at the N.C. Oyster Festival at Seaside. On the same

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