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Brunswick Officials Defend Links With Architectural Firm

BY RAHN ADAMS

County officials say it is merely coincidental that one Pennsylvania man's name keeps popping up in Brunswick County government circles.

The Beacon learned last week that L. Robert Kimball—whose architectural and engineering firm was contracted last year to handle Brunswick County's \$2.25 million mapping program—contributed to the 1988 political campaigns of four incumbent candidates, two of whom were re-elected to county offices last November. The contributions apparently were legal.

County commissioners are considering hiring the Ebensburg, Pa., firm's subsidiary—Kimball Associates P.A. of Raleigh—to design a new Social Services building and addition to the county jail. A company architect made a proposal to commissioners last week.

"I don't owe them a thing in the world, any more than I would someone who gave me \$5."

—Frankie Rabon, Chairman Brunswick Commissioners

One other link is that Brunswick County Manager John T. Smith's last employer before coming to work here in September 1987 was L. Robert Kimball & Associates.

In response to recent rumors questioning the county's relationship with the company, county officials have denied speculation that L. Robert Kimball & Associates has enjoyed preferential treatment due to the campaign contributions or Smith's former position with the firm.

Kimball could not be reached for comment Monday at his Ebensburg office; his secretary said he was "out of town on vacation." Kimball Associates Vice President Gerald Kabala, who manages the company's Raleigh office, said Tuesday he recommended the contributions because "I truly liked those folks (the incumbent candidates) down there."

Campaign Contributions

According to Kabala and the candidates themselves, L. Robert Kimball personally made \$1,000

contributions last spring to the re-election campaigns of incumbent Commissioners Frankie Rabon, Chris Chappell and Jim Poole, and incumbent Register of Deeds Robert Robinson, whose office is directly involved in the county mapping program.

Kabala said the four campaign donations here were the only county-level contributions that Kimball made last year in North Carolina and only the second ones he has ever made in this state. "We don't generally go around spreading money around," he said.

"I thought that helping those people would help continue on with the growth in Brunswick County," Kabala added, particularly noting recent strides the county has made with its water system and district parks.

When questioned last week by the Beacon, (See BRUNSWICK, Page 2-A)



VISITORS FROM AS FAR AWAY as California attended the Easter sunrise service near Holden Beach Fishing Pier led by the Rev. Franklin Meyers of

Sabbath Home Baptist Church. A heavy fog broke just before the start of the service, which drew approximately 600 people.

Legislative Panel Was To Vote Wednesday On Incorporation Bill

BY DOUG RUTTER

Members of a state legislative committee were expected to vote Wednesday on a bill which would allow for incorporation of the Carolina Shores community in southwestern Brunswick County.

After hearing local support and opposition to the bill last Wednesday, the Local Government II Committee was to make its recommendation on the proposal this week, according to State Rep. Edith Lutz of Lawndale, chairperson of the committee.

She said following last week's discussion that she had no idea how the vote would turn out. If the bill passes the committee, Mrs. Lutz said it would then go before a larger, 35-member government committee before going to the General Assembly.

Attending last week's committee meeting were seven residents of Carolina Shores and the mayor of the neighboring Town of Calabash, which opposes the proposed incorporation.

Robert Cook, president of the Carolina Shores Property Owners Association, said he presented to the committee a position paper and other documents indicating the time frame of the community's move to incorporate.

He said the local contingent did not receive any indication on how the committee viewed the bill. "We weren't left with any impression," said Cook.

Also attending from the community were Robert Noe, manager of the POA; Al Smith, board of directors member; Pete Sperry, past POA president; Les Meader, chairman of the incorporation committee; and citizens George Taubel and Jon Sanborn.

Calabash Mayor Doug Simmons also attended last week's meeting, to speak in opposition to the incorporation bill on behalf of the town.

Simmons said Monday he told members of the legislative committee that incorporation would restrict the future growth of Calabash, a town currently looking to expand its corporate limits through annexation.

The mayor noted that at least 70 percent of Carolina Shores falls under the extraterritorial jurisdiction of Calabash, and all of the golf course subdivision is included in a resolution of consideration for annexation adopted last March.

Simmons also said he had no idea how the committee may vote on the bill. "From what I gather, it's going to be a while to get it through the House and Senate," he noted.

The N.C. League of Municipalities, which had earlier been leaning toward opposition of the incorporation bill, has decided not to take a specific position on the proposal, said staff attorney Andy Romanet.

League officials had proposed joining the Town of Calabash in opposing the bill because of the existing town's (See INCORPORATION, Page 2-A)

Easter Visitors Give Area Early Spring Transfusion

An Easter transfusion of sunshine and tourists set the South Brunswick Islands buzzing over the holiday weekend.

While no estimates were available yet on the number of visitors in the area, most local business people said the crowds were good, though lighter than last year when the holiday fell later in the season.

Susanne Sartelle, executive vice president of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber, said from conversations last week with several area real estate agents that reservations appeared to be "on par."

"They didn't really expect a big increase because of Easter being early," she added.

An early Easter always makes for fewer rentals, agreed Debbie Fox at Sloane Realty on Ocean Isle Beach. Still, rentals this past weekend were less than the firm had hoped for, though overall traffic at the beach was "really good."

"It turned out to be a good weekend," said Ms. Fox, "but it could have been better."

With good weather and many public schools out across the state, she said week-long rental traffic for the agency will about the same as over the weekend.

Ms. Fox and other observers said that island property owners and day visitors accounted for much of the

steady stream across the high-rise bridges to Ocean Isle and Holden beaches and the single-lane pontoon bridge to Sunset Beach.

While rentals were less than hoped for at Sloane Realty, expectations of a slow weekend were surpassed at Ocean Isle's Cooke Realty.

"We were taken by surprise," said Chauncey Cooke, who added that the early holiday had no apparent effect on rentals.

He said the agency rented about 90 percent of the cottages it had available, and there were no cancellations despite last week's wet beginning. Sales were also "red hot," said Cooke, indicating that a good spring and summer tourist season is on the way.

"It's like the weather," he added. "On a scale from one to 10, I'd have to say it was a 10."

At Holden Beach, "Beautiful," was the one-word description offered by Police Chief Raymond Simpson for the early holiday. "There weren't as many people as last year," he said, but those who came enjoyed the good weather and didn't get into trouble. "I believe the boys wrote three parking tickets—three!"

After last week's rain, Simpson said he enjoyed working over the weekend. "We had a great weekend. The weather was beautiful and the temperatures weren't bad."

The weekend weather was undeniably spectacular, but last week's rain apparently kept some people away from Holden Beach.

Kerry Cox of Brunswickland Realty reported a mediocre weekend in terms of rentals, with about 80 percent occupancy.

She blamed the low turnout on the combination of an early holiday and last week's weather, and noted that many of the people who rented homes decided to do so at the last minute after hearing the weekend weather report.

"It's just back to normal now, but it was a pretty busy weekend," she said.

At Betty's Waterfront Seafood Restaurant, business was down from last Easter weekend but was picking early this week.

Manager Bolena Laws said Tuesday, "We were busy last night, and it looks like we're going to be busy tonight."

Conditions seemed much better down the road at Sunset Beach, where a restaurant manager and real estate representative reported a great weekend and high hopes for the season.

"We had a fantastic weekend, and it hasn't stopped," said Joann Stubbert of Sunset Properties, who said the agency rented nearly all of its available homes over the weekend.

She speculated that the nice weather offset any effect of the early Easter holiday. "Mother Nature has sure cooperated."

The Italian Fisherman Restaurant on Sunset Boulevard enjoyed a full house over the weekend with no complaints from manager David Schweitzer.

"Easter weekend is always a good weekend," he said, adding that the early holiday did not seem to have any impact.

Calabash Merchants Association President Tony Belk said the town's restaurant district was "bustling" Friday and Saturday night, followed by a lull on Sunday.

Speaking for his own convenience store business, he said business was "moderate" and postulated that bad weather in the week might have had some would-be visitors "jittery."

"We did about what we expected, no blow out," he concluded.

Belk attributed the weekend performance in part to a "deliberate campaign" by Myrtle Beach/North Myrtle Beach, S.C. to keep Grand Strand vacationers across the state line in Horry County. "I think they did a good job of it this weekend."

He said the merchants' association and South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce are working (See EASTER, Page 2-A)

Shalotte Suspends Town Clerk

BY DOUG RUTTER

Shalotte Aldermen are expected to decide next week on the employment status of Town Clerk Cynthia Long, who was suspended last week without pay.

No cause was given for the suspension last Wednesday pending a hearing on the clerk's continued employment. Mrs. Long has served as town clerk since July 7, 1982.

As of Tuesday, a special hearing date had not been set. Mayor Jerry Jones said it would probably be held

during the next regular meeting on April 5.

Aldermen David Gause, who made the motion during last Wednesday's regular meeting to suspend the clerk, and Wilton Harrelson, who seconded the motion, refused comment. So did Mayor Jones, Mayor Pro Tem Paul Wayne Reeves and Alderman Jody Simmons. Board member Sarah Tripp was absent last week.

Jones referred all questions to the town attorney, who also refused to provide details on the action. "Matters of personnel are very confidential," said attorney Mark Lewis, who added that divulging personnel records is a misdemeanor.

Mrs. Long, who has been employed by the town for almost 15 years including her tenure as clerk, also declined comment. She currently earns an annual salary of \$17,160.

Her suspension followed a one-hour, 20-minute executive session called to discuss personnel matters. During the closed-door session, the town clerk was called in on two different occasions.

Town attorney Lewis said the hear-

ing will likely be in executive session, but that any action will have to be taken in open session.

Mayor Jones said that while the hearing is not required under town personnel policy, it was recommended by the town attorney. He said the hearing is meant to allow Mrs. Long the opportunity to speak on her own behalf.

Meanwhile, Assistant Clerk Mary Etta Hewett is serving as interim town clerk. She has worked in town hall for nearly seven years.

Drug Trafficker's Dog Will Be Sold To Benefit Schools

BY RAHN ADAMS

A hunting dog that has been serving time at the Brunswick County Animal Shelter for the past 15 months will be granted "work release" Friday when it is sold at public auction.

According to Brunswick County Chief Civil Deputy Liston Hawes, the three- to four-year-old trained blue tick coon hound—once owned by convicted cocaine trafficker Larry Charles Green of Starke, Fla.—was taken to the animal shelter in December 1987 after Green and two other Florida men were arrested in an SBI sting operation at Pearl Golf Links near Calabash.

Brunswick County Narcotics Officer Mike Speck explained that the animal was seized by authorities because it was found in the same vehicle that had transported a kilogram of cocaine here from Florida.

Also, the three drug suspects "weren't in a position to do anything with the dog," Speck noted.

Green pleaded guilty to cocaine trafficking charges and was sentenced to a five-year prison term in February. At the sentencing hearing in Bolivia, Superior Court Judge Henry V. Barnette Jr. also ordered that Green's dog be sold.

Proceeds above the cost of keeping the dog at the animal shelter will go to the Brunswick County Board of Education, Hawes said. However, he added that the dog has run up quite a bill—around \$1,000—during its 15-month stay at the county facility off N.C. 211 south of Supply.

While the dog is believed to be AKC registered, authorities do not have its registration papers, Hawes said. As a result, the animal will probably sell for considerably less than its value. Hawes said a trained blue tick coon hound is worth up to \$5,000.

Green reportedly bought the dog in western North Carolina. Speck said it is in good physical condition, although it has not been "run" since it was placed in the shelter. "For someone who hunts, it would make a good buy," Speck said.

Hawes will conduct the auction Friday at 2 p.m., at the animal shelter. The top bidder will be required to pay for the dog in full—in cash or by certified check—at the time of the sale.