

# Holden Beach Voters Set To Decide Referendum Issue

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach officials are well aware there's some opposition to a proposed change in the town's form of government, but still believe voters will support the switch to a town manager format in a referendum next Tuesday.

Town commissioners, who have pushed hard for an amendment to the town charter since last fall, are confident that voters will approve the proposed switch from a mayor/council to council/manager format, according to Mayor Pro Tem Gil Bass.

"We feel like it will pass," he said. "There are a few

against it, but the majority are in favor of the change."

As of Monday, town and county election officials did not have an exact count on the number of voters registered for the May 2 special election. Brunswick County Elections Supervisor Lynda Britt said town election officials were expected to purge their registration books this week to match county books.

Charlotte Pringle, chairperson of the town elections board, said she is hoping for at least a 50 percent turnout rate next Tuesday, when polls at town hall will be open from 6:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m.

"There is some interest in this, but how much I

don't know," she said. "We don't have too many of these special elections, so it's hard to get a feel for it."

The last special election at Holden Beach was held May 5, 1987. At that time, less than one third of the town's 359 registered voters turned out to narrowly pass a referendum that shortened the terms of town commissioners from four to two years.

Bass said of next week's election, "I feel like we'll have a good turnout because we sent out some information on it."

The town mailed a letter last week to all registered voters reminding them of the upcoming election and

providing information on the proposed amendment to the town charter.

Also, officials had earlier mailed a pamphlet comparing the two forms of government and held a public hearing last November during which a representative from the N.C. League of Municipalities discussed the two systems.

Under the existing form of government, town commissioners have responsibilities as both administrators and policy-makers. With a council/manager format, the board would be able to concentrate solely on for-

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NEW COUNTY PARTY CHAIRMAN Glen Peterson (right) talks with fellow Democrat Tom Simmons dur-

ing the Brunswick County Democratic Party's convention Saturday afternoon in Bolivia.

## RESOLUTIONS ADDRESS DRUG LAWS

### Peterson Heads Local Democrats; Tells Convention To 'Start Now'

BY RAHN ADAMS

Unaccustomed to the comeback trail, Brunswick County Democrats have taken their first steps toward revitalizing the local party by handing the reins of leadership to a former chairman.

Leland attorney Glen Peterson, who headed the party six years ago, was elected by acclamation to his second two-year term as chairman Saturday. He replaces W.A. "Bill" Stanley of Shallotte, who did not seek re-election to the post he has held for the past two years.

"We've got to bring all our people back in," Peterson said, urging grassroots involvement in every precinct. "We can't afford to wait a day longer. We need to start now."

Approximately 200 local Democrats attended the three-hour county convention Saturday afternoon in Bolivia. Other speakers included State Rep. E. David Redwine of Shallotte and former state legislator and judge Ray Walton of Southport—both of whom also encouraged Democrats to rebound from last fall's political losses by preparing for next year's races.

Last November, Brunswick County

Republicans made their best showing since 1972 by sweeping three county commission races, claiming two seats formerly held by Democrats. In the 1990 election, the two remaining slots on the county board—now held by Democrats Grace Beasley and Benny Ludlum—will be on the line.

Redwine reminded the gathering of a statement reportedly made at this spring's county GOP convention that in 10 years no Democrats will be elected in Brunswick County. "The challenge to us is to see that that doesn't happen," Redwine said. He added that Democrats can no longer afford to have "dogfights" among themselves, due to Republican gains in the county.

Walton blamed complacency as the local party's downfall. "We have a problem, and the first thing we have to do is acknowledge it, then do something about it," he said. "We have become complacent. We have a lot more Democrats in Brunswick County than we'll ever have Republicans, I hope, but we cannot be complacent."

Describing himself as the "oldest rat in the barn," Walton also emphasized the value of turning to older

party members like himself for political advice. "There are a lot of us out there, and you need our help," he said.

Peterson was the only individual to actively seek the chairmanship. Ronald Hewett of Shallotte, a sergeant with the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, also was nominated but declined the nomination.

Other new officers elected to two-year terms Saturday included First Vice Chairman May Moore of Yaupon Beach; Second Vice Chairman Moses Stanley of Grissetown; Third Vice Chairman Kathy Rich of Belville; Secretary Barbara Holcombe of Supply; and Treasurer Billy Gibson of Holden Beach.

Former Commissioner Chris Chappell of Calabash and Irene Hankins of Southport were elected to serve as Brunswick County representatives on the state Democratic Executive Committee.

Also, 30 individuals volunteered to serve as delegates to the party's upcoming district convention; the meeting date and place had been set as of Saturday. Local delegates are (See PETERSON, Page 2-A)

## Brunswick Drug Cases Lead Shaw To Seek Floor On 'Minimum' Sentences

BY RAHN ADAMS

After seeing nearly one in four of Brunswick County's investigative grand jury defendants receive probationary sentences, State Sen. Robert Shaw wants to make sure convicted drug traffickers spend time behind bars, whether they cooperate with lawmen or not.

Shaw, a Greensboro resident and Holden Beach property owner, last week introduced legislation to require that drug traffickers actively serve at least 10 percent of the mandatory minimum sentences of the offenses for which they are convicted. Drug dealers who are convicted of offenses whose minimum terms amount to more than 100 years would have to serve at least an additional five percent of the second 100 years they face.

"This is a mandatory sentencing bill," Shaw said last Wednesday, indicating that his legislation is in response to the current loophole in the state's drug trafficking laws that allows defendants to avoid mandatory minimum sentences by providing "substantial assistance" to the state.

The senator explained that he conceived the proposed amendment after following the prosecution of drug traffickers in Brunswick County, where 85 individuals have been indicted on mainly cocaine trafficking charges by investigative grand juries over the past two years.

According to 13th District Attorney Michael Easley, who also is president of the N.C. Conference of District Attorneys, investigative grand juries in Bladen and Cumberland counties have followed Brunswick's lead and have returned indictments in the past year. Investigative grand jury probes also are now underway in at least five other counties, he added.

The investigations across the state are coordinated by two special assistant district attorneys. Special Assistant DA William Wolak, a former SBI drug agent, is assigned to Easley's office in Bolivia but also works with investigative grand juries in other counties.

Despite a high conviction rate in Brunswick County, Shaw feels the

"(The public) can't believe it . . . They don't know this is going on."

—Sen. Robert Shaw

general public is often "shocked" when major drug dealers are sentenced to little or no active prison time (see related story). "They can't believe it," he said, adding that people—including legislators—in other parts of the state "don't know this is going on."

Under current laws, an individual who is convicted of trafficking in more than 400 grams of cocaine, for example, faces an active prison term of at least 35 years; trafficking in more than 200 grams of cocaine, at least 14 years; and trafficking in more than 28 grams, at least seven years.

However, the law now provides that a judge may impose a lighter sentence or suspend the prison term and place the defendant on probation, "when such person has, to the best of (the judge's) knowledge, provided substantial assistance in the identification, arrest or conviction of any accomplices, accessories, co-conspirators or principals . . ."

Of the 76 investigative grand jury defendants fully prosecuted so far in Brunswick County—all of whom pleaded guilty—judges made no finding of substantial assistance in only two cases—those of Alvin Bryan Willis III of Shallotte and Rocky Lee Robinson of Supply. The other 74 defendants received sentences that ranged from probation with no active prison time to 25 years in prison.

Shaw's bill would amend the present law to require a minimum amount of active prison time for a drug trafficker "regardless of whether the person has given substantial assistance . . ." If ratified, the amendment would become effective Oct. 1 and would apply to offenses occurring on or after that date.

Public disillusionment with the substantial assistance provision was evident Saturday at the Brunswick County Democratic Convention, as local Democrats overwhelmingly adopted a resolution asking State

Rep. E. David Redwine of Brunswick County to sponsor legislation to remove the provision from drug trafficking laws. Another resolution that passed supports the discontinuation of investigative grand juries due to their "unfairness."

Redwine said after the convention that he will "ask around in the General Assembly and see what the feeling is," as to whether or not he will follow through on the resolutions. He noted, though, that the deadline for filing such bills this session has passed.

In response to Shaw's proposed legislation, Easley pointed out that at least 10 judges have sentenced the 76 defendants so far and that "95 percent" of their sentences were less than what the district attorney's office requested. Easley and Wolak consistently have asked for no less than split sentences—a combination of active and suspended prison time—in the investigative grand jury cases.

"I agree with the concept," Easley said of Shaw's proposal. "I have not recommended probation for one drug trafficker yet . . . I share his (Shaw's) concerns. It's a source of frustration for me."

Still, Easley doesn't blame the judiciary for what the public may view as overly lenient sentences in some cases. "I've got confidence that the judges are trying to do the right thing," Easley said, "although I disagree with some of the sentences."

Shaw generally described individual judges in Brunswick County Superior Court as having been tough to moderate to lenient in the drug sentences they have handed down. "This (amendment) would make moderate-conservatives out of all of them," he said.

Shaw and Easley both speculated, though, that the bill—now in a Senate judiciary committee—will encounter considerable opposition from (See DRUG, Page 2-A)

## HERITAGE DAY HONOREE

### Rourk Witnessed, Sparked Changes In His Community

BY DOUG RUTTER

When Malcolm Henderson Rourk began practicing medicine in Brunswick County 55 years ago, there were no golf courses, no paved roadways and the population was holding steady at approximately 22,000.

Now there are a dozen golf courses with more on the way, more than 585 miles of paved roadway and the population has ballooned to nearly 57,000 permanent residents.

But over the years, resort development, a boom in the population and street improvements are just three areas in which Dr. Rourk has noticed changes—changes he said people would have to see for themselves to believe.

As a long-time resident of Shallotte and one who had

practiced medicine there for more than a quarter of a century, the 85-year-old has particularly noticed change in his own back yard.

"Nobody believes what's happened at Shallotte," he said during an interview last week at his home on N.C. 179. "Between blue and white I reckon is the difference between Shallotte now and then."

Rourk and his family have played a key part in bringing about many of the positive changes that have occurred over the past 40 years.

After moving to Shallotte for good in 1946, Rourk donated land on what is now U.S. 17 that houses the Shallotte Senior Citizens Center, N.C. National Guard Armory, West Brunswick Branch Library and Shallotte Masonic Lodge.

The Rourks also donated land for the old Shallotte High School on N.C. 179—where Shallotte Middle School now stands—and for the adjacent football field that was

named in Rourk's honor.

The family's contributions were aimed at improving the educational system, he said. "We wanted to see the school expand, and they didn't have money to buy land."

For his personal donations of the land for the football field and uniforms, Rourk has received a number of game balls that include a tattered basketball signed by players of the Shallotte High School state championship team of 1957.

On Friday, he will be honored at Shallotte Middle School as part of the North Carolina Heritage Day celebration. The special program will begin at 9 a.m.

With all of his generosity toward education, Rourk is perhaps most proud of his association with the Shallotte Lions Club that he helped charter in 1946. Lions are involved in a number of community projects, but are best known for their work with those who have sight problems.

Along with Shallotte businessman Woodrow Russ, Rourk is one of two living charter members of the local club, and he is the only man from Brunswick County ever to serve as an International Director of Lions.

"The Lions Club is the finest organization on this Earth if people would just realize it," he said proudly. "I don't know what this county would have amounted to without Lions."

He is also a former chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Education and was one of the original trustees of Southeastern Community College appointed by the governor.

Speaking of Rourk's contributions to the area, fellow Lion Woodrow Russ said simply, "He's meant more to the community than any other man that's ever been in Brunswick County."

The youngest of five children, Rourk was born in (See ROURK, Page 2-A)