



STAFF PHOTO BY RAHN ADAMS

A record-setting high temperature Saturday was all the more reason for local residents and vacationers alike to flock to Ocean Isle (above) and other beaches in the South Brunswick Islands for the Memorial Day weekend.

South Brunswick Islands Heat Up!
Local meteorologist Jackson Canady reported the mercury rose to 94 degrees Saturday at Shalotte Point, with slightly higher readings reported elsewhere in the Shalotte area. The National Weather Service office in

Wilmington reported a 96-degree high temperature Saturday, which broke a 92-degree record set in 1918.

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Memorial Day Observed

Brunswick County Veterans Services Officer Jess Parker (right, background) adds the name of the late Harry Langdon Pigott, a local World War I veteran who died in France in 1918, to the Brunswick County Honor Roll of Valor during a Memorial Day service Monday morning near the Veterans Memorial at the county complex in Bolivia. About 40 individuals attend-

ed the 15-minute ceremony, which was conducted by members of the Holden Beach Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8866. The Holden Beach VFW Ladies Auxiliary, Calabash VFW Post 7288 Ladies Auxiliary and a West Brunswick High School JROTC Color Guard also participated in the service.

Good Weather, Good Crowds Make Weekend A Big Success

BY SUSAN USHER

Sunny faces sent good signals throughout the South Brunswick Islands over what local business people termed the best Memorial Day weekend they could recall.

Area business managers were smiling themselves Tuesday when interviewed by telephone. The long Memorial Day weekend is a traditional indicator of the main summer season to follow.

Manager Don Safrin said Sunset Beach Grocery was "extremely busy" this weekend serving what appeared to be more people than were around this time a year ago.

"From what all the Realtors tell us down here, we're looking for a bang-up year," he said.

The message was similar at other area beaches and shopping meccas. "Rusty" Kirby of Sizzling Sirloin Steakhouse in Shalotte described business as "great every night," adding he's looking for a big season in 1989.

At Gogas of Shalotte, Rose Jinwright said business Friday and

Saturday nights was "very steady and busy," with sales for the two nights totaling about \$11,500.

The news was equally good from Nancy Sholar, a part-time employee at Elizabeth Newman's Boutique in Calabash. "We had a very good weekend and I believe the whole town of Calabash did," she said.

"We had good business all weekend, a lot of people around. Everybody I've talked with said the same."

At Ocean Isle Beach, Mayor Betty Williamson, whose family owns Williamson Realty, told the Beacon, "We probably had the biggest Memorial Day weekend we've ever had. I can't remember when we've had a such a large crowd. I think it may be partly because Easter was so early this year. I've talked with the other Realtors and they agree."

The crowds may have been large, but they were also orderly, she said, with only typical "tourist" problems such as loud music reported.

She and Allan Dameron of Alan Holden Realty at Holden Beach described the Memorial Day crowds

as "happy," with both giving excellent weather the large share of credit.

"It was a very happy crowd," said Dameron, who is also president of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce. "Even those who had problems were taking them lightly, except those whose air conditioning wasn't working—they were a little anxious. But we didn't hear one negative word."

As at Ocean Isle, Dameron said other merchants on the beach are reporting "one of their best Memorial Day weekends ever."

And on the causeway during the evenings business parking lots were full, he noted. "The people were getting out and enjoying themselves."

Alan Holden Realty had rented out all of its units with air-conditioning and most of those without. Even with approximately 30 additional units this year, rentals were up about 5 percent for the holiday, he said, at about 85 percent.

Area golf courses also reported a busy weekend, noted Dameron.

Suspended County Department Head Dismissed

BY RAHN ADAMS

One month after she pleaded guilty to forging a \$50,000 county check, the director of Brunswick County's Computer Services Department was fired May 18 by County Manager John T. Smith.

Smith told the Beacon last week that Regina M. McKeithan, 45, of Bolivia, was notified of her dismissal by registered mail. He said the stated reason for her firing was for "conduct unbecoming a county employee"—a cause for dismissal listed in the county's personnel

policy.

The county manager indicated that he delayed firing Mrs. McKeithan in order to give the county employee of 16½ years an opportunity to voluntarily resign. "I think I'd given her ample time to resign," Smith said, in reference to the timing of his action.

Mrs. McKeithan was suspended without pay in early February, after she was accused of forging a check last May to buy \$50,667.63 in unauthorized computer equipment for her department. In April, she pleaded guilty in Brunswick County

Superior Court and received a suspended sentence.

Brunswick County Commissioners reviewed the former department head's case during a May 1 executive session in Bolivia. The board announced no action after meeting with her behind closed doors for 45 minutes. Mrs. McKeithan requested the private conference, which did not include Smith.

A proposed county budget that Smith presented to commissioners three days before firing Mrs. McKeithan (See COUNTY, Page 2-A)

Citizens Protest Tax Rate Increase Proposed On County Property

BY RAHN ADAMS

Only time—30 days to be exact—will tell if the pleas, protests and threats of taxpayers Tuesday were enough to sway Brunswick County Commissioners against raising the property tax rate to cover a proposed \$33 million county budget.

More than 60 citizens attended the 1¼-hour budget hearing Tuesday night in Bolivia. Some 20 speakers addressed Commissioners Benny Ludlum, Kelly Holden and Gene Pinkerton, and County Manager John T. Smith, whose proposed budget recommends a 10-cent tax rate hike to 64½ cents.

Pinkerton, who chaired the hearing, said Commission Chairman Frankie Rabon was called away to deal with a "problem" at Federal Paper Board Company, where Rabon is a supervisor. Rabon had attended a three-hour budget session Tuesday afternoon. Pinkerton said Commissioner Grace Beasley was absent due to illness.

The afternoon session dealt with topics—funding for Brunswick County Public Schools, and the county Health and Social Services departments—that were addressed by speakers at the hearing, whether directly or indirectly.

Led by Superintendent John Kaufhold, school officials spent two hours outlining their \$6.8 million current expense and \$5.2 million capital outlay budget requests to commissioners. Smith has recommended giving the schools \$6.1 million for current expenses and approximately \$6 million for capital outlay, which includes \$5.5 million for a new elementary school near Supply.

Health Director Michael Rhodes briefed the board on his department's need for an additional \$36,086 in funds that Smith had deleted from various Health Department budgets. There was no discussion of the local Board of Health's recommendation to raise environmental health site evaluation fees, to cover additional funds re-

quested by the department. That proposal is included in Smith's recommended budget.

Also, Social Services Director Jamie Orrock and Smith explained to commissioners that a proposed \$1.5 million Social Services Building has, in fact, become state-mandated. The state has given the county 30 days to offer a definite plan to relieve overcrowding in Social Services or else lose about \$75,000 per year in administrative reimbursements.

The proposed new Social Services Building and elementary school are part of a five-year, \$18 million capital improvements program that Smith has proposed to begin funding with \$3.8 million in the 1989-90 budget.

While most of the speakers Tuesday simply voiced opposition to higher taxes, several citizens specifically addressed those two proposed capital projects.

Shalotte resident Don Hege, who presented commissioners with petitions containing at least 200 signatures opposing a tax hike, asked, "Why increase Social Services? Why spend that money? . . . If there has to be a tax increase, make it as small as possible."

Tom Pope of Thomasboro questioned the high estimated cost of the DSS project as well as the need for a new school. "Statistics tell us that throwing money at education is not the way to improve education," he said, adding that the local school system needs "better accountability" in dealing with its finances.

Bill Boyd of Caswell Beach denounced the proposed tax rate hike and encouraged commissioners to find revenue sources other than the "deep pockets" of taxpayers. Boyd supported an informal proposal by the county Utility Operations Board's consulting engineers to raise the wholesale water rate by 14 cents to cover additional needs. He also suggested that the commissioners explore fee increases, such as the ones recommended by the Health Department.

Perhaps the biggest attention-getters at Tuesday's hearing were Bolivia Volunteer Fire Department Chief Wayne Bowling and Ocean Isle Beach developer Odell Williamson.

Bowling prefaced his comments by handing the three commissioners keys to the Bolivia fire station, then informed the board that the members of his department planned to resign July 1, if the county does not give Bolivia VFD enough funds to operate. The department has requested \$20,000; however, the proposed budget allocates only \$10,500 each for Bolivia VFD and all other fire departments and rescue squads in the county.

The fire chief said that in addition to the 500 to 1,000 hours his firefighters volunteers per year, they must raise about \$200 per week to meet operating needs. "We don't mind begging," Bowling said, "but give us a break."

Williamson, the largest individual taxpayer in the county, chided commissioners for considering raising taxes, even though "everywhere I look, I see new tax valuations," he said, referring to the county's on-going growth.

The developer also suggested to Commissioners Holden and Pinkerton that they were put into office last fall because last year's board raised the tax rate by four cents to the current 54½-cent rate. "Four years isn't that long," Williamson told the pair. "You can bet your life you will be held accountable."

In reference to the capital improvements plan, Williamson noted, "Rome was not built in a day, and you don't have to do all this building all at once."

Later, V.A. Creech of Leland encouraged the board to use common sense and prudence in adopting the budget. He also suggested that the board call for a bond referendum on the capital projects. "The people of Brunswick County will make the right decision," he said, "if you give them the facts."

Annexation Tops Holden Agenda

Holden Beach Commissioners will have a chance to vote on mainland annexation and will hear the long-awaited results of a wastewater needs study when they meet Monday, June 5, at 7 p.m. in town hall.

Commissioners are considering annexation of approximately 67 acres of land north of the Holden Beach Bridge that includes the commercial causeway and residential property on both sides. Most of the public comment on the proposal has been against annexation.

Town Manager Gus Ulrich said last week that a survey of the area proposed for annexation, which is required before the town board can adopt an annexation ordinance, would be completed in time for the meeting. "They'll certainly have the opportunity to vote on it," he said. "Whether they will or not is another question."

Under state law, the commission must vote on the annexation proposal within 90 days of the public hearing, meaning board members could delay action no later than July 9.

Mayor John Tandy said Monday he's not sure whether or not the town board will act on the annexation

proposal next week, but noted that he hopes the vote is unanimous whenever it is taken. "They may wait til the ninth hour. I don't know."

Also at next week's meeting, commissioners will review a final wastewater needs study report with consulting engineer Jay Houston of Houston and Associates of Shalotte.

The firm has been working since last summer to determine if there are pollution problems on the island and to develop alternatives for wastewater treatment.

Commissioners authorized the \$40,000 study last June and have extended the deadline for the final report three times. The original deadline was Dec. 19, 1988.

Houston said Monday members of the town board would be presented with a copy of the report prior to next week's meeting. He refused to comment on the findings of the study before the meeting.

The June 5 meeting will open with a public hearing on the proposed budget for the 1989-90 fiscal year. (See related story this issue.)