

Shallotte's Town Clerk Started With BTC Degree

BY DOUG RUTTER

Prominently displayed on the yellow-paneled wall behind her desk is a framed degree from Brunswick Technical College.

The wall hanging is positioned to catch the eye of anyone who walks into Mary Etta Hewett's office in Shallotte Town Hall. She wants everyone to know that the degree was a stepping stone to her position as town clerk.

After nearly seven years employment with the town, the 42-year-old Supply resident was appointed town clerk April 5 following the resignation of the former clerk.

A native of Marion, S. C., Mrs. Hewett married a Brunswick County native, Danny Hewett, in 1965. They have two daughters—Karen, 22, and Katherine, 13.

Mrs. Hewett spent 15 years as a homemaker, staying with her children until both were of school age. Then, in 1980, she enrolled in the executive secretary program in 1980 at what was then called Brunswick Technical College, now Brunswick Community College.

Although she had been out of high school for more than 16 years, Mrs. Hewett said her return to school was not difficult because of the atmosphere at the local college. Small classes and friendly teachers and students made her two years there very fulfilling, she said.

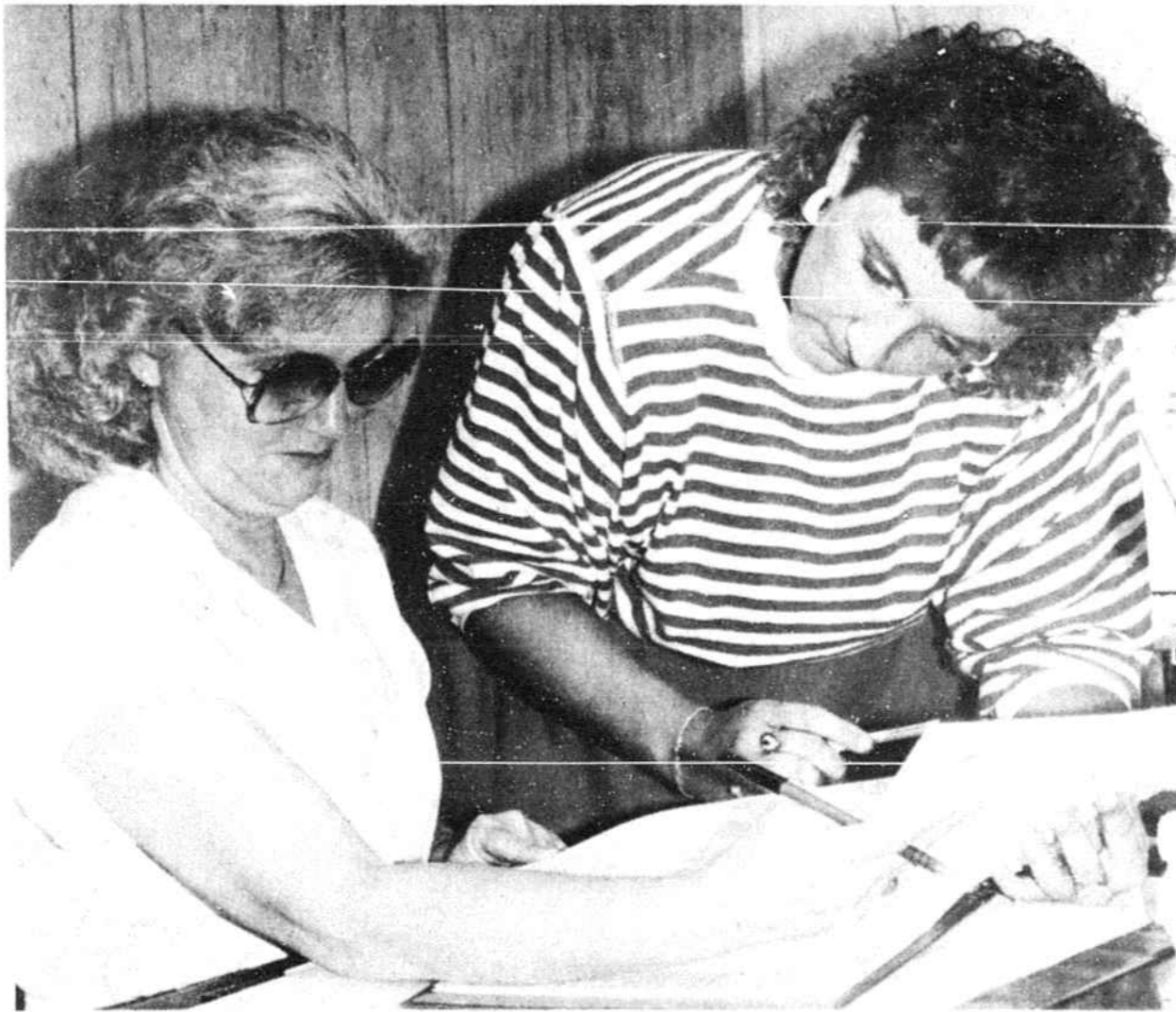
"I thoroughly enjoyed going back to school. I met a lot of new people and I became independent," she said. "It was a very enriching experience."

Mrs. Hewett said she decided to return to school for an associate degree to ensure a good future for her family. She said all women—whether they are married or not—need to have the ability to provide for their families.

Two years of classes and working part-time in the college's public information and admissions offices prepared her for her job as town secretary of Shallotte, she said, which she can promptly tell you she took over on July 7, 1982.

"After the first week I was hooked," she said of her job with the town. "There are very few people who can say they love their job. But the job that I'm doing, I have loved it since day one."

In her nearly seven years as secretary, she said she learned or was exposed to all of the duties she now has as town clerk and finance officer. These include the



SHALLOTTE TOWN CLERK MARY ETTA HEWETT, left, reviews a list of vehicle registration numbers with co-worker Sandy Hewett.

STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

handling of payroll, financial reports and other budgetary matters; serving as clerk to the town board of aldermen; and working with department heads to keep the town running on a day-to-day basis.

Since taking over the clerk's post in April, she has also been busy training the new tax collector and billing clerk and a new receptionist who started working about

two weeks ago.

"It seems like I do a little bit of everything around here," she says with a smile as she picks up a buzzing telephone. "If I had to sit here and tell you everything I had to do you'd probably get tired of listening to me."

Although Mrs. Hewett is known around town hall for her cold-blooded nature, often using an electric space heater in the winter and closing off cool air vents in the summer, her fellow town employees and others who have dealt with her over the years describe her as a warm and friendly person.

Albert Hughes, who heads up the streets, water and sewer and building inspections departments for Shallotte, believes the new clerk has done well so far. "I think she's very efficient, very thorough and most of all has the best interest of the town at heart."

Shallotte was just about to open its wastewater treatment plant when Mrs. Hewett started working for the town in 1982, and since then she's witnessed tremendous growth. "The town has just grown really by leaps and bounds since I've been here," she noted, "because we've had annexation upon annexation."

She said the result of that growth has been the need for more positions in all areas, including police, maintenance and administration. The move from the old town hall about five years ago is one of the biggest changes she's witnessed and something for which she is personally grateful.

"When I say we were cramped for space over there I mean we were cramped," she said of the old town hall, which is now used only by the police department and magistrate. "You had to look behind you every time you wanted to get out of your chair so you wouldn't back into anybody."

Although she admits her work with the town has presented its share of headaches over the years, Mrs. Hewett said she can't picture herself working anywhere else, and she has no plans of moving on to bigger towns or other occupations. "I don't plan to go anywhere," she said. "I hope to be here until I retire."

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