

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Are School Officials Inept, Or Is It Something Else?

Imagine being a Brunswick County commissioner and expecting county school officials to request a specific amount of funding for the next fiscal year and being prepared to provide accountability for needing that funding.

So you go into the meeting with the school officials only to have them tell you they don't know how much funding to request, because they don't know how much money they have. Huh?, you ask? That's right, the school system says it doesn't know how much money it has.

But that's not all. Then school officials tell you their insurance won't cover their losses if they lose a lawsuit that the school superintendent, John Kaufhold, has filed against them for firing him and if they lose they will ask the county to cover those losses.

Now they have settled with Kaufhold and the county will have to pay him \$30,000. But, they say, they found the money to pay him and won't have to go to the county commissioners.

It sounds like something out of a far-out work of fiction, right? But, as they say, sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. This really happened June 20 at the Brunswick County Government Center.

The Brunswick County commissioners were all shocked, as they should be. They cannot imagine such a thing happening. We agree with them.

Something like this is absolutely inexcusable. We can understand getting a little behind in balancing the books, but knowing how much money you have shouldn't be dependent on balancing the books; it should be as simple as balancing the bank statement.

Well, county officials told the commissioners, they hadn't balanced a bank statement since the fiscal year began July 1, 1989.

Something is seriously wrong here, and it's much deeper than just a problem with the finance director who was fired in January. Obviously, Kaufhold and the entire school board are at fault.

They should have known all along where the school system's finances stood. And if they didn't, they should have learned when the finance director was fired and they certainly should have discovered then that the bank statements had not been balanced and made it a point to do so.

And most definitely several weeks before they were to appear before the county commissioners, they should have set out to get their books and statements as orderly as possible so they wouldn't have to appear ignorant.

But no, they chose to appear ignorant. Why? Is it ineptness or something else?

Growing Space Tomatoes Takes Patience

Those blasted SEEDS! For several months now they've been on the "to do" list on my desk. But the project seems jinxed from several perspectives. And I'm losing patience with those darned seeds.

"Budding student scientists" at a number of county schools, you see, were attempting to grow space-exposed seeds and Earth-based seeds this spring. Among the schools I know that decided to participate in the project are Leland Middle School, West Brunswick High School and the Brunswick Interagency Program (BIP) at Brunswick Community College. There may be others as well.

In fact, students all over the country are growing and monitoring these seeds as part of a one-of-a-kind, hands-on experiment, searching for differences caused by long-term exposure to cosmic radiation. In March, NASA distributed 180,000 SEEDS kits with equal numbers of space-exposed and Earth-based seeds.

Students through the university level are supposed to be looking for possible mutations to the tomato plant, such as changes in fruit size and color, growth rate, and leaf, stem and stalk shapes and sizes. Their very own Man-In-The-Moon Marigolds, so to speak.

Did you know the pink grapefruit is a mutation that resulted from irra-

Susan Usher



diating the white grapefruit seed? ANYTHING is possible with these seeds, you must agree.

The Space Tomato seeds have been exposed for nearly six years to the harsh environment of space before they were rescued by the crew of the space shuttle *Columbia* on Jan. 12. During that time they had been subjected to cosmic radiations, temperature extremes, weightlessness and the vacuum of space.

I was eager to see what happened when these seeds were planted and nurtured. However, I've yet to see a space-exposed tomato or tomato plant, though the day may soon arrive.

My contact at Leland Middle School advised "Just call and leave a message" as to what day I was coming by and the class would be there or would call back. The day I dropped by on my way back from North Brunswick High School (with the agreed-upon advance notice), the class was on a field trip.

Good thing I hadn't made a special trip just to see the tomatoes.

At BIP, I was told on the first call that the tomatoes really hadn't done much yet, that a story would probably be better after they started growing. A few weeks later they were off and running—but most had been moved to the garden of an employee, since there wasn't much room at BIP.

At West Brunswick, the teacher never returned my end-of-the-year phone call. He was probably too busy or had already dismantled the experiment. We may never know.

Just last week, however, I had a nice long talk with Anita White, director of the Brunswick Interagency Program.

The tomatoes—space-exposed and Earth-based, are coming along, she tells me.

There's just one small problem.

Here it is the Fourth of July. In just about every Brunswick County garden, staked tomato vines stand heavy with green, almost-ripe fruits, with more yellow blossoms showing up every day.

But not Anita's space tomatoes. Just last Wednesday she consulted with Kathleen Holden of Supply, in whose garden most of the plants are growing in their own separate quarters. Four of the SEEDS experimental plants are growing outside the

BIP building; I'm not sure if they're Earth, space or a mixture of the two.

"They grew real well to start off with," Mrs. White said. "Our students measured their growth over the first several weeks and I thought they were going to do super."

"But so far, nothing."

That's right, no pretty little yellow blossoms, no nice juicy red tomatoes. Nothing but vine. Growing these space tomatoes takes more than a green thumb; it takes lots of patience. If I were one of those students, I might be ready to give up and grow quicky bean sprouts instead.

Anita thought it might be just the four plants at school that were slow to get going; after all, they'd been inside for a while and had gotten a little spindly before getting moved outdoors into the full sun.

But that wasn't the case, as she learned after checking in with Mrs. Holden.

Turns out the ones in Kathleen's garden weren't blooming yet either.

Mrs. White, her usual optimism weakening a bit, said, "Maybe one of these days we'll see a blossom and a tomato. Maybe, I'm beginning to have my doubts."

She's to call me right away at the first sign of activity. I'll keep you posted.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Take Time To Evaluate Superintendent

To the editor:

I have followed with interest the actions taken during recent months by three members of the Brunswick County Board of Education to remove Superintendent John Kaufhold.

While this action has been met with shock, surprise, and even criticism and dismay by some, I feel that these board members deserve much praise. They have dared to tackle a very complex problem characterized by frequent disregard for policy adherence and driven by the force of personal ego gratification on the part of the superintendent, often accomplished through the careful and deliberate use of petty intrigue and "strong-arm" tactics.

"There appears to be much infor-

mation that the public still does not have access to that, hopefully, will be forthcoming soon when the board is able to disclose all the facts.

To the small group of dedicated Kaufhold supporters who have attended board meetings and verbalized and played out a drama (no doubt handed to them) with lines couched in such endearing terms as, "what is best for boys and girls" and frequent references to the "wonderful things that Dr. Kaufhold has done to improve the educational experience for students," I ask you simply "What are they?"

I can identify several programs that are working beautifully in other school systems that failed here due to lack of leadership (i. e. Alternative School, After-School Care

Program, the implementation of an effective A.I.D.S. curriculum, as well as a Drug-Ed program adversely affected by administrative cover-up of drug survey results, etc.)

Has anyone taken the time or energy to evaluate this superintendent's performance and former track record in terms of the skills, knowledge, and personal traits that an effective school system leader must have such as:

- Knowledge and experience in the operation of N. C. Public Schools?

- Acceptable performance in prior administrative posts?

- A leadership style that promotes a "team effort" where professional staff are viewed as "equals" vs. "subordinates" and whereby the strengths, ideas, and skills of

staff members are nurtured, recognized, and utilized rather than submerged and punished because all credit must go to the leader?

- The self-assuredness that allows competent staff to be viewed as assets rather than threats?

- A knowledge of state and local public school policies and a willingness to abide by them rather than making his own rules and executing them with "dogged determination" even when the hand is called?

- An understanding of personnel and fair employment practices and the implementation of them, especially in the hiring, firing, and transfer of employees? (Several positions have been filled illegally due to a failure of the superintendent to have positions approved by the staff members.) (See LETTERS, Following Page)

What Ever Happened To Pinball?

Trips to the arcade used to be exciting. There was pinball and neat video games like Space Invaders, Asteroids and Pac Man.

Recent trips to the arcade have been disappointing. Look at the games kids play these days. Most of them involve either Ninja people who try to kick and punch their way to glory or high-tech jet fighters that try to gun down the enemy.

Take it from me, playing one of these jet fighter games can be a very harrowing experience. First of all, you don't just stand there and flip a joy stick like we did in the old days.

You're strapped into this molded seat that swivels, and you're surrounded by a three-dimensional screen and the booming sounds of missiles exploding on all sides. It's not that much different from how I imagine nuclear holocaust would be. People with weak hearts should stay away from these games.

Personally, I prefer a nice, relaxing game of Frogger. In this game, you play a frog that has to jump across a six-lane highway full of cars that can easily splatter you all over the pavement.

Crossing the road, though, is the easy part. Once you've made it to the other side, you have to jump on logs and lily pads that move in opposite directions. You can get bonus points by eating flies along the way. But watch out for the alligators! They love the taste of frogs.

As far as I'm concerned, you can do away with all of the video games that have been invented since 1985. That was about the time I retired as a serious video gamer.

For those of you who agree with me, I don't think we've lost the battle yet. I saw a faint flicker of hope when I went to the mall a few weeks ago.

I couldn't help but walk into the arcade. I happened to have a few extra quarters taking up space in my pocket, and well, you know how hard it is to break an old habit.

Shaking my head in disbelief, I walked past the Xrygon Z-32 Space Flight Simulator and several other newfangled machines.

Looking around, I thought to myself, this is pathetic. Then, I heard a very familiar sound in the distance. It was sort of a cracking noise.

I turned and started walking toward the sound as if it were calling my name. I didn't know why, but it was music to my ears. With each step I took, the cracking noise got louder and louder.

The next thing I knew, there it was. A real game. AIR HOCKEY.

Air Hockey is one of the best games ever invented. It's played on a table about the size of a pool table. One person stands at each end of the table and uses a small doohickey to slam a plastic puck into the opponent's goal. The top of the table has tiny holes in it, and air blows through the holes. The puck floats fractions of a millimeter off the table on a cushion of air.

I watched this little kid in the arcade play Air Hockey for about 10 minutes, and it made me feel real good. It gives me hope that my lava lamp will come back in style someday.

Doug Rutter



Some Athletes Now Charge For Autographs?

I could hardly believe it recently when I learned that agents are now arranging for professional athletes to charge \$50 each for autographs.

My first 11 years in the newspaper business were spent in sports and during that period I covered many, many professional athletes, from Joe Namath in football to Rick Barry in basketball, Bob Boone in baseball and Richard Petty in stock-car racing.

And many times I have watched sports heroes sign autographs for fawning fans, with never a thought toward charging for an autograph. I'm not saying they relished the idea; they would avoid those fans and subsequent sessions if they could, but once it started, they generally would stay until they signed every autograph.

And, of course there were those who shunted fans aside with a curt "No autographs!" or who simply pushed right through them without

Bob Horne



saying anything. I never cared much for those athletes, because they were acting so high and mighty to the very people they owed for their very lucrative lifestyles.

One of the most-memorable autograph-signing instances in my mind involved Petty after he had won a race. I'm not certain about the track, but I believe it was at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

The practice at that time, and I presume still is, was for speedway officials to take the winner to the press box after he had finished his victory circle celebration, where he

would be interviewed for 45 minutes to an hour by the news media.

So when Petty left the press box on this particular day, it was probably at least two hours after the race had ended. He walked down the stands, through the gate by the flag stand and started walking down the track toward the general garage area.

The track was almost deserted, with just a few lingering fans and a few racing crews that still had not pulled out. Petty obviously was trying to avoid the few remaining fans, who were lingering in the victory circle area. He put his hands in his pockets, pulled his baseball cap down, lowered his head and walked down the track in the other direction.

I sat in the press box and watched to see if those fans would recognize this solitary figure who was walking away, with his back to them. They did. And suddenly Petty had

40 to 50 fans running toward him and calling his name.

He stopped and, as I watched, stood there in the middle of that race track and signed every autograph, including those for several stragglers who came up late during the session.

As a writer, I have always tried to be neutral while covering anything, trying never to favor anyone over anyone else. But I don't mind saying that I was proud of Richard Petty that day, not for winning the race but for his treatment of humankind.

Now some athletes are charging \$50 each for signing autographs? I find that despicable, as well as insulting and degrading to the fans. But if those athletes can get it, I guess it shouldn't bother me.

But it does bother me. I feel like such acts say something about our society and that it isn't good. And that bothers me.