

Shaw Hopes To Provide County With New Style Of Leadership

BY TERRY POPE

Today homes line Mt. Misery Road in Donald Shaw's neighborhood in Leland. But 29 years ago when he and his wife, Sadie, settled there after moving from Columbus County, his home was only the third house on what people still call Du Pont Road.

"I walked out to the road," Shaw recalls, "and you couldn't see a light anywhere. It was so dark. I mean dark."

What has happened in Shaw's neighborhood since then is typical of Brunswick County. Growth. The county's Northwest water treatment plant built in 1986 lies just a few hundred yards away from his front yard.

"It's right over there," Shaw says, pointing his finger south, "and I don't have county water. I'm just thankful that we've got good water here."

Even with the growing population, it is still a quiet community. Goshen Baptist Church, where Donald and Sadie are active members, is only a half mile from their home. A large white church nestled between bent and ancient oaks covered in Spanish moss, it stands on the banks of Hood Creek. The place has preserved its Southern mystique.

In this community is where Donald Shaw began his campaign in 1986. He didn't understand how county commissioners could call themselves leaders. Squabbles on the board irritated him. When he questioned one commissioner (whom Shaw refuses to name) about the board's policies, he was met with a challenge. The commissioner re-

sponded, "Why don't you get up there and try to do something!"

"I really felt it was necessary for me to win the seat to try to help solve some of the county's problems," Shaw says. Incumbent Grace Beasley whipped Shaw by more than 1,800 votes that fall. Shaw was attempting to become the first Republican from Leland elected to the board since the Civil War.

However, running for office also had its price. Up until 1986 he had operated a television repair shop behind his home and also worked rotating shifts at Federal Paperboard Company in Reigelwood, where he has worked for 29 years. He had to close the repair shop. Electronics had been a love since childhood, but not after politics entered his life.

In 1974 Shaw built a 25-inch color television set from scrap parts, a set that still plays today. In 11 months he finished a correspondence course from DeVrie Institute in Atlanta with a 96 average. An instructor couldn't believe it. Nobody had ever completed the course in 11 months. As a teenager, Shaw had set a goal of one day learning to work on televisions. He found that it wasn't as difficult a job as he thought it would be.

"I've always been an electronics nut," Shaw said. "I feel the same way about politics now. It's in my blood."

The 1986 loss stung, but Shaw remained determined to try again, to win. For four years, he never stopped shaking hands and spreading the word that he would be back. People remembered his face. At parades

and beauty pageants, they remembered the slim jaw and the wide smile and the confidence in his voice whenever he talked about the need for new leadership on the board of commissioners. The board gave him plenty of campaign material with its constant bickering.

Nov. 6, 1990, was perhaps the longest day he can remember. Shaw had campaigned constantly since the first day of filing in January. He wondered how many people would remember him at the polls. Running on the theme of, "Let's do away with the good ole boy style of politics in Brunswick County," Shaw raced past Ms. Beasley this time by more than 800 votes. While watching the election returns at the government complex in Bolivia, Sadie held close to Shaw. When it became obvious that he had won, tears began pouring down her face.

"All I could do was smile," Shaw said. "It seemed like it was a very, very good dream. We are still very happy about it. We still talk about it. I hope four years from now they'll vote for me again, that my record will be just as good four years from now."

The "we" that still talk about his upset victory are his wife and son, Marvin Donald Shaw III, 26, who works in bridge maintenance for the N.C. Department of Transportation. Watching his father lose in 1986 really bothered him, Shaw said. Sadie, who worked at Lincoln Primary School for 15 years before she accepted a job as registrar at Cape Fear Community College, took



DURING ELECTION RETURNS in November, Donald and Sadie Shaw watched as voters mandated a change in leadership, giving Shaw the District 5 commissioners seat over incumbent Grace Beasley.

STAFF PHOTOS BY TERRY POPE



AFTER ENTERING POLITICS Shaw gave up his television repair business, but he still enjoys tinkering with electronics at his shop in Leland.

the loss in stride, seeing it as a challenge for 1990.

"Most people say she's the politician, not Donald Shaw," he said. "She has a lot of class, charm and political inclination. She really does. She worked so hard."

When the smoke had settled, the county had elected a new leader, a native of Evergreen in Columbus County who grew up on a farm and volunteered for two years of service in the U.S. Army from 1958-60. After serving 20 months in the armored battalion in the state of Washington, Shaw came back to Columbus County to help his father crop tobacco all summer.

Every four days he would drive to Federal Paper in Reigelwood and ask for a job. It was about the only major employer around; you either worked on a farm or for Federal. He always got the same answer, "Come back later, when we're hiring."

Finally, his persistence paid off. He was allowed to take the test given to potential employees. Prior military service was also in his favor, but his scores revealed a technical knowledge that company officials drooled over. They could use a man like Shaw.

Today, Shaw works in quality control, keeping a check on the company's finished product, rolls of paper. He is also a relief water plant operator. Federal has its own water plant used for the production of paper products. It is a plant that operates similarly to the Brunswick County water plant near Shaw's home. The county's water system employees know that, too. They often seek his advice when complications arise at the plant.

The "workaholic" in him makes Shaw always willing to lend a hand. A leader, Shaw says, is someone who takes action, foresees the future and is willing to work and work hard. This past Christmas, Shaw gave up his time at home so a fellow employee with smaller children could play Santa Claus.

Federal Paper never closes. The water system must operate constantly to avoid costly damage from cold weather. It amounts to around 70 days of overtime for Shaw each year.

"A leader shouldn't ask someone to do something that they are not willing to do," Shaw said. "A leader shouldn't feel that they are too good to do anything. He should set the example. You can get better results that way."

Shaw figures he will continue to work at Federal for 12 more years. He will take an occasional summer vacation to spend a quiet week in Gatlinburg, Tenn., in the Great Smoky Mountains, to relax. In between will be trips up Black River to fish for bream and whatever else will bite.

"I want to work as long as I can," Shaw said. "I don't have any intentions of slowing down until I have to."

Shaw's mother still lives in Evergreen, on the old homestead. It was there that Shaw came to know hard work, raising tobacco, sweet potatoes, hogs and cows. He would chop wood for the fireplace. Shaw would come home from school and jump right on his chores. It was just a way of life.

"I was an old farm boy," Shaw recalls. "When I got a job at Federal paper I appreciated it. Hard work never bothered me."

The former Sadie Williams, from Chadbourne, has talked about a return to the farm. She collects cows, not live ones, but ceramic and stuffed cows for the home.

"She wants a milk cow so bad she can't stand it," Shaw said, laughing. "I just don't know about that. She's always wanted to go back to the farm."

For now, the couple would just settle for better government in Brunswick County.

"The majority of people in Brunswick County are loving, nice, understanding people," Shaw said. "They just want to be heard. They want to have input and they deserve that."

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