

Three Men Drown, One Lives After Boat Sinks Near Inlet

BY DOUG RUTTER

Clinging to a torn life jacket, a Greensboro fisherman floated at sea for about three hours Tuesday before drifting ashore at Holden Beach after a boating accident claimed the lives of three companions.

Gary Richardson, 38, was treated at The Brunswick Hospital in Supply and released Tuesday night.

The identity of only one of the three

drowning victims, Jack Lamont Owens Sr., 61, had been released at press time. Brunswick County Coroner Greg White was withholding the names of the two other victims until their next of kin could be notified. All four men were from Greensboro.

Owens' 24-foot motorboat sank in choppy seas around 2 p.m. Tuesday about a mile south of Shallotte Inlet, said Brunswick County Emergency Manage-

ment Coordinator Cecil Logan. Details of the how the boat sank were unavailable Tuesday evening.

White said Richardson grabbed a life jacket just before he bailed out of the boat. Coastline Volunteer Rescue Squad picked up the man around 4:30 p.m. after he drifted ashore at the 900 block of Ocean Boulevard West.

Rescue squad member Herbert "Midget" Varnum said the survivor couldn't swim

and was in the ocean for about three hours holding on to a life jacket that ripped in half when he grabbed it.

"He's up walking around," White said Tuesday night from the hospital. "He's OK other than being a little shook up, of course."

About 4 1/2 hours after the accident, rescue workers using the county's surf boat recovered the three bodies just west of Holden Beach Fishing Pier.

Five rescue workers launched the rescue boat, which has a fiberglass hull and rubber pontoons, into strong southwesterly winds shortly after 6 p.m. The Brunswick County Sheriff's Department airplane arrived about 15 minutes later.

Using binoculars and standing on a deck at Mace's Trailer Park, area residents and visitors spotted two of the drowning victims several hundred yards offshore.

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NO COUNTY TAX INCREASE PROPOSED

\$35 Million Budget Goes To Hearing Tuesday

BY TERRY POPE

Holding the line on the county tax rate has its price.

Fifty currently-funded positions have been cut or reduced in work time as the county's general fund will be about \$1 million less than last year.

The \$35.3 million proposed budget will go before a public hearing Tuesday, June 4, at 7 p.m., in the public assembly building at the government complex in Bolivia. Commissioners can legally adopt a budget 10 days following a public hearing.

Personal property taxes will remain at 68.5 cents per \$100 in valuation under the proposed budget tentatively approved by Brunswick County Commissioners Monday.

In preparing the budget, County Manager David Clegg assumed the county would receive \$1 million less from the state for the 1991-92 fiscal year. Both he and commissioners chose not to delay the budget process by waiting for a possible allocation from the state.

"I hope that we can stay as conservative as possible with the budget."

—Kelly Holden, Commission Chairman

The budget is based on a real property valuation of \$4.05 billion and a tax collection rate of 95.3 percent for projected tax revenues of \$26.4 million, said Luthia Hahn, finance director.

Last year's budget was \$36.5 million and was based on the same 68.5-cent tax rate. Clegg cut \$7.5 million in requests from county departments to keep the tax rate the same for the coming year.

Persons either losing their jobs or facing cutbacks are in the departments of older adults, clean county, water system, health and social services.

BCC Concerned
At a budget workshop Monday,

District 3 Commissioner Gene Pinkerton said he received a letter from Brunswick Community College, which is concerned about an apparent 2.9 percent cut in funding.

The college will receive \$511,244, which is actually a 3 percent increase from last year's budgeted \$506,555, said Clegg.

However, last month commissioners approved a \$20,000 budget amendment for the college. Clegg said the extra money existed for BCC but was in another fund.

"To them, it would only appear to be a decrease," said Ms. Hahn.

Noting a 5 percent increase in funding to the Brunswick County Schools, Pinkerton said the county

needed to be fair to both systems. BCC teaches students that the county schools often fail to educate, he said.

"I think 'fair' should enter into these cuts," Pinkerton said.

Commission Chairman Kelly Holden pointed out that the county is paying about \$505,000 in debt service this fiscal year for bonds used to build the college. The total debt service in the proposed budget is \$7.7 million.

"That's one of those hidden things in a budget," said Holden. "I think that's something that people should keep in mind also."

Pinkerton also said the N.C. Marine Crescent should receive more than a \$3,000 allocation because of its work with BCC, the Southport Maritime Museum and its help in the "overall economic development of the county."

Holden told fellow board members, "I hope that we can stay as

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WATER EMPLOYEES TO LOSE JOBS

Webb Told To Make Personnel Changes

BY TERRY POPE

Five water system employees will lose their jobs under the 1991-92 Brunswick County budget.

Brunswick County Commissioners told Public Utilities Director Jerry Webb Monday to make the personnel cuts as recommended by an outside consulting firm hired to investigate the water department.

"I hate to lose people, but they called it like they saw it," said Webb.

"We need to get more efficient. That's what they're telling us."

David M. Griffith and Associates of Raleigh was hired in January to conduct an operations review of the public utilities department and presented its findings to commissioners last week.

The study recommends that the county fire five of its water system employees and hire three temporary summertime workers to help with grass mowing. Another maintenance mechanic's position will be reclassified.

Commissioners accepted the re-

"We need to get more efficient. That's what they're telling us."

—Jerry Webb
Utilities Director

port as presented Monday. The positions have been eliminated from the proposed 1991-92 budget.

Positions held by David "Leo" Fulford, assistant to the public utilities director, and Kenneth Hewett, water system director, have been cut.

Also, a water treatment plant operator for the Northwest plant in Malmo and two maintenance mechanic assistants assigned to Fulford's office will lose their jobs.

Fulford was hired by the county in May 1987 and Hewett has worked for the water system since September 1981.

John House, of Griffith and Associates, said with an organization of less than 50 employees there is no need for an assistant director. More individuals should answer directly to Webb, he said.

In December, Webb had asked commissioners for more employees so he could begin a preventive maintenance program. However, he told commissioners Monday that he

agrees with the consulting firm's findings.

"They did what they were hired to do," Webb said. "I think it's a comprehensive report, I really do."

Brunswick County Manager David Clegg said the county got its money's worth with the report.

The department has already started weekly safety awareness meetings and has been developing new job descriptions, Webb told commissioners.

"We've been making some very definite moves," said Webb. "It's a long, drawn-out process; it doesn't happen overnight."

Board of Commissioners Chairman Kelly Holden instructed Webb to work with Clegg in making the personnel cuts.

"If there are any stumbling blocks, consult with him (Clegg) first," said Holden.

The firm conducted on-site interviews with every employee of the water system. It also noted that

morale among water department employees is poor for several reasons.

Mistakes are quickly pointed out, but employees are rarely told by their supervisors when they have done a job well, the report states.

Management techniques and practices at the water treatment plants also point to several problems, it notes.

An emphasis was placed on the perception of reverse discrimination by the Caucasian staff, who allege that some of the black employees are permitted to conduct themselves in a manner for which white employees would receive disciplinary action, it states.

"On the other hand, some black employees indicated they had been the victims of racial slurs and prejudice," the report indicated.

Several employees told the firm that they had been the victim of, or witness to, criticism delivered by Webb in a public forum that caused the person embarrassment or humiliation.

The report stated that employees should receive counseling or disciplining in the privacy of the supervisor's office.

No significant personnel management problems were noted in the administrative section.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

Family At Play

Sharon Messier of Bristol, Conn., plays in the sand with her two-year-old son, Corey, Sunday at Ocean Isle Beach. Rain showers late last week gave way to mostly sunny skies for the balance of the Memorial Day weekend.

125 Birds Stolen During Animal Shelter Break-In

BY TERRY POPE

Someone broke into the Brunswick County Animal Control Shelter near Supply late Saturday and stole an estimated 125 birds.

The birds were among the 288 confiscated last month during a raid on a Belville motel that resulted in charges of cruelty to animals against the owner, Albert Sidney Boney.

A number of cockatiels, canaries, finches and their cages were taken during a break-in at the shelter, said Zelma Babson, animal control supervisor.

"I don't have a definite number as to how many were taken yet," Ms. Babson said Tuesday. "I'm just

not sure right now."

Animal control workers must count the birds and determine how many of each breed were taken before an estimate on the loss can be given, she said.

Some breeds were more valuable than others, she said.

The thieves took the most expensive birds of the 280 or more, including a pair of rare finches, said Ms. Babson.

According to Brunswick County Sheriff's Deputy William Hewett's report, someone broke into the shelter between noon Saturday and 7:50

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Shallotte Bypass Opens On Schedule For Memorial Day Weekend Travelers

BY TERRY POPE AND DOUG RUTTER

The U.S. 17 Shallotte bypass opened without a hitch last week, just in time for the Memorial Day holiday and the arrival of hundreds of families looking forward to fun at the beach.

The long-awaited route opened last Wednesday morning with a ceremonial "first ride" by Brunswick County Board of Commissioners Chairman Kelly Holden and Shallotte Mayor Sarah Tripp.

With the four-lane road open, the long line of cars that usually forms on U.S. 17 north of Shallotte at the start of holiday weekends was nowhere to be seen last Friday afternoon.

Mike Blandino of TJ's Auto Electric saw cars and trucks backed up several miles north of town Easter weekend. He didn't see any of that last week when vacationers arrived for Memorial Day in the South Brunswick Islands and points farther south.

"We haven't seen any traffic out here since they got the bypass open. They've been running by here at 55 miles an hour," Blandino said Tuesday. "I think it's a success that was needed a long time ago."

There were no ribbons to cut and no limousines when the bypass opened last week. Road crews started removing orange and white barricades around 8:40 a.m. last Wednesday.

Doug Bowers, division engineer with the N.C. Department of Transportation, drove the lead car that took local officials on the first official ride down the bypass.

Other passengers were David Batten, manager of



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

THE FIRST PACK OF CARS AND TRUCKS motors south on the U.S. 17 Shallotte bypass last Wednesday morning, with Brunswick County Board of Commissioners Chairman Kelly Holden and Shallotte Mayor Sarah Tripp passengers in the lead car.

Brunswick Electric Membership Corp., and Marilyn Williams of Wilmington, district representative on N.C. Board of Transportation.

The DOT car lead a pack of about 20 vehicles that included a tractor-trailer rig and logging truck south on

the 4.8-mile stretch of asphalt.

The motorcade then led a trail of northbound motorists around Shallotte at 9 a.m. as DOT engineers began making adjustments on stoplights.

Sharon Messier and her family took the bypass on

(See OPEN, Page 2-A)