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County's 68.5 Cents Per \$100 Budget Has Few People Talking

BY TERRY POPE

About 30 people attended a brief public hearing on the proposed 1991-92 Brunswick County budget Tuesday night, but only four spoke.

They called for increased funding of the county's Emergency Medical Services program, Southeastern Mental Health Center, Brunswick Adult Day Care and the Brunswick County Library.

The hearing lasted just 20 minutes.

The \$35 million budget is based on a property tax rate of 68.5 cents per \$100 in valuation, the same as last year.

However, 50 currently funded positions will either be cut or reduced in work time and the Clean County department eliminated under the budget cuts.

Veronica Manlove, an administrative assistant for Clean County, told the board she learned she would lose her job by reading the

newspaper.

"I'm very sorry to see it come to an end the way that it has," said Ms. Manlove.

Saying Brunswick County needs the program, she questioned if it was necessary to dissolve Clean County. Its head, Terry Munn, will transfer to the county engineering department to oversee county recycling. The Keep America Beautiful board will be affiliated with the parks and recreation department.

"I'd hate to see it go, just like this, without any sincere thought to it," she said.

Dr. Harry Johnson, medical director of the Brunswick County EMS, said the county should fully fund the EMS program because of the need for advanced medical care for a growing elderly population.

The county has budgeted \$594,247 to begin its EMS program, but it had planned to budget more than \$1 million. Of the funds,

\$207,000 will buy two ambulances and \$218,272 to pay for salaries of emergency personnel to staff the rescue units 24 hours a day.

Johnson said the county should explore other ways to fund the program, such as district fees or charges for services.

He also criticized cuts in budget requests for the Southeastern Mental Health Center. The department will receive 75 percent of its request, which will still be an increase over last year, from \$229,088 to \$292,847.

"They are hanging on by their teeth and doing the best they can," said Johnson of the center's employees.

Brunswick Adult Day Care will get what it got last year, \$5,000, but the center is now expanding to include two locations, one in Southport and another in Shallotte, said Jean Marshall, its executive director.

She asked the county for \$10,000 this year.

"Because of the second site, I do wish you would reconsider," she said.

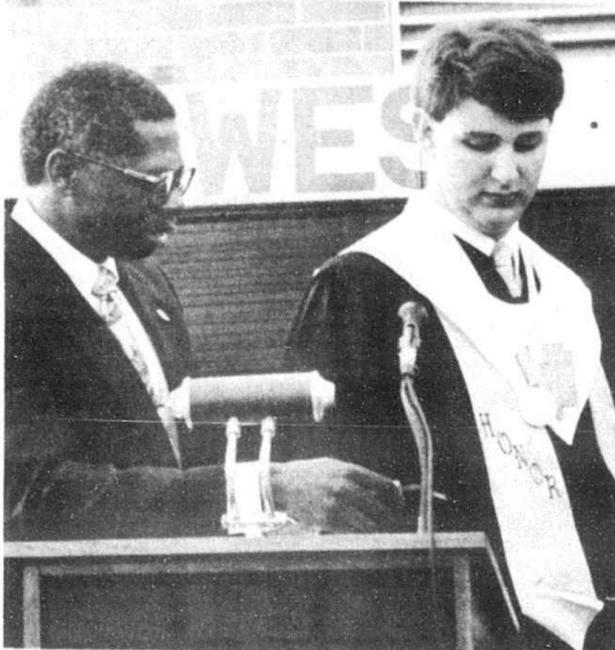
Edith Tillman, a member of the Brunswick County Library Board, said the Leland Library has the funds needed to build its new building, but none to help pave a parking lot.

She visited other libraries to see what they have that Brunswick County libraries do not have.

"I don't want to go visiting anymore because it makes me sick," she said. "We are generations behind other library systems."

Brunswick County's libraries will receive \$125,000, an increase from \$110,000 last year. The Leland Library will get \$30,000 from the county to help build the \$192,000 facility.

Among those attending the hearing (See BUDGET, PAGE 2-A)



ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL Eugene Bowden drapes Chris Byrd with his valedictorian's medallion. Salutatorian Perry Culpepper received a similar medallion.

West Seniors Urged To Make Their Lives Count

BY SUSAN USHER

A surprise guest showed up for West Brunswick High School's commencement last Thursday night, making the Class of 1991 part of a first in Brunswick County education annals.

His visit makes Bob Etheridge the first state superintendent of public instruction to participate in a Brunswick County High School graduation, according to school officials.

"You really are the success story of the North Carolina schools," the state superintendent told the class.

Etheridge suggested they take time before the night was over to

thank those who made sacrifices to their graduation possible. He urged seniors to live determined "to make each day better than the one before."

Thursday's graduation differed in at least one other respect from previous ceremonies, with ingenuity coming to the rescue for a group of seniors whose Trojan green caps and gowns did not arrive in time.

Faculty members shed their traditional black academic robes, which were donned instead by the 30 honor graduates. The honor graduates, in turn, gave their green mortarboards and gowns to classmates whose outfits had not arrived.

(See WEST, Page 3-A)

GRADUATION AND AWARDS COVERAGE INSIDE
North Brunswick High SchoolPage 7
Shallotte Middle SchoolPage 8
South Brunswick High SchoolPage 9

DOT MAKING CHANGES Motorist Killed On Bypass Approach

BY DOUG RUTTER

Following a single-car accident in which a local man died, the N.C. Department of Transportation has placed orange barrels along a curve leading to the U.S. 17 Shallotte bypass and plans to build a service road.

Michael Frances Stelter, 35, of Ocean Isle Beach died last Wednesday morning after driving a 1987 Buick station wagon off the road on a curve on Business 17 near the north end of the new bypass, which opened to traffic the previous Wednesday morning.

Trooper W.H. Thompson of the N.C. Highway Patrol said the fatal wreck was one of two accidents that occurred last week on that approach to the bypass.

Nobody was injured in the second accident. In both cases, Thompson said the driver didn't notice the curve in the road.

The fatal wreck occurred at 12:30 a.m. last Wednesday on U.S. 17 just north of Shallotte, said Highway Patrol spokesperson Ruby Oakley. Stelter was traveling north on U.S. 17 when

the Buick ran off the right side of the road in the curve about 120 feet east of the bypass.

Ms. Oakley said the car went down an embankment and overturned, throwing the driver from the vehicle. The car came to rest on its top in a ditch on the northbound side of the highway.

Stelter died at the scene.

"He just didn't see the curve," Thompson said. "He went right over the hill."

Thompson said Stelter was not wearing a seat belt and probably would have survived if he had been wearing one. There were no passengers in the car.

As a result of the fatality, the state has put barrels along side the curve to make sure people see it, said Dave Boyleston, resident engineer with the Department of Transportation in Wilmington.

Boyleston said roadside arrows known as "chevrons" were put up before the road was opened to traffic. He said Stelter wouldn't have missed the curve if he had been observant.

Within the next two weeks, Boyleston said the

state plans to build a new service road off the curve to provide access to several businesses north of Shallotte.

"We're going to start that just as soon as we get through work on the south end," Boyleston said Tuesday.

Construction of the service road will create a more gradual slope than there is now on the north side of the curve, Boyleston said.

Thompson indicated in his accident report that the driver was exceeding a safe speed. The speed limit along that stretch of roadway is 45 mph, and Thompson estimated the car was traveling 45 mph.

Thompson said there was 12 feet of skid mark on the highway and that if Stelter hadn't been exceeding a safe speed, he wouldn't have gone off the road and down the embankment.

Ms. Oakley said the fatality was the fifth of the year on Brunswick County roads. Five deaths also had occurred through May of 1990.

Damage to the Stelter vehicle was estimated at \$6,000.

County Merit Pay Plan Gets Mixed Reviews From Commissioners

BY TERRY POPE

Brunswick County Commissioners appear divided over a plan that would reward county employees with pay raises for excellence in job performance.

Merit pay would give workers who excel on their job evaluations a 5 percent pay increase and those who score above expected a 2.5 percent pay raise, as opposed to across the board pay increases to all employees.

Commissioners on Monday tabled discussion of the plan until June 17, when the board will reconvene at 4 p.m. to discuss the county budget.

County Personnel Director Starie Grissett headed a committee that drafted the "Brunswick County Performance Evaluation Policy" and presented it to commissioners May 27.

"We feel like the project needs to be im-

plemented," said Ms. Grissett. "It's time now for those employees who are excelling on their jobs to be rewarded for their exceptional work."

Across the board pay raises, she said, do not "go over too well with employees after a while."

However, District 3 Commissioner Gene Pinkerton said he's not sure if he likes the merit pay plan.

"I've had an awful lot of negative responses from the employees themselves," said Pinkerton.

He said employees are concerned that persons from outside departments will have a hand in their evaluations.

The policy states that an employee's supervisor is to evaluate the worker and then forward the forms to the Performance Evaluation Review Board, composed of

five department heads or supervisors, three non-department head employees and the personnel director.

"I find it would be very hard to implement this year anyway," said Pinkerton.

The plan calls for it to begin July 1. Employees would be evaluated on the anniversary of their employment date.

At an earlier meeting, District 4 Commissioner Frankie Rabon requested the board table the matter until the board's budget workshop. He said he favors an across the board increase for all employees.

Increases in insurance deductibles to help the county save money will be a burden to all employees, Rabon said.

"It's going to be just as costly for the person making \$10,000 as it is for the person who makes \$40,000," said Rabon.

Rabon said he is also concerned about

employees receiving a fair evaluation.

"I don't agree that a person out of the social services department could properly evaluate someone out of the finance department," said Rabon. "We could implement it, but it would take a year to see if it works."

The personnel policy committee has worked on the plan for more than two years, said Ms. Grissett. On that committee were Public Utilities Director Jerry Webb and County Manager David Clegg.

Kelly Holden, board chairman, said he believes merit pay would end a lot of the county's morale problems. Across the board pay increases also reward mediocrity on the job, he said.

"I think we're on the right track," said Holden. "I do think it's something we desperately need."

According to the policy, its goals are:

- to reward employees for excellence in job performance and to identify employees who are not meeting job standards;

- to encourage and improve communications between employees and their supervisors;

- to provide employees with clear direction on what they must do to be effective on the job; and

- to provide information for future personnel actions such as training opportunities.

Persons who are performing at the expected level or whose scores indicate they need improvement would not receive a pay raise.

An unacceptable performance score would place the worker on a 90-day probation period. A second poor evaluation would result in a transfer or demotion for the worker.

SINKING REMAINS A MYSTERY

Sailors Tell Of Rescue At Sea

BY DOUG RUTTER

The lone survivor of a boating accident last week probably wouldn't have made it to shore if two sailors visiting Holden Beach hadn't been in the right place at the right time.

That's the story as told by Wayne Carter and Mike Efremov, who transported Gary Richardson of Greensboro to the beach following the accident last Tuesday that claimed the life of his three companions.

Brunswick County Coroner Greg White identified the drowning victims as Eugene Crowder, 28; Donald Braxton Smith Jr., 35; and Jack Lamont Owens Sr., 61, all of Greensboro.

Holding tight to a ripped life jacket, Richardson floated in the ocean for about three hours before

Carter and Efremov found him about a half mile off the beach.

The two men, who were sailing on Carter's 16-foot Hobie Cat, said in an interview last week that they first thought something was wrong when they saw a gas can floating in the water.

Shortly after that, they saw full Coke bottles, beer cans and a baseball cap in the ocean. They knew then that a boat had capsized.

Richardson and the three victims had been fishing aboard Owens' 24-foot boat about a mile off Shallotte Inlet when the boat sank in rough seas between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. Richardson was the only who grabbed a life vest before the boat went under.

Carter, who lives in Raleigh, said

(See SINKING, Page 2-A)



EMERGENCY PERSONNEL carry the body of one of the three drowning victims over the dune at Holden Beach last Tuesday.

STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER