

# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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## Grow Up, You Guys!

Our boys—Butch and Tommy, that is—are bickering again up in Raleigh.

Butch is Rep. E. David "Butch" Redwine, a Democrat from Shallotte. Tommy is Secretary of Transportation Thomas "Tommy" Harrelson, a Republican from Southport.

Sometimes they just don't see eye to eye. This time it's that little fight they got into two years ago coming to a head again.

A few years ago the state wasn't interested in adding on any more state-run welcome centers, though some folks in Brunswick County thought one was needed here near the South Carolina line. Similar ideas had emerged at the other end of the state along U.S. 17 and in the mountains.

So, a compromise was struck. The state agreed to build the centers and local supporters agreed to find the money for their operation (somehow, somewhere) from non-state sources—chambers of commerce, local governments, etc.

Lo and behold, last year we found Butch and friends trying to wangle money from fellow legislators to help run the centers to the tune of \$200,000 over a two-year period. To do it, they proposed taking money away from DOT: the personalized license plate fund. Its revenues are used for landscaping and wildflower planting.

That didn't sit well with Tommy and his cohorts in DOT. The landscaping is VERY popular with the public. They not only want to continue it, but expand their efforts. They thought they had bent over backwards to even agree to build the centers.

Some nasty words were exchanged and the future of the centers looked in danger, at least for a moment or two.

Well, Butch and his buddies are at it again, with money in both Senate and House versions of the budget for the centers. The money, again, would come from the tag fund.

Let's pick up the scene as it might be played out this week in Raleigh:

Butch: "If we want to spend it, we will. (Na-na-na-na-na.)"

Tommy: "But you were there. You heard them promise. We made a deal. A promise is a promise. (Didn't I hear somewhere that you're an Eagle Scout, Butch?)"

Butch: "If we want to spend it, we will. That's our PREROGATIVE."

Tommy: "You think we won't stop building that center at Shallotte, just keeping pushing me. We can drop it, glass walls, landscaping, redwood and terrazzo picnic tables, everything."

Butch: Hey, we're the General Assembly. You work for us. If we want to spend the money, we will."

Tommy: If you do, I'll take away your wildflowers. And the people in Brunswick County really like their wildflowers along the road. So there."

Butch: "Go ahead; you'll have to answer to the people of Brunswick County. They want that welcome center to succeed."

Tommy: "And you know the landscaping that was going to go on the U.S. 17 Bypass of Shallotte...well, you can forget it. And you'd better hope no plants die near those bridges that you wanted so bad, 'cause we're not gonna help replace them."

"Speaking of those bridges...didn't you want one built to Sunset Beach?"

Grow up, you guys!

## Hard Call, But Leaders Make The Tough Decisions

It takes tough people to make tough decisions.

Why is it hard? Because the feedback is so immediate and often extremely negative. Consider the recent decisions by Brunswick County Commissioners. Accusations of racism, partisanship; marches, press conferences.

Taxpayers and voters need to put those recent personnel decisions in context, as part of a series of tough decisions.

The county's going through a transition. For a while county government had simply sat, like an inert blob, getting bigger with little to show for it. Rather than confronting issues or leading in dynamic new directions it just sat, its so-called leaders avoiding making the big decisions.

Something had to be done. Finally there's a majority of commissioners who are willing to try. They may not be 100 percent right

Susan Usher



every time, but they're acting, and they're willing to take the heat and flack that result from their decisions.

Yes, it's hard when a friend, family member or a loyal party follower loses a job.

Some of the people who are losing their jobs—Clerk Regina Alexander, in particular—I consider my friends.

It's hard to see another project—be it solid waste, water or 911, take precedence in funding over a pet program.

When times were flush, county government didn't hesitate to respond to most every wish expressed by the public—a full-time veterans' service officer, expanded senior programming, litter control, recreation, 911, paid daytime emergency response teams. The list goes on.

Over the years the cost has begun adding up.

I wanted all those programs, too, and thought we could afford them. I don't know about you, but my dollars aren't going as far as they did even three years ago. We're making some tough family financial decisions and I'm not surprised to see the county do the same.

In the past we've seen commissioners sometimes simply not act, either because they couldn't agree on what to do or because they didn't want to invoke the ire of one group of constituents or another.

We like making everyone happy, be it voters or members of our own

families. Saying "yes" is easier than saying "no." But when we do, there are long-term consequences harder to bear than the immediate pouting and tears that a "no" can prompt. Or even the spiteful "I'll show you" that might come afterwards.

It takes the long view to hang tough.

It's no different right now for the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners. From now until November 1992 may well be "I'll show you" time.

Some folks are pouting, charging the recent actions by commissioners were motivated by the race and/or party affiliations of those being laid off or fired, whatever you want to call it. Given the statistics regarding county employees reported elsewhere in this paper, that's a difficult proposition to accept. I don't.

Hard times bring hard choices. It takes tough people, it takes leaders, to make tough decisions.



## I'm Glad Budget Season Comes Once A Year

I've somehow survived another month of June.

That may not seem so newsworthy to most readers. A lot of people survive June every year. But for me, June is a very special month.

You see, June is the last month of the fiscal year, which means local governments across the county have been scrambling all month to figure out their budgets before the 1992 fiscal year starts July 1.

When local governments scramble,

Doug Rutter



I scramble with them. That's my job. And when the money of taxpayers is involved, I have to scramble extra hard.

For local officials, budget season seems to be one of the most hectic times of the year. There are very few times when a governing board will meet more often than when it is developing a budget.

But the fact of the matter is, governments need new budgets every year because they deal with more money on a regular basis than any one person could keep up with in their head.

When you're in my situation and

there's only one person spending the money, it's simple to keep track of every penny. It's easy for me to look at my checkbook and decide if I can afford a new pair of sneakers.

But a government taking in several hundred thousand dollars or several million dollars a year needs a specific spending plan. Government officials have to decide how they plan to spend the money a full year in advance.

If you ask me, developing a budget is one of the most important roles of a governing board. The budget reflects the attitude of the board about public services and the future of the community.

You can't tell very much about an elected board by how much money it sets aside for utilities, streets or a police force.

I think you need to get to the heart of the budget to determine how a board feels about the community it serves.

Governing bodies that stick a certain amount of money in a contingency fund and build reserve funds

obviously care about their communities.

Board members who don't allow for unanticipated expenses that come out of contingency or build reserve funds to handle future growth are failing the public they were elected to serve.

Above all, the way a governing board reacts to a proposed tax increase tells me more about its members than anything else.

There are some boards that simply accept tax increases as a matter of course. Some elected officials see tax increases as inevitable. They think nothing can be done to avoid them, and they don't even attempt to avoid them.

But there are boards that eyeball every figure and make cuts where they can be made. Cutting back is never simple, but it is possible and necessary in many circumstances.

Any governing board can shrug its shoulders and vote for a tax increase. It takes a board with guts to make tough decisions and save the taxpayers money.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Say No To Big, Feverish Government Here

To the editor:

We have now arrived at the time when Capital "D" Democracy has received a bit of comeuppance when revenues suddenly fall short of government expenditures and budgets must be cut back at the same time taxes must be increased.

And the liberals complain that the poor and middle class taxpayers will bail us out instead of the fat cats who supposedly can afford to pay more, and conservatives begin to get the picture in focus, as Representative Johnathan Ryne said: "North Carolina is not a tax and spend state but a spend and tax state."

All the while the liberals delight in picturing our state as being at the bottom of government services and declaiming against the "regressive" sales tax on food etc. But their viewpoint is grossly out of focus.

One needs to examine the services and taxes in long-time political strongholds of liberalism...say Prince George's County, Md. Refugees from that area understandably cannot give an objective assessment of government services there, but there ARE tax figures to examine.

The latest news is that the county there found a court-route to increase the property tax rate (previously set at \$2.40/\$100 to \$2.60/\$100). In addition they increased a county "energy" tax 2.5 percent, expected to add \$3.23 per month to household utility bills.

But the county property tax rate

is not the whole story. There is another layer of government there, the National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, which performs some county government functions which gets another 50 cents or so on the \$100 assessed value of property and the state of Maryland gets another bite (reportedly about 21 cents).

Assessment there is 40% of sale value, reassessed every three years so that a property worth \$100,000 would be taxed about \$1,400, more than twice the equivalent tax in Brunswick County. But since property sales in Prince George's County for equivalent value are about

twice those in our county, the property tax in Maryland tops ours by a factor of four plus!

And the higher food prices there more than make up for the sales tax on food paid locally.

And the Prince George's County budget is about \$1,400 per person, whereas the Brunswick County budget is about \$700 per person.

Most of us can no longer afford to live in a progressive utopia, and hopefully Brunswick County will not become the scene of big, feverish government.

Karl E. Brandt  
Shallotte

## Help Amateur Radio Association

To the editor:

I would like to direct your attention to the Brunswick County Amateur Radio Association and to the effectiveness with which it serves our county, particularly in times of emergency.

Its 34 members are in a position to provide invaluable key assistance to the county civil defense structure and to the sheriff's dept. through use of their individual equipment in conjunction with a member-owned "repeater." Also they are ready to man the 11 evacuation shelters in the county with their own equipment when hurricanes threaten and can give immediate notification to police and rescue squads from accident scenes with their vehicle installed equipment.

And, during the Gulf War, they relayed many servicemen's mes-

sages, or patched them directly through to the phones of loved ones. I can personally testify to the value of the phone patch. We talk to our daughter and her family, missionaries in Uruguay, every week over our telephone through a phone patch from the radio of Alton Clemmons in Civictown without the expense of an overseas phone call.

The Brunswick County Amateur Radio Association is beginning a drive to raise funds to acquire needed new equipment and maintain existing equipment. Their most important need is a remote controller for their repeater, which will cost \$1,000. I appeal to your readers to send their tax exempt donations to this most worthy effort at P.O. Box 2932, Shallotte, N.C. 28459.

Donald A. Lamb  
Shallotte

