

Commission's Cuts In Senior Citizens Meals Criticized

BY TERRY POPE

Some residents asked Brunswick County Commissioners Monday to restore funds cut from the senior citizens meals program.

Commissioners trimmed funding last month for meals served at its senior citizens centers, stating that too many people who are neither elderly nor needy were taking advantage of the program.

"If present budget cuts are not amended, the senior citizens are going to hurt," said Patsy Hewett of Shallotte Point.

Ms. Hewett said her mother is typical of senior citizens who benefit from the nutritious meals and friendship found at the Shallotte Senior Citizens Center.

She addressed commissioners Monday on behalf of the senior citizens there who are upset at having the number of meals cut. The county allotted enough money this fiscal year to serve about 1,000 county meals a month rather than the 2,300 meals per month that had been served.

"I owe it to them for what they've done for my Mom," said Ms. Hewett.

A volunteer with the program, Jack Brady of Calabash, said commissioners have cut the number of meals served from about 110 per day to around 50 per day. The majority is being penalized because of a few abusers, he said.

Brady delivers meals to persons who cannot travel to the centers. Commissioner Jerry Jones noted that funding for home delivered meals was not cut in the budget.

"I'm here to tell you gentlemen that the majority (of those served) are elderly," said Brady. "They're feeble and they're impoverished. It may be the only hot meal they get that day."

Funding to operate the centers themselves, in Shallotte, Leland, Southport and Oak Island, also was not cut. Lunches are served around noon five days a week at the centers except for Oak Island, which serves lunch once a week.

Commissioners listed to the comments but took no action. Commissioner Gene Pinkerton was out of town on business, said Chairman Kelly Holden.

"That center means a lot to our old people," said Alma Tolson of Shallotte. "It's just more than a meal. It's something to fill our lives."

She said the senior citizens play games and make crafts before and after their meals.

"That is our life," Ms. Tolson said. "We just enjoy being together."

The Brunswick County Department of Older Adults will receive \$7,135 in county funds in this year's budget for congregate meals as opposed to \$65,740 in 1990-91. The Older Adults department has grown to cost taxpayers one cent on the tax rate, Holden said, which wasn't the intent of the program.

Persons 60 years or older qualify to receive free lunches at the centers. Volunteer contributions from those served meals also help to defray the costs of the meals.

A majority of funding for the meals program is channeled through the Cape Fear Council of Governments.

Carolyn Soders, COG aging administrator, said Brunswick County will receive around \$70,000 again this fiscal year for congregate meals.

Historically, Brunswick County has always matched aging allocations "almost dollar for dollar," said Ms. Soders.

"Yes, we provide a meal at the congregate site," said Ms. Soders, "but they are also coming to the site for the socialization. That gives them something to look forward to, to help them live longer."

Other business Monday, commissioners:

■ Heard an appeal of a building inspection fine from James S. Mintz Plumbing, who told the board he

mistakenly began work on a project thinking the homeowner had already obtained permits. The board upheld the penalty levied against Mintz by Robert Tucker, county engineer and supervisor of the building inspections program.

■ Agreed to set adoption of the county's new subdivision ordinance for Aug. 5. To pass on first reading, a full board must be present. Planning Director John Harvey said 52 people helped revise the ordinance that went to a public hearing in April.

■ Entered into a lease agreement with the State Employees Credit Union, which will install a 24-hour teller machine at the county government complex in Bolivia.

■ Amended the county building code to set a \$25 fee for fire inspections of industrial and commercial buildings.

■ Revised the contract with Tax Management Associates of Charlotte to allow the company to continue to uncover hidden property taxes for a set fee rather than on commission, in light of a State Property Tax Commission ruling declaring such commission work illegal. The firm will be paid on a sliding scale, based on collections. The company could receive from \$650 to as high as \$5,200 should it discover more than \$5 million in hidden taxes.

■ Heard that state funding for the Caw Caw and Shallotte Swamp

drainage project, sums of \$8,480 and \$29,500 respectively, had been returned to the county.

■ Set a public hearing for Special Assessment District 12, made up of 10 subdivisions between Ocean Isle and Calabash, for July 29, 7 p.m., in the public assembly building at the complex in Bolivia.

■ Agreed to sell timber cut at the construction site for the new 911 center at the complex.

■ Awarded a bid of \$165,997 to Carmichael Construction Co. for the water extension project from the

Malmo Treatment Plant to the Jennifer subdivision on Mt. Misery Road in Leland. Wells in Jennifer are tainted with gasoline.

■ Set a public hearing for Aug. 5, 6:15 p.m., on the county's property address and display ordinance.

■ Appointed Robert Williams to the Industrial Facility and Pollution Control Finance Authority, which reviews applications for tax-exempt financing bonds for new industries.

■ Tabled three appointments to the Brunswick Interagency Transportation System board.

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Suspects Charged With Illegal Whiskey Sales

BY TERRY POPE

Five people were arrested over the weekend following an undercover operation that brought more than 80 gallons of moonshine, or illegally distilled corn whiskey, into Brunswick County.

Officers with the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department and N.C. Alcohol Law Enforcement office in Wilmington seized 61 gallons of whiskey when making the arrests Sunday, said Tom Parker, Wilmington ALE agent.

Ten charges were filed against Lindsey Jacob Simmons Sr., of Apollo Street, Shallotte, who had two vehicles seized and was placed under \$30,000 bond, Parker said.

Simmons is charged with three counts of selling non-tax paid liquor, three counts of possession of non-tax paid liquor, two counts of conspiracy to sell non-tax paid liquor and three counts of selling liquor without a license.

Officers also made the following arrests:

■ Tony Edwin Benton, of Route 1, Supply, was charged with one count each of selling non-tax paid liquor, possession of non-tax paid liquor, conspiracy to sell non-tax paid liquor and selling liquor without a license. He was placed under \$500 bond.

■ Hannah Lewis Bellamy, of Route 5, Southport, was charged with one count of aiding and abetting the sale of non-tax paid liquor. She was placed under \$500 bond.

■ Sherrill Minson Tart, of Route 2, Chadbourne, was charged with sale

of non-tax paid liquor, possession of non-tax paid liquor, transporting non-tax paid liquor, two counts of conspiracy to sell non-tax paid liquor, possession of equipment used to manufacture non-tax paid liquor and possession of liquor for sale without a permit.

Tart was placed under \$30,000 bond and his vehicle was seized, Parker said.

■ Steven Sherrill Tart II, of Route 2, Chadbourne, was charged with one count each of sale of non-tax paid liquor, possession of non-tax paid liquor, transporting non-tax paid liquor, conspiracy to sell non-tax paid liquor and possession of liquor for sale without a permit.

He was placed under \$15,000 bond.

All of the suspects were taken to the Brunswick County Jail, Parker said. They will face trial in Brunswick County District Court Aug. 21.

Parker said the arrests were the result of an ongoing investigation dating to April 26. It was a cooperative effort of the two law enforcement departments, he said.

In all, 80 gallons and 16 oz. of illegally manufactured liquor were seized in the operation. The liquor sales would have resulted in lost tax revenues of \$3,183 to the state, Parker said.

N.C. Department of Revenue officials can also enter judgments against suspects for non-payment of state taxes on income received through illegal liquor sales, he added.

VOTE SET ON TWO-YEAR TERMS

Redistricting Plans Adopted

BY SUSAN USHER

Redistricting plans approved by the North Carolina General Assembly leave Brunswick County in a two-member House district with Columbus County, but make few other substantive changes.

In other legislative action, Brunswick County voters go to the polls this fall to decide whether county commissioners and school board members should serve two-year terms instead of four-year terms.

The new 14th District would include Brunswick and Columbus counties and Cape Fear I and II precincts in the Castle Hayne area of New Hanover County. Columbus County is presently represented by Leo Mercer.

The existing 14th District, served by Redwine, already includes a small part of New Hanover County. It also includes Topsail Township in Pender County, which will become part of another district under the House plan.

In the Senate redistricting, the 18th District loses Beaverdam Township in Cumberland County and picks up Wilmington No. 5, a single census block in New Hanover County that includes the State Ports Authority. The balance of the district remains intact: Columbus, Bladen and Brunswick counties. The district is represented by Sen. R.C. Soles Jr. of Tabor City.

The reconfigured 7th Congress-

ional District, represented presently by Rep. Charles G. Rose, would lose Fort Bragg in Cumberland County but pick up portions of Pender and Onslow counties, including Camp Lejeune. The plan keeps in the district Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover and Robeson counties.

However, Rep. E. David Redwine said Monday that all the plans are subject to possible challenges and could be revised in the future.

One House redistricting proposal that was defeated, for instance, would have created numerous single-member districts as well as creating a new minority district.

Redwine says he expects the southeastern section of the state to be the target of redistricting challenges by the GOP.

If voters say yes to two-year terms in a Nov. 5 referendum, then all five members of both boards would be up for re-election at the same time, every two years. Presently the members are elected to staggered, four-year terms.

Redwine introduced the bill after the issue was raised two years ago at a Brunswick County Democratic Convention. Public opinion on the issue is sharply divided, Redwine has admitted, with the county Republican Party opposing two-year terms, saying the move is motivated by partisanship, and the Democratic Party endorsing it.

Parcel Fee Bill Gives County What It Wanted

A law allowing counties to charge parcel fees for solid waste disposal was ratified by the State House Monday, but after Brunswick County Commissioners had met for its regular monthly meeting.

County Manager David Clegg told the board Monday that in its modified version HB 86 would do for Brunswick County what officials had wanted it to do—allow the county to charge a set fee per improved parcel to fund the county's solid waste department.

Although its passage was virtually assured, Clegg advised the board not to take any action until receiving official notice that the bill had been ratified.

At a budget meeting in June, commissioners transferred \$1.2 million from other departments to fund solid waste before adopting the 1991-92 budget. Budget amendments must now be adopted to return the funds to their original sources.

Brunswick County Tax Administrator Boyd Williamson has estimated a fee of \$40 per improved parcel would provide the necessary funds for solid waste.

The new law allows counties to adopt an ordinance so that such fees would appear on property owners' tax statements. The fee would be payable and collected in the same manner that delinquent personal or real property taxes can be collected.

The bill falls in line with House Bill 623, introduced by Rep. Leo Mercer of Columbus County. That law allows Brunswick and Columbus counties to enter into long-term solid waste disposal contracts and franchise agreements.

The bill is important for Brunswick County because it also applies to county recycling projects, said Clegg.

"We plan to contract our recycling to private

industry," said Clegg. "It would cost us more just to buy the vehicles than to fund the program itself."

County Engineer Robert Tucker and county recycling coordinator Terry Munn will oversee development of the recycling program.

"One of their first marching orders is to develop requests for proposals so we can move forward," said Clegg.

The county will first build recycling and solid waste stations on N.C. 904 near Seaside and on N.C. 211 near Southport.

The Seaside site is ready for construction, Clegg said.

As the new stations come on line, some county green box trash disposal sites will be eliminated.

Some green boxes in the Funston and Ash communities have been removed, he said, because the landowners have requested the county do so.

State Budget Includes Welcome Center Funding

BY SUSAN USHER

The state budget package adopted this week includes money and operating guarantees for the Southeastern Welcome Center at Shallotte.

The law also mandates that the state Department of Transportation complete the structure by the Labor Day weekend and that it not close the center.

Dean Walters, chairman of the board of directors of Southeastern Welcome Center Inc., said he supports Redwine's actions in support of the center, which is under construction near the intersection of the U.S. 17 bypass of Shallotte and N.C. 130 west.

"As long as they're going to give money to any welcome center, we think we should get it too," he said last week. "Brunswick County just wants to be treated the same as the others."

"He (Redwine) asked if we wanted to be included and I said yes. I appreciate what he's doing. He's just trying to help us out."

At first Redwine had planned on simply seeking operating funds for Southeastern to match those received in an earlier budget by the two existing centers. Then he and representatives of the districts where the other two state-built, locally-operated visitors' centers are located got together and introduced a bill that would provide each center \$50,000 in operating money during 1991-92 and 1992-93.

They proposed taking the money from a portion of personalized license tag revenues set aside by the N.C. Department of Transportation for wildflower and landscaping projects statewide.

Thomas Harrelson, secretary of transportation objected to both the funding and its proposed source of revenues, saying the legislators had reneged on agreements reached earlier with the state and were taking funds from a statewide kitty for local projects.

In signed agreements, local organizers for all three centers had agreed that if the state built the visi-

tors' centers, they would raise funds locally with which to operate them.

Walters was one of the local leaders to sign the agreement for the Southeastern Center, but doesn't think the group should be bound by it since the other two centers have received funds from the General Assembly already.

"We just want to be treated the same," he said.

When Harrelson argued against the legislation, said Redwine, he lost "a fair fight."

In turn, Harrelson let it be known that the legislators' actions could have consequences—reducing the likelihood of the state reaching future agreements for similar centers and possibly a decision by DOT to put the centers it has built or is building to other uses.

In the House, Redwine and other backers of the funding proposal moved to block Harrelson, relying again on the legislature's lawmaking powers.

A budget conference committee agreed to include provisions that 1)

Southeastern and two other existing centers would get their \$50,000 each for two years; 2) that the Southeastern Center would be built and completed on schedule, by Sept. 1; and 3) that this center and the two other centers would not be shut down.

The budget package had to be adopted or rejected in its entirety, making the center provisions "a done deal," Redwine said Monday.

While he doesn't expect it, Redwine said the centers can choose not to accept the funds. "If they want to send it back, fine. There's nothing in the law that says they have to accept it."

Redwine says he doesn't plan to seek additional funds for the centers, but should visitation figures support the move as he expects, and he remains in office, he would consider asking that the centers be made a full-fledged state-operated welcome centers.

Walters said he doesn't think the state funding "takes away" from anything and that Harrelson might not have objected so strongly had the money come from elsewhere.

The center now has commitments of funding support from entities in Brunswick and New Hanover counties only, but Walters said he expects that to change once the center is in operation. "We're looking to bring in other counties when they see it is viable."

Like Redwine, Walters said he believes the state should and eventually will take over operation of the center.

"It's an asset," he said. "It's a positive influence on the area."

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