

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Bad Ideas Can Destroy Our Beaches—For Good

You could say the mayors of the South Brunswick Island beach towns have a bad case of tunnel vision, too, along with everyone else who believes there is a quick-fix solution to coastal erosion.

They would like the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission to relax a six-year ban on seawalls because some oceanfront areas need immediate relief from erosion.

As in most things in life, there is no simple and quick solution to the coastal problems we face, and a receding shoreline is no exception.

The CRC meets this week in Beaufort to consider a controversial proposal to allow seawalls, jetties and groins to be built on the beach if they would not "cause significant adverse impact" or if they would "provide overriding public benefits."

Several CRC members initiated the proposal in March, much to the delight of those who narrowly view bulkheads as a reasonable solution to battle nature's work against our shoreline.

Brunswick County beach mayors think the ban on hard structures should be loosened and each bulkhead, seawall or groin proposal considered on its own merits. They may be right in that no blanket policy or law can fit every case. However, laws are not made to be so flexible but are instead for everyone to live by, no exceptions.

There is nothing appealing about a wall of boards, rock jetty, concrete-filled sandbags or pilings rising from the surf that denies public access to the beach, regardless of whether a town or individual ordered it there.

No matter how much an oceanfront erodes, the beach itself doesn't disappear, unless it meets with a seawall or other hard structure first. There are other ways to save the beaches, if that's what we are really trying to save.

The state's ban on seawalls imposed in 1985 has helped to maintain public beach access here along the North Carolina coast. In the past six years, some homes have washed into the ocean while others have been relocated or inched closer to the pounding surf, but the beach itself hasn't disappeared.

Things would drastically change if the ban is lifted. Man would ignore the evidence against seawalls and reach for the quick-fix solution to save private property at the expense of a public beach. Towns would ignore the evidence against groins and ask that they line the inlets.

Such seawalls may save some investments, but then shift the damage to others along the beach, who will also want a seawall, and so on.

When we have finally replaced our wide, sandy beaches with a continuous row of concrete piers or rocks, as has happened in some northern states already, there won't be a beach as we know it today.

We will have destroyed what others have worked so hard to save.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Fired Employee Did Good Job

To the editor:

I attended a meeting Monday night at the Brunswick County Board of Health in regard to the firing of Zelma Babson (county animal control officer). They did not allow any positive testimony from the public as to the outstanding job she has done. I would like to take this opportunity to point that out.

Under Ms. Babson's direction the conditions at the pound are that of a well-run kennel. Over the last ten years I have visited numerous kennels and neighboring county dog pounds, not to mention my own breeding kennel, so I do know a well-run kennel when I see one. The facilities are not only clean, the animals are well treated. Sick animals are attended to and not left to lay there and suffer.

Before Ms. Babson, I had tried to report an animal abuse case to the pound. They referred me to the sheriff's department, which informed me I had to swear out a personal complaint. As I was concerned about

(See FIRED, Following Page)

Kids' Golf Clinic Took Me Back To Early Days

I had the pleasure of visiting the "Hook A Kid On Golf" program last week at Sea Trail Plantation.

Thirty local kids, many of whom had never even picked up a golf club, were introduced to the basics of the game during the week-long clinic.

Brunswick County was one of only 25 sites in the country chosen for the nationally-sponsored program this summer, which means the youngsters who got to participate were pretty darn lucky.

Watching the kids practice their putting, chipping and driving last week brought back a lot of memories of when I first learned the game of golf.

I didn't have the benefit of an organized clinic or instruction from club professionals like these kids had.

No, I learned golf the old-fashioned way—from relatives. I can vividly remember my first experiences on the golf course. They were



Doug Rutter

with my father, brother and uncle.

The course they use to play had a rule that nobody under 12 years old was allowed to participate. I must have been about 10 years old at the time, and this rule didn't sit too well with me.

I always thought the rule was unnecessary, especially when we were the only people on the golf course. Anyway, we respected authority and stuck to that minimum age rule as much as possible.

Actually, I really shouldn't lie about it. As soon as we were far enough away from the clubhouse so nobody could see us, I would start

playing, using my brother's golf clubs.

That reminds me of another rule I never liked. The rule said anyone who wasn't taller than the wooden clown at the boardwalk in Ocean City, N.J., wasn't allowed to ride the race cars.

Every summer we'd go to Ocean City for vacation, and every summer I would run to the end of the boardwalk to see if I was taller than the clown.

It must have taken 10 years to grow as tall as that stupid clown. For a while there, I think the clown was growing faster than I was.

I must have been 15 before I was able to ride those dumb race cars. By that time, my brother had graduated to the more advanced rides, and I was racing cars with a bunch of overgrown second-graders.

As it turned out, my years of waiting were wasted. The ride wasn't that good anyway. And I always got stuck in the yellow car

that broke down going into the back straightaway.

But let's get back to golf. As I said, I was using my brother's golf clubs and not doing too well with them. The problem was, they were right-handed clubs and I felt more comfortable playing left-handed.

When I was old enough to play legally, my father bought me a starter set of left-handed clubs. They were cut short to fit my body. I've been swinging hard ever since.

Since those early days, I've gone through two sets of golf clubs, hundreds of golf balls and tees and thousands of ups and downs on the course.

You might have noticed that I write a lot about golf. I just think it's a great game. It's a game that a 12-year-old boy can enjoy just as much as an 80-year-old woman.

Golf is something that I will play the rest of my life. Hopefully, some of the kids who went to the clinic at Sea Trail last week found something they can enjoy for life.



I Don't Understand The Tobacco Business

There are a few things that I'd really like to do before my time is up on Earth. They are two rather simple things in life, for my wishes are not extravagant.

One is to hop on Interstate 40 and drive all the way to California, with a decent car. I'd want plenty of time to occasionally stray from the interstate to see more of America than just four lanes of asphalt.

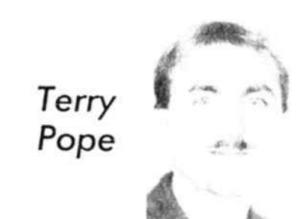
I want to drive to the west coast and see what lies in between here and there—the deserts, canyons, big cities, mountains and different animals—and to take rolls and rolls of film to document the trip.

Another thing I'd like to do is attend the tobacco market in Whiteville. As I said, I don't ask for too much in life.

I've never been to a tobacco market. I've seen them, but I've never even stepped inside a tobacco warehouse. One of these days I'm going to go, just to see what I'm missing.

I saw news reports of opening day at the market in Columbus County last week. It made me wish that I had been there.

My grandfather was a tobacco



Terry Pope

farmer in Maco. He'd head to the market in the wee hours of the morning during the dog days of summer.

While he would scurry about the warehouse hoping for "fair" leaf prices, my grandmother would take the children downtown to buy school clothes. These are not my memories, but are those of my mother.

Such trips to opening day of the tobacco market have become lost between the generations. Somehow I feel robbed of a part of my southern culture. Can one trip to a tobacco market cure my curiosity? My main concern is that I'd get there and not know what the devil was going on.

From what I've seen on television, the warehouses are huge with rows and rows of golden tobacco stacked in burlap sacks. A row of men walk alongside of the tobacco while listening to an auctioneer rapidly spit out a line of numbers.

I think those numbers are the prices per pound, and I think that row of men are the buyers, from R.J. Reynolds, Philip Morris and other cigarette companies.

I've noticed these men may pick up a leaf, turn it over in their hands, feel it for texture and drop it back on the pile. But the tobacco on that floor doesn't look anything like the tobacco inside of cigarettes. How can they tell?

When I was young, I remember there were still a few tobacco farmers left in Maco. They would pass the house in the late evening, probably getting an early start for the next morning's market.

The tobacco in their trailers would be tied down with burlap and straps, but some golden leaves would fly loose and land along the roadside.

I once gathered up a handful and

hung it in my bedroom. Don't ask me why. I liked the sweetness of its smell. If you ever get behind a slow-moving trailer of tobacco, instead of thinking ugly thoughts you should roll down your car window and let in that sweet smell.

I hate cigarette smoke, but I like the smell of tobacco leaves. I don't drink coffee, but I like the smell of coffee.

Both as a child and today, I don't understand this tobacco business. My mother inherited part of grandfather's tobacco farm. She still receives this information in the mail about tobacco allotments, stabilization prices and U.S. Department of Agriculture pamphlets that I've never understood.

Many farmers gradually got out of the tobacco business. Some farms have become subdivisions in Brunswick County. Other farmers have turned to the produce market to survive.

While the days of small, North Carolina tobacco farmers are numbered, I really want to go to the market, just once, to see what I've been missing.

Center Vision Is Exciting, But Is There A Less Costly Alternative?

School board member Robert Slockett has an exciting vision: a partnership of educators, industry and community creating a regional science, math and technology education center. It would be located, of course, in Brunswick County.

A go-getter, Slockett wants to see that vision become reality now, not sometime in the distant future. The slow-turning wheels of bureaucracy have frustrated him, as have the reluctance of others to buy into the dream as wholeheartedly as he has.

The idea started out smaller—a teacher education center to better prepare Brunswick County teachers to teach these specialized and rapidly-changing fields, perhaps housed initially in a single classroom and office. The old Piney Grove School was proposed as a possible site.

The vision expanded, fueled in part by the interest expressed by a major potential donor, DuPont, in supporting a regional project. After all, the company's Cape Fear Plant

at Leland draws significant numbers of employees from at least three counties.

The idea of the center is worthwhile: to keep teachers up to date in advances in these fields and in the teaching techniques and equipment needed to share them with students through "hands on" learning activities. Ideally, teachers could earn course/certificate renewal credit without paying tuition or else receive some sort of stipend.

Get teachers and students interested and excited about what they're doing, get them teaching and learning the right stuff, and the result should be higher test scores.

Furthermore, students should be better prepared to continue their educations or to enter an increasingly technological workforce.

Other programs would be aimed at the general public, increasing their awareness of the importance of math and science education in modern society.

Sounds great. The school board



Susan Usher

thinks it sounds nice, as do the directors of the loosely-structured Brunswick County Educational Foundation and a fledgling Science Alliance. Teachers have identified ways such a center could benefit them and their students.

So what's the catch? First, such a center would be very expensive to operate and to house appropriately.

Several industries have expressed a willingness to contribute start-up equipment, materials, expertise and possibly cash. But to date no one has come up with a precise proposal, in part because neither the

BCEF, Science Alliance or Board of Education wants to take the role of lead agency. We also have no idea where the money would come from for day-to-day operations.

Slockett tells us the center would not be built with local tax dollars.

The Brunswick County Board of Education has been reluctant to take a lead role in the project, in part, I think, because it fears being stuck with a potentially very large tab, at a time when it lacks the funds to fully support and carry out its existing programs and facilities.

Second, we could be re-inventing a good thing.

The University of North Carolina at Wilmington operates something it calls a "Science and Math Education Center." It recently announced, in a Brunswick Schools employee newsletter, seven hands-on training opportunities for public and private school teachers in its service area. Topics range from *Teaching Math with Manipulatives* and *Biology of the North*

Carolina Coast to the latest classroom techniques of recombinant DNA technology and how to teach physics in the middle schools using simple, teacher-made apparatus.

Staff for the courses come from across the region and beyond: UNC-W, the New Hanover and Onslow county school systems, Southeastern Community College, the state Community College system and Appalachian State University.

Renewal credits and stipends are available. The classes for the most part are within commuting distance for economy-minded Brunswick County teachers.

If this UNC-W Center fulfills many or all of the purposes of the center proposed for Brunswick County, we would be doing ourselves a disservice—and taking an unnecessary ego trip—to attempt to duplicate that effort unnecessarily.

Southeastern North Carolina has

too many other, pressing needs to warrant two such facilities within an hour's drive of each other.

Wouldn't it be better to explore alternatives with that center? I'm talking ways to involve more Brunswick County educators in courses; offering center programs at county locations, perhaps in cooperation with Brunswick Community College (which has offered classroom space); and then involving Brunswick County businesses and industries in supporting those efforts.

A middle ground might involve going ahead with Slockett's original idea of a smaller, county teacher education center. Perhaps it could be linked by computer and other types of resource sharing with the UNC-W center.

We owe it to the people being asked to support a regional math/science/technology education center to find out more about the UNC-W center and the possibilities it offers for involvement and cooperation.