

# Moonshine Seized In County Sting Operation In July Contains Poisonous Lead

BY TERRY POPE

Toxic lead has been found in 81 gallons of moonshine confiscated in a Brunswick County sting operation in July.

Law enforcement officials are warning people who consume the illegally distilled corn whiskey that the liquor may be packing an extra, and sometimes fatal, punch.

"Since we haven't been able to locate the still, there's a tremendous possibility that it remains in operation," said Tom Parker, of the N.C. Alcohol Law Enforcement office in Wilmington.

The ALE office and the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department are in the midst of a special investigation to break up still operations in Brunswick County. The sting in July resulted in the confiscation of 81 gallons of moonshine while five persons were arrested on various charges.

Parker said tests show the moonshine contained high levels of lead, which usually enters the liquor from soldered piping that is part of the still.

It contained quantities of up to 6.8 parts per million (ppm) of lead, said Parker. The maximum recommended level for lead in drinking water is .05 ppm. The accumulation of lead in the body can cause brain damage.

"Lead is neurotoxic," said Andrew P. Mason, chief toxicologist at the office of the N.C. Chief Medical Examiner. "It causes

## Shallotte Eyes Changes With Roadside Peddlers

BY DOUG RUTTER

Shallotte officials are trying to come up with a plan that will allow peddlers to continue selling from vehicles and roadside stands without creating an eyesore or hurting merchants who pay taxes.

A town committee is studying the situation and considering different options, including the possibility of finding vacant property where all peddlers could set up shop.

Mayor Sarah Tripp said residents have been complaining about the number of people selling out of "shanties" on the side of the road. They sell clothing, furniture, seafood and produce from trucks and makeshift stands.

"I like to buy my produce that way but I like for it to be neat," Mrs. Tripp said at a recent town meeting. "I think it's more attractive."

Mayor Pro Tem Paul Wayne Reeves said the area near the corner of Main Street and Smith Avenue is a "terrible eyesore" because so many peddlers gather there.

"I don't think there's a business in town that would want that next door to them," he said.

Reeves said the board shouldn't allow peddlers to drive away business owners who pay taxes on buildings and are trying to sell the same merchandise as the peddlers.

"I think we owe it to the merchants of the town and the people who have been here a long time and paid the taxes," he said.

Peddlers are allowed to sell in town if they buy a \$25 license each year. Those that sell from trucks that weigh at least half a ton must buy a \$100 privilege license.

Reeves, who is serving on the committee with Alderman Joe Hewitt, said he's visited communities that have all of the peddlers in one area, much like a farmer's market.

He said Shallotte might be able to do the same thing somewhere off Main Street away from the downtown businesses.

However, Alderman Wilton Harrelson said he doesn't think a few complaints about unsightly stands is a sufficient reason to change the rules. He thinks the town board should study the situation before doing anything.

"Shallotte is not Asheville, Raleigh, Charlotte or Columbia," he said. "Roadside selling has been going on ever since people used to pull the produce in here on a mule wagon."

Board member Jody Simmons said he partially agrees with Harrelson. "We're not Raleigh, but we've got merchants paying taxes with businesses in this town that we owe some sort of consideration."

changes in the brain at very low concentrations."

Mason said the amount found in the Brunswick County moonshine "is a significant amount and is potentially dangerous."

Since the regional investigation began, ALE agents have located and destroyed an illegal liquor still in Onslow County near the Maple

Hill community, said Parker.

"We do not believe it had any connection to this case," he added.

In the Brunswick County case, the 81 gallons were seized as part of an ongoing investigation that began April 26. Charged in the ring were Lindsey Jacob Simmons Sr., of Shallotte; Tony Edwin Benton, of Supply; Hannah Lewis Bellamy, of

Southport; Sherrill Minson Tart and Steven Sherrill Tart II, of Chadbourne.

The liquor sales would have resulted in lost tax revenues of over \$3,000 to the state, estimated Parker.

The toxic moonshine could have been distilled in Brunswick County or shipped in from another area,

said Parker.

"It's not exclusively shipped a long way, nor is it always locally produced and sold," he said. "There's a history of both."

ALE agents and sheriff's deputies involved in the investigation have done a good job of "curtailing the illegal liquor business in the area," said Joe Dean, secretary of N.C.

Crime Control and Public Safety.

"Let's hope that no one has drunk enough of the moonshine to cause any harm," said Dean.

The investigation is continuing, added Parker.

Anyone with information should contact the Wilmington ALE office, 395-3902, or the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, 253-4321.

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