

# Jury Selection Under Way In Capital Murder Trial

**BY TERRY POPE**  
 Jury selection began Tuesday for the trial of one of two Columbus County teen-agers charged with the murder of a sheriff's deputy in June. District Attorney Rex Gore is seeking the death penalty against Michael Thomas Brown, 18, of Brunswick, a small town in Columbus County. Brown is charged with first-degree murder, conspiracy to commit murder, armed robbery and conspiracy to commit armed robbery. He will be tried separately from a co-defendant, Aquino Lee Williams, 16, who is scheduled for trial Nov. 18. Prosecutors cannot seek the death penalty against Williams because the alleged crime was committed before the defendant turned 17. The two are accused of luring Columbus County Sheriff's Deputy Bob Hinson to a false break-in call on Mill Pond Road in southern Columbus County around midnight on June 18, where Hinson was shot and killed as he sat in his patrol car. Both prosecutors and defense attorneys agreed to move the trials to Brunswick County because of pre-

trial publicity and community outrage at the killing. A special three-week session of Brunswick County Superior Court began in Bolivia Monday, with selection of a jury expected to take most of this week. Superior Court Judge Narley Cashwell heard arguments Monday on a pre-trial motion filed by defense attorneys Michael Ramos of Shallotte and Mike Willis of Whiteville, who wanted to suppress from evidence Brown's signed confession given to SBI agents. Cashwell ruled the statement can be introduced at trial. SBI agent Kelly Moser testified Monday that Brown, after being read his rights, agreed to answer questions without an attorney or parent present in Brunswick County Sheriff John Carr Davis' office on June 19, the day after the shooting. The statement, read by Moser in court Monday, details how the two had allegedly planned the killing for about a week so they could take a police officer's weapon. According to the statement, Brown told investigators that Williams wanted to carry out the plot

"because police officers have nice pistols" and that Williams "just wanted to kill an officer," Moser read from the confession. Brown told SBI agents that Williams fired a .22-caliber pistol three or four times at Hinson through the window of the patrol car and then drove the officer's body to a trash dumpster site. After taking the officer's gun and shotgun from the trunk of the car, the two went to Brown's house where they watched a movie, Moser stated. Brown told officers that he tried to wipe away fingerprints from the patrol car and placed the shotgun under his mother's bed, the statement read. He also told officers that he placed the .22-caliber pistol in a pillow case and hid it in the attic, Moser stated. Armed with search warrants, officers found both weapons inside the home, said Moser. Brown's mother had signed a consent to search form allowing officers inside the residence, he added. Gore and Assistant District Attorney Thomas Hicks will prosecute the case. At arraignment Monday, Wil-

liams pleaded not guilty to charges of murder, armed robbery, conspiracy to commit murder and conspiracy to commit armed robbery.

## CP&L Plant Closes Visitors Center

Carolina Power & Light Company's Brunswick Nuclear Plant has closed its visitors center for the rest of the year in preparation for the Southport bicentennial. The visitors center will house a special exhibit on the historic city as part of the 1992 celebration, said David Kelly, external relations manager at the nuclear power plant. "We expect the new exhibit to open by early January 1992," Kelly said. "There will be the new bicentennial display plus informative new displays about energy production and conservation and alternative energy sources." The visitors center closed Nov. 1 to install the new displays. For more information, call the center at 919-457-6041.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

## Out Cold

Jon-Michael Stone of Sanford couldn't figure out what all the fuss was about at the recent N.C. Festival By The Sea at Holden Beach. He was tucked out by early afternoon and didn't let the festivities interrupt his nap.

## County Wants Civil Court Judge To Dismiss Lawsuit

**BY TERRY POPE**  
 Brunswick County attorneys are seeking dismissal of a lawsuit filed against the county by a Shallotte engineering firm. Houston and Associates filed suit against the county in September, claiming Brunswick County Commissioners breached a contract agreement when the company was fired Aug. 5 while at work designing water expansion projects to the Seaside and Shallotte Point communities. In a motion filed last Wednesday, Oct. 30, Brunswick County Attorney David Clegg and consulting attorney Alfred P. Carlton Jr. of Raleigh ask that the lawsuit be dismissed for failing to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. A ruling is expected at a Dec. 2 hearing, when the motion will be argued before a Brunswick County Superior Court judge in Bolivia. Commissioners voted 3-2 to fire Houston and Associates, saying the firm had delayed delivery of plans to the county on several occasions. Houston and Associates claims the firm was deliberately forced to miss its deadlines when the county failed to obtain access to sites

where design work was needed. The firm experienced a two-month delay because land entry rights were not obtained on time at a site where a 300,000-gallon water tank is to be built at Shallotte Point, the lawsuit claims. A July deadline for the Shallotte Point project was delayed twice by the firm, to the fall of 1991 and again to February 1992, Clegg has argued. Plans are to bid the project out to a contractor in early 1992 and allow 11 months for construction. Camp, Dresser and McKee of Raleigh has been hired to replace Houston and Associates to finish design work on the estimated \$7 million project. Houston and Associates has asked for a jury trial and is seeking \$187,000 plus interest for work completed; \$210,000 in fees the firm would have received for construction inspections; and damages for breach of contract. The complaint alleges the county undertook a series of deliberate acts and remained silent at times "to induce Houston to breach the contract."

## U.S. 17 Four Laning Top Item In DOT County List

Completion of the four-laning of U.S. 17 through Brunswick County tops the list of highway improvements proposed here in the state Department of Transportation's proposed seven-year program. State Board of Transportation members received a draft of the plan Friday and will vote on the final plan at their December meeting. Secretary Tommy Harrelson said the draft isn't being widely circulated because staff anticipates a change—hopefully an increase—in federal funding that would affect the final plan. As drafted the state expects to spend another \$69 million completing U.S. 17 from N.C. 87 at Bell Swamp to the South Carolina line over the next four years. Also included are \$111.65 million for construction of a Wilmington bypass connecting U.S. 17 south to I-40. Planning is under way, with design expected to begin in FY93, right of way acquisition in FY94 and construction in FY96, continuing beyond FY 97. A related project is proposed for New Hanover County. The state plans to widen U.S. 117 to four lanes from Holly Shelter Road in Castle Hayne to North Third Street in Wilmington, to better handle increased traffic generated by traffic from I-40 bound for the state port, airport and Brunswick County beach-

es. The route is not intended to replace the proposed Smith Creek Parkway, which would move traffic from the east side of Wilmington to the west side, connecting with I-40. Other Brunswick County projects outlined are as follows: ■Widening N.C. 179 a distance of 2.4 miles from Clariday Road (S.R. 1164) north of Calabash to the South Carolina line, making it a three-lane curb and gutter facility, \$550,000. Right of way acquisition would begin in FY94, with construction beginning later that year. ■Installing automatic warning devices at the CSX railroad crossing at Cedar Hill Road (S.R. 1430) in Leland, FY94, at a cost of \$70,000; ■Building a second bridge to Oak Island from Smith, 3.7 miles, at an estimated \$4.2 million in addition to \$200,000 already spent. Planning would begin in FY93, with construction from FY96-98. Some right of way and approaches will be provided by a developer. ■Widening of U.S. 74-76 from the Columbus County line to east of N.C. 87, 13.6 miles, at a cost of \$1.5 million, starting in FY97; ■Widening N.C. 130 from Shallotte to Holden Beach, 11 miles, to 28 feet, starting in FY97, \$6.1 million, with some right of way and approaches to be provided by developer.

■Widening N.C. 133 from Daw's Creek Road (S.R. 1518) to Old Towne Wynd (S.R. 1543), 6.3 miles, to 22 feet, with resurfacing, \$5750,000, starting in FY97; ■Widening and resurfacing N.C. 133 from Orton Road (S.R. 1530) to Daw's Creek Road (S.R. 1518), scheduled for feasibility study; ■Replacing these bridges over the seven-year period, with some already in progress: N.C. 130—Wet Ash Swamp and Waccamaw River; N.C. 211—Royal Oak Swamp; N.C. 904—Waccamaw River and Scipioe Swamp; Middleton Avenue (S.R. 1105)—Davis Creek; Camp Branch Road (S.R. 1340)—Juniper Creek and overflow; Mount Misery Road (S.R. 1426)—Hood Creek; Navassa Road (S.R. 1435)—Sturgeon Creek; Governor's Road (S.R. 1521)—Rice's Creek. Also under way, but continued in the plan, are an I-40 directional signing package (\$300,000); an environmental impact assessment of a planned and funded high-rise bridge to Sunset Beach; construction of a rest area/visitor center at the Shallotte bypass; and construction of a new ferry for the Southport-Fort Fisher ferry run. Two additional ferries are also proposed, at a cost of \$7 million, with construction to begin in FY94.

## Harrelson: Local Visitors' Center DOT's Last

**BY SUSAN USHER**  
 State Secretary of Transportation Tommy Harrelson has pulled plans for additional regional visitors centers from the department's long-range improvement program, citing interference from the General Assembly. Under Harrelson's plan, the Southeastern Welcome Center at Shallotte will be the last of three such centers. Located on the U.S. 17 bypass, ground was broken in October 1990 for the center, which is expected to open in January 1992. It is operated by a non-profit board of directors, Southeastern Welcome Center Inc., that is working to achieve regional financial support for its operation. Last Friday, presenting the department's Transportation Improvement Program for federal fiscal years 1992-1998, Harrelson said funding agreements for the three existing centers have been "violated routinely" by the General Assembly, prompting his decision. The original plan for the visitors centers devised by then Secretary Jim Harrington called for the state Department of Transportation to build the facilities and for local groups, such as chambers of commerce, to fund their operation without using state money. Agreements to that effect were signed with groups that were to run each of the three centers. Since then, however, legislators have approved money for existing centers each year, tapping the personal license tag fund in the transportation department budget over the objections of Harrelson and his staff. Despite their agreements with DOT to operate with local funds, the centers have all agreed to accept the state allocations. Rep. David Redwine, who has supported legislation funding the

centers, said this summer he believes the DOT agreements are nonbinding and illegal, on based on an opinion drafted by the legislature's legal staff. An agency of state government can't prevent the General Assembly, the state's policy and lawmaking body, from allocating funds, he said. After the latest round of debate this past summer the legislature awarded the local center and others in Camden and Macon counties \$50,000 each this year and again next year. Redwine added to the state budget bill a provision that would prevent Harrelson's department from delaying completion of the Southeastern center. While saying he has no plans to introduce legislation for additional funding of the centers, Redwine said the money allocated this summer was intended to do one of two things: give the centers time 1) to prove they warrant designation as regular state welcome centers operated by the Department of Economic and Community Development, or 2) to generate the local support they need to continue as is. The existing centers will receive the money allocated, Harrelson said, because his department must comply with state laws. However, he said the department doesn't have to continue to budget and build new centers only to have them become a burden on state funds intended for other purposes. "It's gone too far," he said in a telephone interview Monday. "About as soon as the center opened in Camden County the group there started asking for money. It started a feeding frenzy." Originally the DOT had envisioned building a network of such centers, including ones in Watauga and Carteret counties. After the first funding dispute emerged, DOT first canceled funds for the planned

Southeastern center, but then devised the written agreements instead. Linked to state rest area sites, the centers were to provide promotional material on points of interest throughout the region, including scenic and historic sites, and provide information on lodging and other services of interest to the trav-

eling public. "There ought to be about 15 of them. It could have been a wonderful program," said Harrelson. "But at three-quarters of a million to a million dollars per year, that's just too much. So we'll go back to building rest areas but there won't be any more others like this."



STAFF PHOTO BY TERRY POPE

## It's In The Wrists

Mike Zandiotis of Fayetteville says it takes an easy touch and just slight wrist movements to fly one of his North Shore Stream kites. Here he is shown participating in the kite contest at the Holden Beach Festival By The Sea recently.

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