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CALABASH BEVERAGE MART was one of three Brunswick County properties seized last week by U.S. Marshals, who allege the business was purchased in 1987 with illegal drug money.

Agents Seize Calabash Store, Lots Linked To Cocaine Deals

BY TERRY POPE

Investigators say a Calabash business seized by federal agents last week had served for several years as a front to launder illegal drug money.

U.S. Marshals placed the Calabash Beverage Mart and two lots there under federal seal last Thursday, claiming the owners purchased the property with proceeds from illegal cocaine deals.

The seizure was the result of a two-year investigation into the business transactions of Harold Gray Winters, of Route 7, Calabash, and his wife, Maria Ashley Winters. The couple also has a home in Yadkinville, where other properties were seized.

According to U.S. Attorney Margaret Person Currin, the Calabash property was ordered confiscated by U.S. District Court Judge W. Earl Britt on Sept. 10 on the basis of findings by a federal grand jury.

Britt's order found probable cause existed to believe that the beverage store and three lots—one in the Boundary Estates subdivision and two at River View Acres, where the store is located—had been purchased with "illegal drug proceeds" or had been used to "facilitate illegal drug activity."

The properties had also been used to "facilitate illegal money laundering of allegedly drug proceeds" or had been acquired through allegedly "structured" financial transactions, the order alleges.

Using a detailed affidavit compiled by Special Agent Vickie L. Howard, of the Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigation Division in Greensboro, Ms. Currin's office filed for the forfeiture of property in U.S. District Court on Aug. 30.

A review of the Winters' financial records shows the couple made expenditures of approximately \$300,000 in excess of all reported legitimate sources of income between January 1987 and December 1989, the affidavit alleges.

The couple also allegedly engaged in numerous financial transactions made to specifically avoid filing a Currency Transaction Report with the IRS, it claims.

Such reports require that individuals indicate among other things where he or she acquires cash proceeds in excess of \$10,000 intended for use in a financial transaction, Ms. Currin stated.

The U.S. Attorney's office can seize drug-related property purchased in illegal drug operations or money laundering schemes. For fiscal year 1991 the Eastern District of North Carolina has seized more than \$4 million in property it alleges was obtained illegally.

By law, 80 percent of the proceeds from forfeitures can be shared with participating state and local law enforcement agencies that assist with a case. The money is earmarked for programs to help deal "with the drug problems in their communities," said Thomas Swann, assistant U.S. Attorney in Raleigh, who filed the order for seizure and arrest warrants against the Winters.

Drug Sales Alleged

The investigation involved a federal grand jury the IRS, the Yadkin County Sheriff's Department and the Winston-Salem Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. The three properties seized last week included Lot 52 in Boundary Estates subdivision and Lots 2 (site of the store) and 3 in River View Acres.

(See AGENTS, Page 2-A)

Former Island Owner Seeks Court Order To Allow Sandbag Bulkhead

BY DOUG RUTTER

Bald Head Island's former owner has filed a complaint against a state agency and its policy making board after he was denied a permit to protect his eroding island property with sandbags.

Walter R. Davis seeks a "declaratory ruling" in his complaint against the N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources and the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission.

Davis also asks for a preliminary injunction and temporary restraining order prohibiting the agency and commission from interfering with construction of a sandbag bulkhead to protect his house on Bald Head.

Kenneth M. Kirkman of Morehead City, an attorney for the property owner, filed the complaint last

week in Brunswick County Superior Court. The next session of superior court is scheduled the week of Dec. 2.

Davis, who lives in Kitty Hawk and owns a home and several beachfront lots on Bald Head, owned the island until he sold it to the Mitchell family about eight years ago, according to Town Manager Wallace Martin.

According to the complaint, Davis' beachfront residence on Sand Spur Trail is being threatened by the encroaching Atlantic Ocean.

High tides and waves have eroded a protective dune between the house and ocean, and the ocean was within approximately 25 feet of the home's foundation the week before the court document was filed.

Davis applied for a state permit

early last month seeking permission to build a temporary erosion-control structure made of sandbags to protect the residence.

He wanted to build the 90-foot long structure prior to a major beach nourishment project at Bald Head Island which is expected to include the strand near the Davis house, according to the complaint.

The permit application was denied Oct. 21, because the erosion escarpment was not within 20 feet of the foundation of the house, the document states.

North Carolina officials normally use 20 feet as the standard when they consider if houses are "imminently threatened" by erosion and eligible for protection.

Davis argues in the complaint (See FORMER, Page 2-A)

VOTE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

County Zoning Back On The Front Burner

BY TERRY POPE

Brunswick County's commissioners say they will follow the voice of the people who voted last Tuesday in favor of a countywide zoning ordinance and establishment of fire and rescue service districts.

In a non-binding exit poll voters favored a comprehensive county zoning ordinance by a majority in 12 of 22 county precincts, 3,449 to 1,955. Residents also voted in favor of service districts as a way to fund volunteer fire and rescue units, 3,856 to 1,625.

Components of a zoning ordinance have sat idle in the Brunswick County Planning Department since 1989. Planners were told last week to start work on the ordinance immediately.

"As far as I know, they've never been told to stop," said Kelly Holden, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners. "The (Brunswick County) Planning Board has been directed to proceed with a county zoning ordinance."

Holden has favored county zoning since he joined the board. The Planning Department began studying zoning most recently in February 1987, and a series of forums were held to gather public input in 1989.

The Planning Board has been charged with creating the ordinance, with holding public hearings on the draft and with certifying it to the Board of Commissioners for adoption. The ordinance would regulate land use outside of incorporated towns that have their own zoning laws.

"We're going to do everything we can in the next two years to adopt an ordinance," Holden said while watching the exit poll returns election night at the Brunswick County Government Center. "I'm going to push it as hard as I can."

District 2 Commissioner Jerry Jones, a proponent of zoning, said he was also pleased with the poll results.

However, the issue is likely to face a fight on the Board of Commissioners.

District 4 Commissioner Frankie Rabon has been an outspoken opponent of county zoning. He contends that property owners face too many regulations and should be allowed free use of their own land.

Although work will proceed immediately, as County Manager David Clegg said, "Don't expect an ordinance tomorrow."

"We've got 911 and water expansion that the board must deal with," said Clegg. "It's going to take time." Of the 6,899 people, or 24 percent, who voted in last week's election, 5,404 responded to the zoning question on the optional exit poll. According to Supervisor of Elections Lynda Britt, 28,405 people are registered to vote in Brunswick County.

Proponents say zoning helps to lessen street congestion, prevents overcrowding of land, plans for

transportation and public utilities, conserves the value of buildings and land, provides for orderly growth and development and encourages appropriate uses of land.

The following precincts voted in favor of zoning by a majority: Hood Creek, Woodburn, Belville, Town Creek, Southport I, Southport II, Oak Island I, Frying Pan, Grissetown, Shingletree, Boiling Spring Lakes and Oak Island II.

More people answered the question on service districts, 5,481. Holden said Brunswick County's Emergency Medical Services Director Doug Ledgett has been told to draft a plan for service districts prior to adoption of the 1991-92 county budget.

Commissioners plan to establish five or more districts to tax property owners for volunteer fire and rescue service. By law, property can be assessed up to 15 cents per \$100 in valuation. Funds collected from a district go to fire and rescue units within that district.

County voters also favored non-partisan elections for the Brunswick County Board of Education, 4,328 to 1,136.

Commissioners sought voter opinion on the matter since it wasn't added to the official ballot.

By a 4-1 margin, voters chose two-year terms rather than four-year terms for both commissioners and school board candidates, 4,569 to 1,330. Both boards now elect members to staggered four-year terms.

State Rep. E. David Redwine placed the term issue on the ballot after the county's political parties split—with Brunswick County Republicans opposing two-year terms and Democrats favoring two-year terms.

Commissioners then added the non-partisan issue to their non-binding exit poll.

"There were two political issues," said Holden, "and he (Redwine) chose not to address one. Now he's going to have to make a decision on this one."

Man Injured, House Lost In Heater-Related Fire

A man was injured and his family's mobile home destroyed in a heater-related fire Monday night at Ash.

James Bennett was treated for burns and released from The Brunswick Hospital Monday night, said Diana Ramsey, director of nursing.

Gregg Warren of the Waccamaw Volunteer Fire Department said Waccamaw and Grissetown-Longwood VFDs responded with personnel and equipment to the 10 p.m. fire. Firefighters were on the scene approximately two hours.

"The house was a total loss," said Warren. It was located on Old King Road (S.R. 1526) near its intersection with N.C. 130.

The fire is the first known heater-related blaze of the season, he indicated after talking with Brunswick County Fire Marshal Cecil Logan.

From an interview with Mrs. Bennett after the fire, Warren said apparently Bennett had had problems when filling a kerosene heater located in a living room of what appeared to be a two-bedroom mobile home.

"It caught fire," said Warren.

"The mother said that when it flared up his shirt caught on fire. He grabbed the baby and ran out the door on one end and she took the other children and left by the other door. The fire was in the middle between them."

The fire department and rescue squad were called from a neighbor's house.

When firefighters first arrived, said Warren, they entered the mobile home in search of the two to four children they had been told might still be inside.

However, all the children had been safely evacuated.

"They were with their father at a neighbor's waiting for the rescue squad," said Warren.

Members of the fire department were bringing clothing they had collected for the family to the fire department Tuesday night.

Warren said James Willard Milligan, the Bennetts' landlord, also wants to help the family get re-established. Others interested in helping the family may reach Milligan at 237-6530, or at the Waccamaw Mini Mart, 287-4454.

Beaches Escape Northeaster

Brunswick County beaches escaped the brunt of a weekend northeaster that caused erosion along North Carolina's Outer Banks and other east-facing beaches.

The local beaches, which face south, suffered only minor erosion while some beaches to the north lost several feet of sand.

"We didn't have any damage," Ocean Isle Beach Building Inspector Drued Roberson said Monday.

"With the wind blowing out of the north we didn't have any problems at all."

Sunset Beach Town Administrator Linda Fluegel said the storm caused "very slight" erosion near Tubbs Inlet at the east end of the beach. No buildings were damaged.

There was no serious erosion at Holden Beach, said Building Inspector Dwight Carroll. "There was nothing to speak of," he said.

WILLETTTS COMES UP WINNER IN BOLIVIA

Fournier Wins Holden Beach Seat On Coin Toss

BY DOUG RUTTER

"That's got to be the first gambling thing I've ever won in my life."

That was Jim Fournier's reaction after winning a seat on the Holden Beach Board of Commissioners last week on the toss of a coin.

Fournier called "tails" to beat out Roger Williams in the coin toss after the two candidates tied with 136 votes each in last Tuesday's election.

Holden Beach Board of Elections Chairperson Elizabeth Dameron had the honor of tossing the coin last Thursday at town hall.

Instead of a traditional coin toss, however, Mrs. Dameron dropped a quarter into an empty coffee mug, shook the mug and turned it over on a table to reveal the winner.

Three witnesses verified that the coin had heads on one side and tails on the other before the "toss."

The tie-breaker was needed after Fournier and Williams locked even for fifth place in last Tuesday's election, when voters elected a new mayor and the full board of commissioners.

Fournier said the outcome of the coin toss left him with feelings of relief and apprehension.

"I'm glad it's over with," he said. "I hope I can do a good job and serve the people well. It's a big responsibility."

Williams, who is chairman of the town's planning and zoning board, was out of town last Thursday and missed the coin toss.

Jim Shafor, another planning board member and candidate for commissioner, represented Williams at the event, which drew a small crowd to town hall.

Mrs. Dameron said there were no changes in any of the vote totals that were announced election night.

Holden Beach election officials had counted the ballots twice on election night because of the tie, and decided not to count again last Thursday.

This wasn't the first time a Holden Beach election had ended in a tie. It first happened in 1971, according to John Holden, the town's first mayor.

Holden said Kermit Coble and Dave Bowers drew straws to determine who would sit on the town board. Coble was elected.

Toss Breaks Bolivia Tie

The Holden Beach coin toss also wasn't the only one last week in the county. A seat on the Bolivia Board of Aldermen came down to "heads or tails" after Sherry Willetts and Thurston "Tut" Clemmons tied with 19 votes each.

Mrs. Willetts won the coin toss at the Brunswick County Board of Elections office last Thursday.

At Holden Beach, Fournier will officially take office at the Dec. 2 town meeting along with new commissioners Gil Bass, Sid Swarts and David Sandifer.

Gay Atkins, who has been on the board since 1985, was re-elected for two more years. She was the only incumbent commissioner who ran for re-election.

Wally Ausley, who defeated Commissioner Bob Buck in the mayor's race, also will take office Dec. 2. He will replace John Tandy and become Holden Beach's fourth mayor.

"I think we've got a good board," Fournier said following the coin toss. "I think we had a real good slate of candidates. We would have had a good board no matter who was elected."



JIM FOURNIER is all smiles after winning a seat on the Holden Beach Board of Commissioners on a coin toss last Thursday. Fournier called "tails" to break a tie with Roger Williams.