

'Tis The Season For Thieves As Well As Holiday Shoppers

BY DORI COSGROVE GURGANUS
 Kim Hewett of Ocean Isle Beach was shopping with a friend out of town during the after-Thanksgiving rush last weekend, and thought her shopping bags full of gifts would be safe behind the seat of her car with the doors locked.
 When she and her friend returned to her Suzuki Samurai later that day, the bags they had left in the car were gone, along with their contents—Christmas gifts worth more than \$450.
 A thief or thieves had broken into the convertible top of the car and taken their

purchases.
 "I feel very violated," Ms. Hewett said of the situation, "and I hope other people can be warned to either cover up what's inside their cars, or not to leave them there at all."
 Not only will she have to consider purchasing all her gifts over again, which is a very costly proposition, but she is canceling her credit cards as well.
 "I had the receipts from each purchase in the bags, now I have to cancel my credit cards so that the thief doesn't use them, too," Ms. Hewett said. "People should be

warned that they should put the receipts in their purse or wallet."
 Brunswick County Sheriff Don Gates agrees that shopping malls can be the location of many auto and personal thefts, especially during the peak shopping season that follows Thanksgiving.
 He recommends that those who shop at malls park as near to the entrance as they can, and park under a light if they will be shopping at night.
 Doors to a car should always be locked, he said, and gifts should be stored in the trunk if they must be left in the car at all.

"Out of sight, out of mind is the best thing to remember," said Gates.
 He also recommends that shoppers keep cash and credit cards in a pocket instead of a purse, and that they should always check the back seat of the vehicle before entering.
 To women who shop alone, Gates recommends keeping car keys ready in their hands when leaving the mall, to provide quick entrance to the car and a weapon for self-defense if needed.
 Gates related the story of a Shallotte woman who was shopping at Briarcliffe Mall in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., and had a

long-strapped purse violently taken from her shoulder by thieves in a passing car.
 "It was a good thing the strap broke," he said, "or she could have been hurt more than just the few bruises and scrapes she did get."
 Gates said the fashionable long-strapped purses are very easy to steal and that shoppers should avoid carrying purses when shopping in the first place.
 House keys found in a stolen purse can also give a thief access to a shopper's home if the driver's license gives that information, Gates advises that these keys be left in the glove compartment of the car.

Judge To Rule This Week On Water System Lawsuit

BY TERRY POPE
 A Brunswick County Superior Court judge told lawyers Monday that he needed at least two days before deciding if a lawsuit filed against the county by Houston and Associates of Shallotte should be dismissed.
 Judge B. Craig Ellis said he wants time to review both the complaint and a disputed contract in the matter. He plans to issue a ruling on Brunswick County's motion to dismiss by Wednesday, Dec. 4.

Houston and Associates, engineers hired to design water line projects to the Shallotte Point and Seaside communities, claims its contract was breached Aug. 5 when Brunswick County Commissioners voted without warning to fire the firm.

"It's clear there were certain provisions for termination of the contract," said Richard Evans, attorney for Houston and Associates. "It's also clear that none of them was complied with."
 In court Monday, Alfred P. Carlton Jr., Brunswick County's attorney, argued that the lawsuit, filed Aug. 30, fails to state a claim for relief and that the matter should be dropped. The Shallotte firm is asking for in excess of \$397,000 in fees, payment for work and damages.

"We think this is a bonafide motion to dismiss on all four counts," said Carlton. "That's why we're here today."
 Judge Ellis said he will also wait until Wednesday to decide if Brunswick County should be given a 30-day extension to respond to the plaintiff's request for pre-trial information.

The extension would be needed, said Brunswick County Attorney David Clegg, if the case is not dismissed. Arguments over the motion went back and forth between Clegg and Evans Monday while Ellis listened and read the attorneys' memoranda.

Clegg said the matter was being rushed.
 "We haven't even filed an answer

yet," he added.
 But Evans said the reason the county wants a delay is "not a normal reason" in asking for one. He said a judgment should be reached in the case by January.

"This is just an attempt to further retard the proceedings," said Evans.
 Ellis said he will rule on both motions Wednesday.

Citing numerous delays in receiving design work as their reasons, Brunswick County Commissioners voted 3-2 to fire Houston and Associates on Aug. 5.

In its complaint, the firm argues that the county's failure to obtain easements on time was a reason for at least a two-month delay.

A contract was signed with Houston and Associates on Feb. 18, allowing 180 days for design work on the projects to be completed. Only 167 days had passed when the vote to fire the firm was taken, it states.

The contract was "front-end loaded on work and rear-end loaded on payment," said Evans. Sixty percent of payment for the work became due after the bulk of the work had been completed, he added.

The complaint also states that county officials undertook a series of deliberate acts, representations and silence "to induce" Houston and Associates to breach the contract so the county could obtain the work without having to pay for it. Evans argued that the engineers were never told that they were doing poor work.

"What we're saying is we didn't breach the contract," said Evans, "but if we did, our breaching was justified on their affirmative statements."

Evans predicted that a key issue in the case would be when the 180-day period to complete the water system plans actually began for Houston and Associates. County attorneys would argue, he said, that the period actually began before signing of the contract on Feb. 18.

Claims that the county induced the firm to breach its contract, Carlton said, "was a little difficult to conceptually understand."



DORIS OLIVITO (left) of Victoria's Ragpatch Ocean Isle store adds up purchases for Susan Cohen (second from right) while her husband Paul (right) and daughter Amy (third from right) wait for the afternoon shopping spree to end.

Subdivision Restriction Lifted For Former Commissioner

(Continued From Page 1-A)

developed prior to current subdivision requirements, said District 4 Commissioner Jerry Jones.

"If these don't have it, then yours shouldn't have to have it," added Shaw. "It's as simple as that."

Other Complaints Voiced

■ Arden Moore of Shallotte asked commissioners for a trash burning ordinance, saying neighbors are threatening his health by burning trash near his home.

"Everybody tells me I have no legal recourse," said Moore. "In my opinion, it's the same as premeditated murder."

Moore said he has volunteered to take his neighbors' trash to the dump, but they insist on burning it.

Clegg said the state laws that address the issue do not mention ordinances that can ban burning when a person's health may be threatened.

■ R.C. Eaton of Shallotte Point asked for an ordinance to restrict billboard lights.

"They should be showing the signs, instead of the people's eyes," said Eaton.

District 3 Commissioner Gene Pinkerton said DOT laws regulate the aiming of lights, while the county has a sign ordinance that restricts the placement of billboards. He suggested that concerned citizens contact DOT officials.

■ Edith Tillman of Leland asked for quick action on resolving the Leland library dispute.

Pinkerton said he and Jones were to meet with Southport officials Tuesday, Dec. 3, to discuss the county's role in helping to get the \$217,000 library project under way.

"I do not think a committee can get together in an hour and resolve a conflict as large as this one," said Pinkerton.

County commissioners stepped in when the Brunswick County Library Board of Trustees became deadlocked over who should oversee construction.

■ Gary Gressel of Leland asked if the county had planned to set up tipping fees at its solid waste transfer stations, saying out-of-county dumpers are abusing Brunswick

County's lax enforcement.

Gressel said residents should have a vote on tipping fees, for a lot of people would not be able to afford them.

"It's something that will come up during budget session," said Holden.

Other Business

In other business Monday, the board:

■ Appropriated \$8,000 to help fund a physician extender II position. The employee will treat inmates at the Brunswick County Jail and work part-time at the county health clinic. The sheriff's department will provide other funds for the nurse program that is saving the county around \$5,000 a month in medical bills for inmates, said Health Director Michael Rhodes.

Previously, all inmates asking for medical care had to be transported by deputies to the hospital or doctor's office.

■ Approved a list of 144 names for roads discovered by crews preparing for the county's 911 system. No one spoke at a public hearing on the names.

■ Accepted a bid of \$93,750 from Pro Con Inc. of Greensboro, which will reroof the health and agriculture

buildings at the government center

in Bolivia. A low bid of \$89,500 from CEI of Florida was rejected by the board for the company had planned to hire subcontractors, a bid irregularity, said Clegg.

■ Appointed Holly Richards, executive vice president of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, to the Keep America

Local Merchants Are Smiling

(Continued From Page 1-A)

we also had other Christmas items on sale that sold well."

Novelty and luxury items also did well for Carson's, where owner Pete Durham said that he didn't think the economic recession was affecting this area.

"I don't think it's that bad in places," Durham said, "and I haven't seen it here."

He said that gnome statues as well as Christmas collectables were selling very well, but that sales figures were no different than last year.

Durham said that television is painting a gloomy picture of the economic outlook, but he isn't paying any attention.

"I even had the best December I've ever had right after Hurricane Hugo hit, when I thought it was going to be the worst," he added optimistically. "I think Christmas will be a good season here."

If a trend could be found for this season, most of these business-owners said it was that shoppers are still looking for a low price.

County Has Good Reasons For Keeping 911 Low-Key

BY TERRY POPE

A nervous clerk who had been robbed at gunpoint last week reached for the telephone and dialed 911.

As the two armed men fled the Brunswick County golf course, the clerk received a busy signal on her emergency call, not because the operators were tied up but because the local enhanced 911 system isn't in operation yet.

County officials say they must keep 911 low-key until the system is up and running in April. Then, they will wage an all-out media blitz to let the public know the long-awaited emergency service is taking calls.

"If people see it now, they'll think it's in operation," said Doug Ledgett, director of Brunswick County's Emergency Medical Services.

Television shows featuring the 911 rescue system have made Americans more aware of how it works. But if Brunswick County residents dial 911 today, they will get a busy signal, said Ledgett.

"If you've got a real emergency and you hear that, then you've got a major panic situation on your hands," he added.

The target date for starting 911 in Brunswick County is April 1. Residents should still keep their seven-digit fire and rescue numbers by the telephone until 911 begins, Ledgett said.

After 911 is underway, if residents still call their local fire and rescue numbers, those calls will automatically be forwarded to the 911 center, he said.

"For some time we will keep that in operation," said Ledgett.

The county had tried for a start-up date in early January, but delays in design work and construction set the project back.

"We probably could have made that," said Ledgett.

Renaming roads, issuing house numbers and erecting road signs also became a major project for 911

"If people see it now, they'll think it's in operation."

—Doug Ledgett, Director Emergency Medical Services

planners at the Brunswick County Planning Department.

Also, Ledgett said, rainy weather set Leader Construction Co. back after work began on the \$1.6 million emergency communications building at the Brunswick County Government Center in Bolivia.

"I understand we are back on schedule now, with the nice weather we've been having," said Ledgett.

All phases of the 911 project are now geared toward starting April 1. Bid packages for the emergency equipment to be housed in the 911 center will be issued soon.

Presently, signs have been placed along 80 percent of the county's roads, at intersections and in subdivisions. Workers have been busy installing the signs at any street or roadway that serves three or more homes.

Since the project began in August, more than 100 signs have been damaged or stolen by vandals, said Ledgett, and have been replaced.

The state estimates that 30 percent of county road signs must be replaced yearly due to vandalism or highway accidents.

"Right now, we're at about 25 percent," said Ledgett.

Community watch groups are being asked to keep an eye on road signs as well as homes in their patrol or watch over neighborhoods. If a street sign is missing, it should be reported to the Planning Department.

"A lot of people don't realize that's a fairly expensive item there on their street corner," said Ledgett.

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON
 Established Nov. 1, 1962
 Telephone 754-6890
 Published Every Thursday
 At 4709 Main Street
 Shallotte, N.C. 28459

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