

Developing Regional Network Will Address Shared Economic Concerns

Illiteracy, poverty and high unemployment are some of the problems across Southeastern North Carolina participants in a daylong economic forum in Wilmington Monday are interested in addressing through regional cooperation.

More than 250 business, education and government leaders from 16 counties participated in the regional economic development forum sponsored by the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

The forum was part of UNC-W's outreach efforts to develop regional linkages with Brunswick, Bladen, Carteret, Columbus, Craven, Cumberland, Duplin, Greene, Jones, Lenoir, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Sampson and Wayne counties.

The new Southeastern Network for Economic Development views regional cooperation as the best way to address common economic, social and educational problems.

Attendees developed an initial set of goals in six major areas that will be reviewed at eight conferences across the region over the next six months. Then a Regional Planning Council will be named to lead in mapping how to achieve the goals. The council will include nine members from each of the 16 counties.

Also, a University Research

Council will be developed with university and professors and staff serving as advisors and brokers for network research projects.

Program moderator UNCW Chancellor James R. Leutze, Ph.D., initiated the networking effort. He stressed Monday that the university's strategy is not to replace or compete with efforts of other agencies and governments, but to support their work, serve as a catalyst and to help avoid resource-draining duplication of effort. The university will provide resources, leadership training and education, increasing workforce skills and helping make the region more competitive.

He told the group that too often in the past competitiveness has retarded regional progress. "The time has come to cement ourselves together in the common good," he said.

His focus was emphasized by keynote speaker Estell C. Lee, a Wilmington native and secretary of the N.C. Department of Economic and Community Development.

"Too often localities become so emotional about individual likes and dislikes, they fail to look at the 'big picture', ultimately putting their own communities and regions at a disadvantage," she said.

She and Leutze stressed the need for regional teamwork in landing

major economic initiatives such as the proposed air cargo transport terminal, now called Global TransPark.

"If there is to be an air cargo port here, the entire area of Southeastern North Carolina needs to get together and agree on one, two or three sites and work collectively for that," said Leutze. "If we find ourselves divided, we may find it located somewhere else."

Goals hammered out by participants meeting in small groups addressed different areas of regional development: economic growth, technical and infrastructure, cultural resources, environment, leadership and education.

They include tapping into sophisticated telecommunications services for regional networking; studying the effectiveness and economic impact of environmental regulations on a regional basis; fostering leadership development and training and increasing minority leadership; inventorying water resources and developing appropriate industrial/commercial development strategies; and developing a plan to improve elementary and secondary education "as quickly as possible" in the region. Participants also want to see that educational systems provide the training students need to meet workplace demands to incorporate eco-

nomics development into the school curriculum and develop linkages between schools and business.

Tom Monks, director of the Resources Development Commission for Brunswick County, said he was unable to attend the conference, but would submit written comments after talking with RDC members V.A. Creech Jr. and Don Hughes, who did attend.

While supportive of a regional database and information/education efforts, Monks said he doesn't think the area needs another regional development agency or chamber of commerce-type structure that might find itself in competition with existing agencies.

The county was also represented by Planning Director John Harvey. Others attending from Brunswick County were Crawford A. Hart Jr., Holden Beach; Sandy Tate, Bolivia; Emily Parker, Karen Hope and Joanne Wesson, Southport; Michael Reaves, Brunswick Community College; James McAdams, Brunswick County Schools; Milton Coleman, county extension chairman; Joan P. Altman, Long Beach; Russell G. Baldwin, B.H. Jones, Leland; David J. Batten, Supply; James D. Bellamy, Bobby R. Davis and Robert W. Leavitt, Shallotte; and David Rouen.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Receives SGA Award

Elisa Herndon (center), the 1991 winner of the Edna Russ Scholarship Award, accepts a check for \$500 from West Brunswick High School Principal Ed Lemon (left) and Student Government Association (SGA) Advisor Susan Tubb. The award is sponsored by the SGA and is presented to the student who demonstrates achievement in mathematics and desires further education. Miss Herndon recently completed her first semester at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, earning a 3.5 grade point average. She is the daughter of Claude and Jill Herndon of the Holden Beach area.

Volunteers Offer Seniors Free Tax Assistance

Free income tax assistance will be available at four locations this year to Brunswick County residents through the Tax-Aide Program of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

The local program begins Tuesday, Feb. 4, and continues through mid-April, said Dan Beppard, AARP tax counseling coordinator in Brunswick County.

Beppard said the service is designed to help older persons understand income tax forms and become familiar with special benefits available to older persons.

Last year, AARP Tax-Aide counselors assisted 375 county residents. "We had an astounding 96 percent accuracy rate," said Beppard, based on monitoring and feedback provided to the volunteers by the IRS.

Volunteer counselors trained by the Internal Revenue will provide counseling services and assistance at sites in Southport, Shallotte, Supply and Leland.

"Our counselors, many of whom are retired business people with considerable experience in tax matters, are trained to prepare returns for older taxpayers," said Beppard.

According to Beppard, past experience indicates that many older per-

sons are unaware of the special benefits they are entitled to claim; some may not even be required to file a return because of limited income.

Persons wishing to use the free service are asked to bring with them copies of their previous year's federal and state returns and forms for the current tax year. These should include W-2s and other relevant records and materials showing income for the year.

Sites, dates and times are as follows:

■Shallotte: Senior Center, U.S. 17 Business, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, Feb. 4-April 14, 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.;

■Supply: Brunswick Community College, Brunswick Interagency Building, Wednesdays, Feb. 5-April 8, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. by appointment only. (Call Debbie Bryant, 919-754-6900, Ext. 400, for an appointment.);

■Southport: Public Library, Tuesdays and Thursdays, Feb. 4-April 14, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; and

■Leland: Community Center, Wednesdays, Feb. 5-April 8, 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

More information about the service is available from Beppard, 919-278-4242, or Larry Nielsen, 845-2121.

Four Killed In Wreck Identified By Patrol

Four people from Albemarle who died in a traffic accident at Grisettown last Tuesday, Jan. 7, have been identified.

According to the State Highway Patrol, the accident victims were David William Tucker, 78; Arlene Barbee Holt, 75; Dorothy Hinson Freeman, 73; and James Worth Freeman, 76.

The victims were all passengers in a 1985 Dodge Diplomat that pulled in front of a dump truck traveling north on U.S. 17 south of Shallotte at the N.C. 904 intersection.

Their names were withheld pending notification of kin last Tuesday evening by the Highway Patrol. No charges were filed after the 3:30

p.m. accident, State Trooper C.E. Ward reported.

The driver of the 1988 dump truck, John Curtis Fuller, 59, of Council, was treated and released at The Brunswick Hospital in Supply.

The deaths were the first fatalities recorded on Brunswick County's highways for 1992.

"That's not the way we wanted to start the new year," said Ruby Oakley, spokesperson for the Highway Patrol office in Wilmington.

Car Overturns
A Leland man was seriously injured Sunday evening when the car he was driving ran off the road, struck a small tree and overturned.

James Roscoe Soles, 50, was traveling east on Old Mill Road (S.R. 1432) about a half mile from Navassa when his 1981 Honda ran off the road on the left, reported State Trooper T.W. Caulder.

Soles was charged with driving while impaired (DWI) and driving with no operator's license, Caulder reported.

The driver was taken to New Hanover Regional Medical Center in Wilmington following the 5:35 p.m. accident. Damage was listed at \$3,000 to the car.

DWI Charge Filed
A Shallotte man was charged with DWI, operating a vehicle with no insurance and driving while his license was indefinitely revoked after the car he was driving ran off the road and landed on its side in some shrubs east of Shallotte.

Thomas Michael Blount, 34, was traveling west on N.C. 130 about two miles east of Shallotte when the 1980 Chevrolet he was driving ran off the shoulder, crossed the roadway and struck a tree, State Trooper B.D. Barnhardt reported.

The car also struck a telephone line pedestal and damaged some shrubs in a yard before coming to rest on its right side, Barnhardt re-

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