

Leaders Call For Local Support At GOP County Convention

BY DOUG RUTTER

Brunswick County Republicans called for strong, grass-roots support in the upcoming primary and general elections at the county convention Saturday.

Fifteen candidates, including two looking to unseat Congressman Charlie Rose this year, spoke at the annual convention.

But it was a plea for work at the precinct level from longtime Republican Shirley Babson that set the tone for the afternoon.

County GOP Chairman James Payne, picking up on Mrs. Babson's comments, urged the 50 people in attendance to get behind the candidates.

"We have a golden opportunity, particularly with what is going on at the federal level and what is going on here," Payne said.

Brunswick County Commission Chairman Kelly Holden, who is running for a seat in the new 14th N.C.

"If we're going to put people in office this year we're going to have to start at the grass-roots level and leave our egos at the door."

—Kelly Holden, Chairman, Brunswick County Commissioners

House district, echoed their sentiments.

"If we're going to put people in office this year we're going to have to start at the grass-roots level and leave our egos at the door," said Holden.

A farmer and businessman from Shallotte, Holden said he's running for the legislature partly because state and federal mandates have frustrated him as a county commissioner.

State and federal lawmakers frequently make rules for local governments to follow, but rarely provide money to carry them out, he said.

Holden said 82 percent of the property taxes paid in

Brunswick County are used to fund programs or services mandated by the state or federal government.

Mike Causey of Greensboro, a Republican candidate for state insurance commissioner, was the keynote speaker Saturday.

Causey said half the voters in North Carolina don't realize the job of insurance commissioner is an elected position, yet insurance affects their pocketbooks as much as anything.

Causey, who has been in the insurance business since 1974, promised to cut red tape and lower rates if he's elected in November.

The candidate attacked the record of the current commissioner, Jim Long, saying he presided over the biggest insurance scandal in state history.

Causey said the Interstate Casualty case left more than 90,000 North Carolina policyholders without insurance and will cost the state \$37 million.

"People are fed up with this lax management, and they're fed up with the waste, fraud and abuse at all levels of government," he said.

Scott Dorman and Robert Anderson, two Republicans hoping to oust Rose this fall, also attended the convention.

They both referred to scandals in Congress, including the most recent pay raise and check bouncing, and called for new leadership in Washington.

"If we can't trust a Congress that can't control what goes what goes on under its own roof, how can we trust

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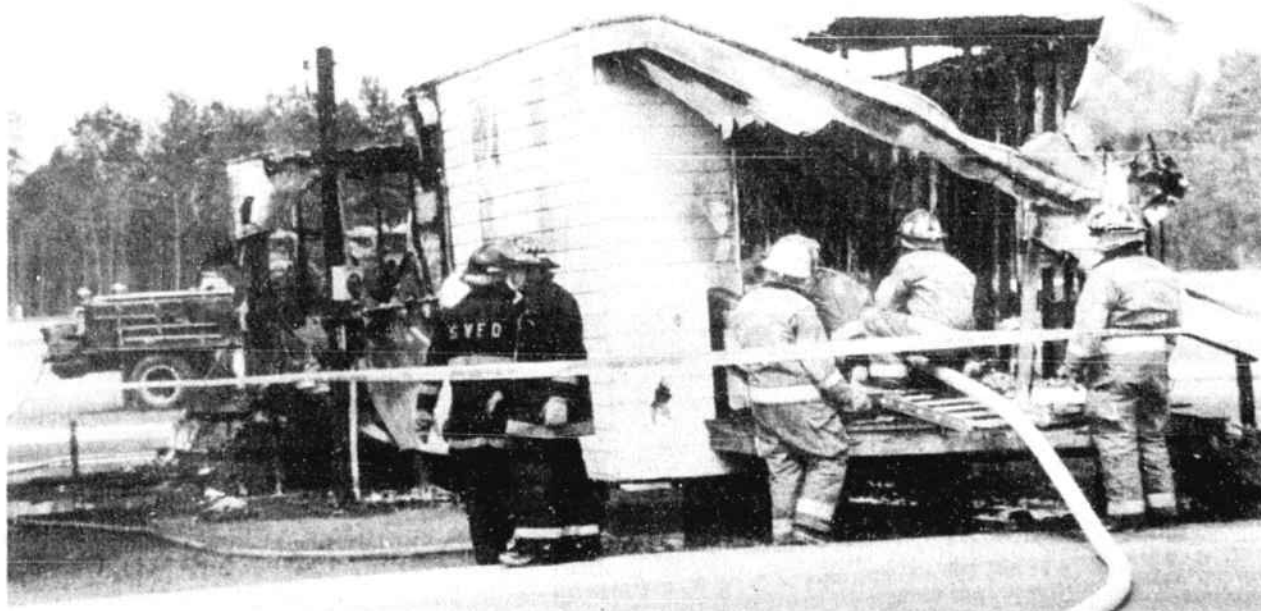
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STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

FIREMEN FROM Shallotte and Shallotte Point Volunteer Fire Departments extinguish the blaze that burned the In-School Suspension classroom at West Brunswick High School Sunday.

Fire Destroys Mobile Classroom On West Brunswick's Campus

A cause has not been determined for a fire that destroyed a mobile classroom building on the West Brunswick High School campus in Shallotte Sunday afternoon.

Brunswick County Fire Marshall Cecil Logan said Tuesday the blaze that caused an estimated \$25,000 in damage to the In-School Suspension classroom remains under investigation.

"We know when it started, but we don't know how," said Logan.

It was the second ISS building on a school grounds to be burned in Brunswick County within a week.

ISS is where students who are disciplined spend their school day isolated from other students. While there, they do independent work on classroom assignments and are not allowed to associate with their friends or classmates.

Last Monday, officers charged 16-year-old Blake Kennedy Hobbs, a North Brunswick High School student, with felonious burning of a school building in a fire that destroyed the ISS classroom on the Leland campus March 14.

Brunswick County's Chief Deputy John Marlow said he doesn't think the fire at West Brunswick was a "copycat" of the North fire, but that it "is going to be investigated to the fullest."

According to Brunswick County Sheriff's Deputy J.M. Adams, the first to arrive on the scene, the fire was spotted by a passing motorist around 12:15 p.m. Sunday.

Ervin Bethae, who lives on Airport Road, saw

smoke coming from the school grounds but could not see a fire. He stopped at the Han-Dee Hugo convenience store at the U.S. 17 and N.C. 130 intersection to ask clerk Melanie Hill to call the sheriff's department, Adams reported.

When Adams arrived at 12:18 p.m., the ISS classroom behind the main building was "fully involved," he said. "No one was seen around the building."

Further investigation revealed someone had also broken locks off of the doors to each of the three main school buildings sometime between March 20-22, said Adams. Someone had entered the main building through a side window.

Several classrooms had been broken into, but nothing was reported missing, Adams reported. A vocational education classroom building next to the burned ISS building had also been broken into.

When the fire call came in, Logan said he dispatched several departments, not knowing if the main school building was on fire.

"I didn't know what was burning," said Logan. "I just knew it was at the school."

Volunteers from Shallotte, Shallotte Point, Waccamaw and Sunset Beach departments battled the blaze and kept it from spreading to other buildings.

Supply Volunteer Fire Department sent an air truck while Calabash and Ocean Isle Beach fire departments stood by in case they were needed.

Logan said it will be difficult to determine how the fire started because there was not much left of the building.

OFFICER ACCUSED OF TRESPASSING

Shallotte Detective Is Reassigned

BY DOUG RUTTER

The Shallotte policeman whose racy attempt at humor offended a woman motorist last month has been reassigned, and another officer has been accused of trespassing.

Det. Tom Hunter was transferred to patrolman last Wednesday, less than a month after he reportedly made a sexually suggestive comment that offended a young woman stopped at a roadblock.

In an unrelated matter, Sgt. Ray Altizer was recently served with a criminal summons accusing him of second-degree trespassing. Perritt Alford, a former town policeman, pressed the charge before a magistrate on March 12.

Shallotte Police Chief Rodney Gause said Hunter's reassignment was not related to the incident involving a female motorist passing through town.

Hunter reportedly said he wanted to strip search the woman who was stopped at a roadblock on the U.S. 17 bypass Feb. 24.

The officer was suspended for four days without pay after the woman, who lives in Wilmington, called Chief Gause to complain.

Hunter said later that he was wrong for making the comment. He

explained that the statement was made to another police officer in a joking manner. The officer also wrote a letter to the woman apologizing for his conduct. He said he would have apologized immediately if he had known she heard the comment and was offended by it.

Gause said Tuesday that Hunter, a detective for the past year, was being reassigned for the good of the police department.

"He's been working detective for quite a while now and he's made a

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School Board Chairman Awaiting Test Results Following DWI Charge

BY TERRY POPE

The test results Brunswick County Board of Education Chairman Donna Baxter awaits this week may decide her role in the May 5 primary election.

The 43-year-old Boiling Spring Lakes resident was charged March 16 with driving while impaired and improper passing following a two-car accident on Boiling Spring Road near its intersection with North Shore Drive in her home town.

"I would love to answer all of your questions," said Ms. Baxter on Tuesday, "but my attorney has advised me not to comment on the charge."

The accident occurred around 9 p.m., according to Boiling Spring Lakes Police Officer Richard Timberlake's report.

His citation indicates Ms. Baxter's 1989 Oldsmobile overtook and passed a vehicle "proceeding in (the) same direction on a portion of the highway marked by DOT with marking against passing."

It also alleges that Ms. Baxter was driving while subject to an impairing substance, though the report doesn't specifically identify the substance as alcohol.

Results of a blood alcohol test taken at Doshier Memorial Hospital in Southport following the accident



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should be available in about two weeks.

"Everything will come to light," said Ms. Baxter. "A lot of people know what I am about. I think the people who know me will know the truth."

The other driver, Walter A. Lumsden, 63, suffered neck and back injuries in the accident. Ms. Baxter received stitches for a cut on the forehead.

"I wasn't hurt that badly," she said. "I just don't understand what happened."

Both drivers were treated and released from Doshier Hospital the night of the wreck. Ms. Baxter's car was demolished while damage to Lumsden's 1977 Ford pickup was estimated at \$1,500.

A court date has been set in Brunswick County District Court for April 29, about a week before the May 5 primary.

Ms. Baxter, who has filed for re-election to her District 4 seat on the school board, faces a Democratic challenger, J. Bryant Pergerson, 35, of Boiling Spring Lakes.

She said she will await test results before deciding whether to stay in the race.

"I have been asked by quite a few people to hang in there," she said.

If her candidacy would hurt the Brunswick County schools and its children, then she would drop out of the race, she added.

"I would never hurt the kids," she added. "That's not my intentions. There have been enough negative things printed in the paper about them."

TEMPORARY LINE INSTALLED

Break Interrupts County Water Supply

BY THE NEWS STAFF

Crews worked around the clock—through thunderstorms, sleet, snow and high winds—Thursday, Friday and again on Sunday to twice repair a main water line that broke, causing faucets in some homes south of Shallotte to go dry.

Thousands of southern Brunswick County residents were either without water or had very low pressure as a result of the break discovered Thursday morning on Bridgers Road in Shallotte. The line supplies water to homes along and off N.C. 179 south of Shallotte, including Ocean Isle, Sunset Beach and Calabash.

A temporary line installed across a bridge by Friday afternoon sprung a leak Sunday morning, sending workers back to the scene. Service was restored again shortly after 4 p.m.

"What happened points out the need for our \$8 million capital improvements project," said County Manager David Clegg.

With age and pressure, the main line broke at a 45-degree joint after the force of water eventually wore a coupling smooth, said Clegg. The pipe lay beneath 16 feet of sludge Thursday. A backhoe was used to expose the break.

Workers once had to scramble out of the hole just seconds before it caved in, said Clegg. Employees from the Water Department, Operations Services and Emergency Management worked through the night, from Thursday morning until Friday afternoon to install the bypass line.

"Water system employees literally risked their

"What happened points out the need for our \$8 million capital improvements project,"

—David Clegg
County Manager

lives to go down into that hole in a driving rain and thunderstorm," said Clegg. "I was very impressed with their bravery."

Part of the county's \$8 million water expansion project this year calls for construction of an additional main line from Shallotte to Seaside to pump water south. That line will run parallel to the existing line which broke last week, said Clegg.

"It's a poignant example of why we need that extra line," said Clegg. "If that doesn't show you, I don't know what will."

When the break was discovered Thursday, the county began pumping water from its four wells at Sunset Beach and using existing water from tanks at Ocean Isle and Calabash. Lines were back-fed through the Shallotte system to get as much water as possible down N.C. 179 to the Ocean Isle area customers.

"Everybody was not without water," said Clegg. "The system did not come to a crashing halt. There just wasn't enough water. In the mid-

dle of March, there wasn't enough water."

Because of the lower water pressure, fire departments were told Thursday to offer backup assistance as needed in the event of a fire south of Shallotte. Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan said there were no major fires or problems during the crisis.

"Thank God we didn't have anything," he said. Water was turned back on Friday around noon, but it took two hours before the lines were flushed and water was flowing again, said Public Utilities Director Jerry Webb. When the pressure dropped south of the breakage Sunday morning, he discovered the temporary line had blown a gasket.

When final repairs are completed, the replacement line will hang from the side of the bridge over a creek where the break occurred. In the future, the new line to Seaside will allow the county to reroute water around such breaks, said Kelly Holden, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners.

For now, said Webb, the department must cut the water off to make the repairs.

Webb's office received numerous telephone calls, "some nice and some not so nice," during the water shortage.

"We really appreciate everybody's patience," he added.

Holden was on the scene Sunday afternoon, to find out why his phone kept ringing, too.

Elbert Galloway, distribution specialist, said he was on the job through the snow and rain from 7

(See BREAK, Page 2-A)



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

WORKING SUNDAY to fix a leak in the temporary line are (top) James Benton, maintenance superintendent, and (below) Wade Robinson, Jerry Ferguson, Robert Ivey, and Phillip Russ.