

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

12/31/93
HOAG & SONS BOOK BINDERY
P.O. BOX 162
SPRINGPORT MI 49284



Thirtieth Year, Number 22

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Shallotte, North Carolina, Thursday, April 2, 1992

50¢ Per Copy

36 Pages, 3 Sections, 4 Inserts

Local Towns Join Forces To Protect Liquor Stores

BY DOUG RUTTER

Brunswick County towns with ABC stores have formed a committee to protect their established systems and keep the county from taking away their business.

"We're just looking at ways that the local ABC systems can be the most beneficial to the people," said Long Beach ABC Board Chairman Ben Thomas, who is heading up the committee that met for the first time last week.

Shallotte, Calabash, Ocean Isle Beach, Sunset Beach, Belville, Boiling Spring Lakes, Long Beach, Southport and Yaupon Beach have each operated ABC stores for more than 10 years.

Some town officials are concerned about the county's ABC system, which opened its first and only store on Holden Beach Road in August 1990. They fear more stores will steal business, and revenue, from the towns.

"All we're trying to do is protect the local systems as they have been for years," Thomas said. "Hopefully, we don't want to infringe on each other's clientele."

At the meeting last Tuesday, Thomas said the committee discussed state legislation that prohibits the county from opening liquor stores within seven miles of a town that already has its own ABC system.

The law is due to expire July 1, but governing boards in at least two towns, Calabash and Long Beach, have adopted resolutions asking that it be continued.

The resolutions ask local representatives in the North Carolina General Assembly, Rep. David Redwine and Sen. R.C. Soles Jr., to remove the "sunset" provision from the bill so it doesn't expire in three months.

Town officials point out that they have substantial investments in their systems and that any nearby county liquor stores would likely divert customers from the town stores.

The loss of customers would mean less money for the towns and a reduction in basic services, according to matching resolutions adopted by commissioners in Calabash and Long Beach.

Redwine introduced the local legislation last session after Southport and Oak Island officials voiced concern over county plans to open a store in the River Run Shopping Center.

The local representative said he agreed to sponsor the bill with the idea that town and county officials would discuss their concerns and reach an agreement before the law expired.

"My hope was that the two groups could get together and work out an agreement between themselves," Redwine said last week.

Dot Kelly, clerk to the Brunswick County ABC Board, said there are no present plans to open another outlet, although the possibility is frequently discussed.

Thomas said the committee plans to meet again April 15 in Southport to find out if the town boards want the local legislators to amend the state law. Redwine said he's been invited to the meeting.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

Hitching A Ride

These two pelicans were ready to do some fishing Saturday afternoon, or at least cruise the Shallotte River. They were sunning on the deck of a small fishing boat docked at Holden's Seafood at Shallotte Point.

REGISTRATION ENDS MONDAY

New Addresses Won't Disrupt Primary

BY TERRY POPE

Thousands of address changes may cause slight delays but will not hamper the voting process when residents go to the polls for the May 5 primary.

Monday, April 6, is the last day for voters to register and to make party affiliation changes, precinct transfers and other transactions with the Brunswick County Board of Elections office or with precinct officials.

Brunswick County's new 911 emergency communications system, which is scheduled to begin April 15, has resulted in thousands of new residential addresses as the county moves from rural postal routes to a new house numbering system with street names.

If a person hasn't changed an address by Monday, they can still vote in May, said Board of Elections Supervisor Lynda Britt.

"We are very much aware that the whole county is going to get new addresses," said Ms. Britt.

Poll workers will be asked to verify voters' names and addresses at the primary election.

"If the address is not the same," said Ms. Britt, "it may take a minute or two for them to correct it on the printout."

Residents must take the initiative to change their addresses with the Board of Elections' office at the Brunswick County Government Center in Bolivia. Changes can be made by telephone, said Ms. Britt.

Most address changes to date have come from the Calabash and Sunset Beach areas, she noted.

Changing an address at another county agency, such as the Brunswick County Water Department, will not change one's address at the Board of Elections.

Most county residents have not received their new address from the county.

Registration closes at the elections office at 5 p.m. Monday. Persons may also register to vote at county libraries and at the N.C. Department of Motor Vehicles drivers license examiner's office during regular business hours.

Registrars in each precinct who will register voters through Monday are Pat Wells in Hood Creek; Mickey Bullock in Leland; Lynn Hall in Woodburn; Marie Jones in Belville; Walter J. Babson in Town Creek; Margie Willets in Bolivia; Florie Senstermacher in Boiling Spring Lakes; Glenda Caylor in Southport I; Ellen Dorsett in Southport II; Claire Rees in Oak Island I; Helen Buchman in Oak Island II; Junius Royals in Mosquito; Annie V. Sellers in Supply; Bertie R. Cailan in Seclusion I; Sheila C. Ward in Seclusion II; Delma Clemmons in Shallotte; Cecilia Kinlaw in Frying Pan; Faye Todd in Grissett; Elizabeth Christie in Shingletree; Brenda Russ in Longwood; Thomas Gore in Ash and Juanita Pruitt in Freeland.

The number of persons registering to vote hasn't increased recently with the April 6 deadline approaching, noted Ms. Britt.

She expects registrars to face the usual last-minute rush on Monday.

Fired Animal Control Worker's Appeal Goes To State Hearing

BY TERRY POPE

Testimony continued at a state personnel hearing Tuesday to determine if Brunswick County officials had reason to fire its former animal control supervisor.

Zelma Babson of Ash, an 11-year veteran of Brunswick County Animal Control, is accused of sidestepping Brunswick County Health Department policy to answer an after-hours call and of being discourteous to fellow employees.

She was placed on suspension last June and later fired by Health Director Michael Rhodes, whose action was upheld by the Brunswick County Board of Health. Ms. Babson appealed that decision to the State Personnel Commission.

Testimony Monday revealed hostility existed among animal control employees and that Ms. Babson felt she was being "set up" and watched closely for a reason to be fired.

Five animal control workers signed a grievance in April 1991 against Ms. Babson, listing 34 events detailing how they felt harassed and intimidated by their former supervisor. A grievance is a complaint lodged against a fellow worker to a superior.

Rhodes issued a reprimand stemming from the grievance, Ms. Babson's fourth while on the job, with a

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third having resulted from a Sept. 1, 1990, incident involving an after-hours call.

She is accused of telephoning former District 2 County Commissioner Benny Ludlum to get permission to answer an after-hours call instead of first checking with her superiors, Rhodes and Environmental Health Supervisor John Crowder, who is no longer a supervisor but remains an employee of the department.

Policy states animal control workers can answer calls after hours, between 4:30 p.m. and 8 a.m., only in the event of an emergency, such as an animal bite on a person, an investigation of rabies or other "human life-threatening situations".

Beecher R. Gray, administrative law judge, will hear evidence and issue an advisory opinion to Brunswick County. It could take months before Judge Gray renders his decision, said County Attorney David Clegg.

The decision is an advisory opinion and does not bind the county to take any specific steps, said Clegg. If Ms. Babson is unhappy with the outcome, she may then pursue the case in Brunswick County Superior Court.

Her testimony Monday detailed how animal control officers are routinely assigned to answer after-hours calls, especially if a resident has first called a county commissioner to complain.

Ms. Babson said Crowder had once told her that employees could answer non-emergency calls after hours if a law enforcement officer had made a request in writing or if instructed to do so by a county commissioner. Written policy states the decision should be made by either the health director or the environmental health supervisor.

After the Sept. 1 incident, Ms. Babson was told that after-hours calls were "political in nature" and to avoid them, she said.

"I was not to call anyone else about approval for after-hours calls," she said.

Relying on her filed reports, Ms. Babson noted five cases prior to the Sept. 1 incident involving officers who were dispatched to after-hours calls by either Rhodes or Crowder in non-emergency situations.

Workers were dispatched to retrieve a dog whose

owner had been served commitment papers, to pick up a dog at Seaside that had been struck by a car, to assist Yaupon Beach police officers in removing a dog from a truck that had rammed into a building, to retrieve livestock found starving near Leland and to pick up a stray dog that pushed his way into an Ash woman's home and wouldn't leave.

In two of those incidents, the residents had first called county commissioners to complain, who in turn called animal control for action, she said.

Ms. Babson also listed six cases between the Sept. 1 incident and her firing in June when officers were ordered by Rhodes or Crowder to answer calls that did not involve reasons covered in the policy.

Officers were dispatched to investigate a dog that had been cut, to catch some horses running loose near Ocean Isle, to pick up a dog that had been struck by a car, to pick up a dog caught in a trap and to pick up stray puppies at an elderly woman's home.

She said Crowder approved the call to pick up the trapped dog after a domestic dispute broke out between neighbors. A resident had called District 1 Commissioner Kelly Holden to ask that the animal be

Height Limit Top Concern At Sunset Land Use Hearing

BY SUSAN USHER

If informal polling at a public hearing last Thursday is an indicator, a majority of Sunset Beach residents would like to see a 35-foot height limit on island construction that could only be changed by vote of town residents.

Twenty-nine of the approximately 50 people who attended a land use plan hearing at Sunset Beach Town Hall last week ranked such a height limit among their top five concerns relating to land use in the town.

"I think some of us are afraid of getting something like they have at Ocean Isle Beach," said Eloise Sarvis after she placed a gold star by the issue. A high-rise condominium project on Ocean Isle Beach's exclusive west end is visible from Sunset Beach.

To put such a height limit in place would require the town council to ask state legislators to adopt a local bill, similar to legislation previously adopted for Holden Beach and Long Beach.

Trailing behind with the second largest number of votes as keeping Bird Island as is, referring to the barrier island's owner efforts to acquire permits to build a new bridge to the island and possibly develop it on a limited basis.

Participants were almost evenly divided on an issue relating to an-

other island—the bridge connecting the island and mainland sections of Sunset Beach. Sixteen voted for maintaining the current bridge and 15 for replacing it with another unspecified type of bridge.

"That seems to be a very evenly divided issue in this town," said planning consultant Margaret (Peggy) Hayes as she tallied the voting results.

She had participants take turns listing one planning concern at a time, allowing all an opportunity to be heard. An hour and a half later, the group had compiled a list of 28 issues, many of them relating to conservation or protection of natural resources, or providing more control over the type of growth that is allowed to occur in the town.

Then each person was allowed to "vote" for his or her top five issues, using one gold star per issue.

Separating commercial and residential development garnered 15 votes, verifying the environmental need for a sewer system before the town contracts to build one drew 10 votes, as did development of a sewer system.

A generic "protecting the environment" received nine votes, as did maintaining the current level of density of development.

Many of the other issues raised by (See HEIGHT, Page 2-A)

Holden Dike Will Hold Spoil

BY DOUG RUTTER

A dike system on Holden Beach is being repaired so it can hold sediment that will be dredged from the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway next week.

Holden Beach Enterprises owns the spoil site east of Swordfish Drive and is overseeing the improvements, according to Jim Griffin, a partner in the land development company. The Corps has an easement to use the property as a dredge spoil site.

Griffin said the corporation will allow the Corps of Engineers to pump dredged material into the dike in return for the valuable spoil.

"Once the dirt dries out we can use the dirt, and dirt's expensive."

Howard Varnam, engineer with the Corps navigation branch in Wilmington, said it's not uncommon for owners of spoil sites to maintain them in return for the dredged material.

Griffin said Holden Beach Enterprises has no immediate plans to develop the property, which juts into the marsh between Heritage Harbor and Harbor Acres.

"If we ever do anything it would be way down the road," he said.

Time To Spring Forward

It's that time of year again.

Daylight Saving Time (DST) will set our external clocks ahead Sunday, April 5, for the only 23-hour day of the year and a resulting mild case of jet lag.

Clocks are to be set ahead an hour at 2 a.m., a task most people accomplish before retiring to bed on Saturday night.

DST will continue until the last Sunday of October.

Daylight-saving was first suggested by Benjamin Franklin in 1784 as a means of saving Parisian shopkeepers money on candles. Since its introduction in the United States it has been a political hot potato because of its purported effects on sundry activities ranging from milking cows to operating AM radio stations and selling Halloween candy and bedding plants.

With DST, clock time is shifted ahead by one hour to provide for one extra hour of daylight in the afternoon in lieu of one hour of daylight in the morning.

(See APPEAL, Page 2-A)