

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Take Care When Burning

'Tis the season to be careful. This month and next constitute the peak fire season in Brunswick County.

Every year thousands of dollars in prime timber, homes and other property are lost to fires.

This time of year it's easy for a fire to spread quickly out of control—winds are brisk, the temperature's rising and plenty of dead twigs, straw and other debris are on the ground for fuel.

Many woods fires here are arson, deliberately set. But most are the result of carelessness. That means we can do something to prevent them.

We can take precautions not to drop cigarette butts or other burning items along the side of the road, to properly douse a campfire along a river bank or in the woods, to make sure ashes from the grill are thoroughly drowned and cold before disposal.

And we can follow proper precautions when we deliberately set a fire. Most fires are accidental: Someone starts a fire to clear land or burn trash or yard debris without taking precautions.

What should you do when burning?

—First, check to see that conditions are suitable—not too dry or windy, and that no burning ban has been issued by the Forest Service:

- Obtain a Forest Service permit, if needed;
- Stay with the fire for the duration;
- Equip yourself with rake, shovel and water so a fire can be stopped if it starts getting out of hand;
- Limit the fire to an area in which it can be policed—and contained—by the personnel available;
- Use common sense. If a fire looks like it could get out hand, call a fire department for assistance before the fire is burning out of control; and
- Burn trash in a barrel with wire mesh or some other cover that will keep burning materials from blowing away.

Brunswick County is in transition, neither urban nor rural. Homes and businesses are scattered all over, adjacent to and in wooded areas. That complicates efforts to fight fires. A backyard fire can turn suddenly into a forest blaze that scorches hundreds of acres. A small woods fire can threaten nearby homes.

If you must burn this spring, play it safe. Follow common-sense guidelines and when in doubt, check with the North Carolina Forest Service at Bolivia.

Here We Go Again

It is with some embarrassment that I insert myself once again into Brunswick County newsgathering. If every body resembled a Mexican jumping bean in their employment history, it's me.

Since leaving domesticity for the labor force in 1971, I have racked up at least a dozen different work experiences, and since 1978, I have been flitting through the *Beacon's* revolving door, coming and going while attempting to find fulfillment in a variety of other jobs.

From congressional aide to church program director to teacher, I've run the gamut.

Nothing, however, satisfied like journalism, and nothing in journalism has proved as appealing as cavorting around Brunswick County for *The Brunswick Beacon*. I have worked for other publications, tried publishing my own, and done other kinds of writing, including histories, books and training materials. There's something to be said for all this, and I wouldn't trade my job-hopping experiences for anyone else's stability.

Nevertheless, like a homing pigeon, I keep coming back to the family, the challenge, and the fun that the *Beacon* represents to me. I have watched it grow over the last 14 years in size, scope and quality and am so proud to have been an occasional part of something that is so good at its brand of public service.

I particularly rejoice this time to have the assignment of covering education, because that's how my journalism career began. In 1973 I traveled across country from Texas to Wilmington to take the job of education reporter for the *Star-News*, my introduction to newspapers. Thus began my love affair with them and a fascination that has persisted through the distraction of other work.

So, here I am again, for a long time, I hope, and how I look forward to meeting YOU somewhere along the way.

Marjorie Megivern



A Deal Too Good To Be True Probably Is

Each spring, the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department receives a number of calls from people who have either been taken for a ride, ripped off or victimized by some fly-by-night scam artist.

Many times the victim is too embarrassed to even report the crime. That doesn't help when detectives are anxious to help catch the rascals.

As crime prevention officer, it's Sheriff's Deputy Don Gates' job to investigate cases when a resident has been cheated out of money. For some reason, the height of the flimflam work coincides with the major league baseball season.

Why? Gates doesn't really know. And the baseball season started Monday.

One reason why reports of flimflam artists on the loose increases this time of year has nothing to do with the baseball season. It's just a coincidence that residents who have sat dormant through a long winter are suddenly eager to get things done around the house when the weather improves.

Mary Russ, home economics agent with the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Service, also

Terry Pope



believes that is true, that people begin to look around their homes to see what needs fixing up during the spring.

"Warm weather also seems to bring out fly-by-night scam artists," she warns, "those chaps who are just waiting to take your hard-earned dollars for bogus repairs."

Flimflam artists are travelers. They move from county to county, never stopping in one spot long enough to leave a trail large enough for detectives to follow.

"You might do well to be somewhat suspicious of the traveling handyman who just happens to be in the neighborhood," said Mrs. Russ, "and who offers to give you a free estimate."

In Brunswick County, reported scams often include out-of-town paving contractors who come to the door with just enough material left over from a job to resurface a driveway.

"Even if the price is a bargain," said Mrs. Russ, "work or materials may be slipshod."

Often a thin layer of gravel and tar is placed on the driveway that crumbles after the first rain.

The price seems ridiculously low, but 99 percent of the time a consumer gets exactly what he pays for.

Gates has a philosophy that residents should adopt—if a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Locally, other scams have included crooked and pushy door-to-door carpet salesmen who enter an elderly person's home. While one salesman holds up a large piece of flooring or carpeting, the other person is searching the home for a purse, money or jewelry to steal. The carpet serves as a shield, blocking the homeowner's view.

"Also be suspicious of anyone who stops at the house and points out problems needing repairs," cautions Mrs. Russ. "He could be right.

But if you do need repairs, contact an established local person who can do the job well. That local person will be around if, and when, problems arise."

She gives these tips on finding local persons who do reputable work: talk to neighbors or friends in the area who have recently had work done; ask their opinion of the work done and if they would hire the person again.

When hiring someone from an advertisement, ask for references or of work they have done recently in the area. And if possible, go see some of their work and talk with others who have hired them in the past.

Where residents often go wrong is when they jump at an offer that sounds too good to pass up. Residents should use better judgment when it comes to home repairs.

There are numerous companies and repairmen in Brunswick County who have established and reputable businesses. If you're serious about home repairs, give them your business, tell the roving flimflam artists to take a hike and report them to the sheriff's department.



J.R.'s On The Loose, With Bell On

J.R. set a record this past week, a record I hope she'll break again and again.

Keeping a collar on that cat seems a nearly impossible task.

She has gone through more collars, of all types, colors and styles, than any other cat or dog I've shared residence with; that amounts to quite a few animals.

The longest a collar had stayed around her neck in previous attempts ranged from 15 minutes to about four hours. I had never put a collar on her in the morning and it still be there when I came home for lunch.

If you've ever doubted that persistence pays off, then let J.R. be an example that not giving up does pay.

Cats have some extra sense, almost like radar, that lets them know when something is up—a scheduled trip to the vet, for example, can cause both of our cats to disappear for an entire day.

Wednesday morning, J.R. knew a disturbing change of some sort was in the air. She scrambled to get away, but I caught her against the deck railing and drew her, struggling, onto my lap.

J.R. didn't stay there long, but when she bolted, a thin, red leather strap with bell was fastened about her neck.

Ooh. She didn't like it one bit and set out to get rid of the darn thing as fast as possible.

J.R. darted across the street and up a tall, dead, longleaf pine, that little silver-colored, Christmas-type bell ringing all the way. She spun around and down that tree and off into the shrubs along the ditch bank. Any minute we expected her to emerge, collarless and bell-less.

A while later, though, off in the distance, we could hear her still tinkling as she ran to and fro.

Surely there were celebrations at the feeders that morning. Every bird in the neighborhood knew J.R.'s whereabouts.

At lunch, there was no sign of either J.R. or the bell. Had she run

Susan Usher



away from home in a fit of pique? Was she hung on a bush by her collar, unable to escape?

Back home Wednesday night after work, Don issued the first major

report of the day: Both J.R. and collar with bell were home.

Victory!
 We may be jumping the gun, but if that collar can stay on an entire day, then why not for many days to come. The next concern: Can a cat learn to move in a way that doesn't ring the collar bell. I hope not.

Why one more try at belling J.R. after so many failed attempts?

She's gained a reputation as a bird-lover of the worst sort. She not only enjoys watching them from the bunker she's dug in the garden; she also likes pouncing. It's instinctual,

we know, but her behavior is a little tough to endure sometimes, especially early in the morning. Contrary to what some readers think, I'm not proud of her great skill as a hunter, but it would be foolish not to acknowledge it.

J.R.'s a delightful cat, and we're not about to get rid of her or lock her up. But she's been a problem as we've tried to turn our yard into a welcoming retreat for birds and butterflies and small critters, as well as people.

Maybe now we've got that problem licked.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bird Island Deserves Protection

To the editor:

Recently revealed plans to develop Bird Island, the last undeveloped barrier island on the North Carolina coast south of Wilmington, should concern everyone.

Bird Island in its natural undeveloped state is vitally important to the southeastern coastal region of North Carolina. The island provides essential wildlife habitat to many rare birds and animals such as the brown

pelican, osprey, and loggerhead turtles. Bird Island is economically important because the marshes and water surrounding it are the nursery for much of the seafood that this area is so famous for. In its recreational and education value, Bird Island is priceless.

Barrier islands are dynamic, vibrant ecosystems—once they are developed they are essentially destroyed. We must save a few unde-

veloped barrier islands along our coast so that our children will know that beaches are not just the sandy strip between the asphalt and the ocean. Bird Island deserves protection, either as a privately owned nature preserve or as a state park.

Alan Myrick
 Greensboro

Early Lesson Is Remembered

To the editor:

I am an 89-year-old man who thankfully, remembers much of what I was taught about conditions in the Central American countries by a very dedicated, competent eighth grade teacher.

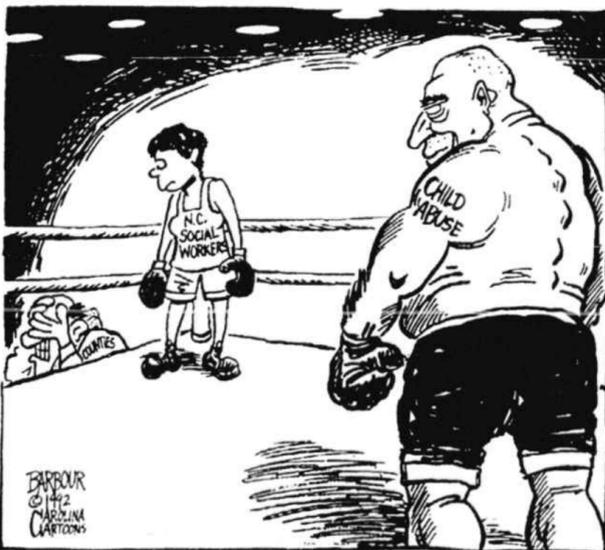
Our teacher told his boys' class how the very rich, some of them owners-operators of the large steamship lines, were in complete control of the economy then. My cousin, in New York City, was a member of the board of the New York Exchange and an owner-operator of a fleet of tugboats in New York harbor. I mentioned to him that these rich owners were taking the natural riches from other countries for little

or nothing and leaving the area's people poverty-stricken. "Why of course," was my cousin's reply. "How do you think the rich get richer?"

Since 75 years ago when I got that lesson, I can only imagine the tremendous amount of bananas, coffee, minerals, nuts, fruit seafood and other items taken from these countries, as well as control of thousands of acres of choice land, all in the name of, "dollar conquest." Prices still climb! People revolt! Greed prevails!

Yes, we do have bananas, and at what cost?

Earl L. Markland
 Calabash



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