

FIREFIGHTERS SEARCH for the cause of the fire that gutted Big Nell's Pit Stop last Thursday night.

Fire Guts Popular Beach Area Diner

BY SUSAN USHER

Workers began clearing the debris this week to make way for the rebuilding of Big Nell's Pit Stop between Ocean Isle Beach and Sunset Beach.

The local eatery was gutted by fire last Thursday night, along with the extensive collection of stock car racing memorabilia that had been displayed there by owner Nell Redwine Harrelson and her husband, Al.

"It's like a national landmark has burned," lamented Tom Pope, a local building contractor who was an almost-daily customer.

Sunset Beach Fire Chief Greg Cain said it appeared the fire was caused by a short in the wiring in the

central heating and air system.

Firefighters said the building was already engulfed with flames when they arrived.

"Apparently nobody saw it until it started to burn," said Keith Logan, assistant chief of Sunset Beach VFD.

Volunteer firefighters from Sunset Beach, Ocean Isle Beach, Calabash and Shallotte Point departments responded to the blaze, which was reported at approximately 7:20 p.m.

The plenum that connected the system to the ductwork was made of plywood, not metal, said Brunswick County Fire Marshal Cecil Logan. Wind created by the heat when that box caught on fire blew the fire through the ductwork, spreading it

through the building.

Keith Logan said the Sunset Beach department's biggest problem in responding to the blaze was a lack of cooperation from motorists.

"People wouldn't move out of our way," he said, even though it's the law in North Carolina. "We even had to stop at the intersection (of N. C. 904 and N.C. 179)."

No one was seriously injured in the fire; however, one Sunset Beach volunteer was treated at The Brunswick Hospital for heat exhaustion and was released.

The exterior of Big Nell's remained intact, but was almost completely gutted by fire except in the kitchen area, which sustained extensive heat and smoke damage.



FOUR DEPARTMENTS responded to the fire, but the restaurant was already engulfed with flames.

PHOTO BY BARNEY MORGAN

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State's Road Request Angers Rabon, Board

BY TERRY POPE

A tiny road between Thomasboro and Longwood is the center of a controversy among county and state officials.

Brunswick County Commissioner Frankie Rabon, who represents District 4, said Monday he was upset by the state's recommendation that Gwynn Road (S.R. 1306) be abandoned for maintenance purposes.

"It's making us look like a laughing stock," said Rabon.

When the state's request went to the board last month, commissioners couldn't recall past action regarding the 2.4 mile road. But Rabon said he was suspicious.

He asked Clerk to the Board Kelly Barefoot to investigate previous action regarding Gwynn Road.

Research of minutes revealed that in May 1990 commissioners held a public hearing and voted unanimously to recommend that the road not be abandoned by the state. Rabon said he thought the state routinely followed the county's request.

"It really disturbs me that this is not the case," he added. "We take our time to hold these public hearings. I just don't like it."

At the public hearing, one person spoke in favor of abandoning the road and three spoke against the proposal.

The board asked County Manager David Clegg to write Secretary of Transportation Tommy Harrelson and Gov. Jim Martin to find out why the county's request was ignored.

"The board deserves an explanation as to why it happened," said Rabon.

Board Chairman Kelly Holden said he talked with local N.C. Board of Transportation member Marilyn Williams of Wilmington Monday about the problem.

"I'm in total agreement with you," Holden told Rabon. "Obviously, there's a total lack of communication with DOT."

The road is used as a thoroughfare by residents in the Thomasboro and Longwood communities south of Shallotte, said Holden.

Other Business

In other business Monday, commissioners:

■Appointed Shirley Babson chairperson of the Brunswick County Board of Equalization and Review, which hears appeals of property tax assessments.

■Designated May 10-16 as Emergency Medical Services Week in

Brunswick County.

■Agreed to budget \$28,714, or 15 percent of a \$157,800 DOT grant, the county is seeking for the 1992-93 fiscal year for road improvements.

■Approved the pre-application process for a state water access grant to build a boat ramp at Bonaparte Landing near Calabash.

■Set a public hearing, June 8, at 7 p.m., for Sherrow Estates subdivision north of Shallotte. Residents have petitioned to become a Special Assessment District for county water service.

■Transferred to the Brunswick County Board of Education the title for land where its administration building in Southport is located for insurance purposes.

■Entered into a user agreement with the SBI and N.C. Division of Criminal Information to connect the 911

system to a statewide crime control network.

■Appointed Thomas Gray of the Holden Beach community to the Brunswick County Planning Board. He will replace Alfonso Roach, who resigned.

■Set aside a used sheriff's deputy vehicle for a Northwest Volunteer Fire Department now organizing.

■Funded a \$20,000 water line extension for the Southport Committee of 100, a group that recruits industry to the county. Clegg said a company expected to employ 32 persons is expected to locate its plant in the group's industrial park on N.C. 211.

Committee Chairman Don Hughes said final details have not been worked out with the firm. Therefore, the committee won't release further information at this time. Clegg labeled it "a clean industry."



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Tom Yeagle

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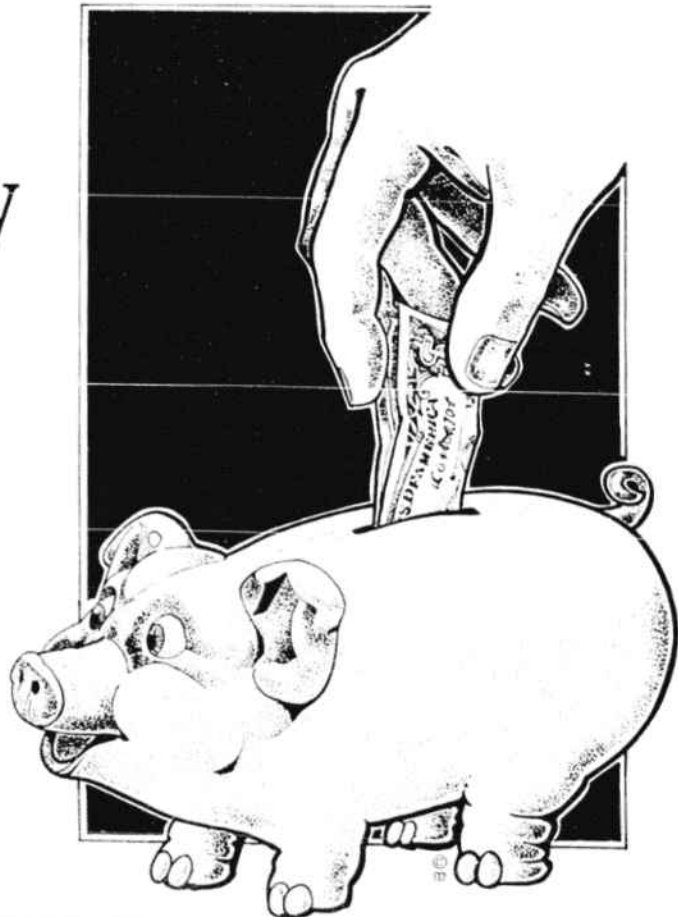
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