

### School Board Petitioned

A Calabash man seeks signatures to support demands that the system improve. The board chairman cries foul. Page 2-B.

### They're All Winners

West Brunswick High School seniors are honored at the school's annual awards day ceremony. Story and photo on Page 12-B.

### Storm Fouls Fishing

A weekend torrent with strong winds and high tides makes fishing a veritable wash-out. Stories, Page 12-C.

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## Varnam Sentenced To 35 Years On Drug, Burglary Charges

BY ERIC CARLSON

Confessed cocaine smuggler and thief Olaf Dale Varnam was given a 35-year prison sentence Monday in a negotiated guilty plea to 12 felony charges stemming from a series of burglaries in the Holden Beach area last winter.

Varnam pleaded guilty in Brunswick County Superior Court to one count of second degree burglary, six charges of possessing stolen goods and five counts of breaking and entering. Another dozen felony charges were dropped in the plea bargain agreement that revoked his probation and activated part of the suspended sentence imposed after Varnam's 1988 drug trafficking trial.

The presumptive sentence for the 12 charges dealt with in the agreement was 47 years. The state agreed to accept a 25-year sentence on the theft charges with the addition of 10 years of the 15-year sentence that was suspended in the earlier plea bargain.

Varnam, 40, cannot be paroled for at least

seven years, according to the Brunswick County District Attorney's office.

The arrangement was called "a good plea" by Assistant District Attorney Lee Bollinger, who said a jury trial in the case might have been risky because it would have hinged on the testimony of one of Varnam's accomplices in the burglary ring.

"Any time a case depends on the testimony of an admitted thief, there will always be a question of credibility," Bollinger said. "We had the goods that were stolen and we had the testimony of co-defendants, but we did not catch them coming out of a house."

The cornerstone of the plea bargain was the burglary charge, which carries a minimum active sentence of seven years before the defendant can be considered for parole, Bollinger said. Once paroled on the first charges, Varnam will then begin the 10-year sentence imposed in the drug case.

In 1988, Varnam pleaded guilty to 18

*"Dale Varnam had a chance and he blew it."*

—Rex Gore  
District Attorney

counts each of cocaine trafficking and conspiracy. He was one of 80 people indicted on drug charges by a special grand jury investigation. He was given a 15-year suspended sentence, fined \$2,000 and put on five years probation. Varnam was not sent to jail because he had cooperated with investigators and because Judge Lynn Johnson felt he would be in danger if imprisoned.

"Varnam got a huge break when he was placed on probation," said District Attorney Rex Gore in a prepared release. "However his help then did not buy him license to steal now. Dale Varnam had a chance and he blew it."

After a three-month investigation into an organized theft ring, police arrested Varnam last Jan. 6 and seized about \$50,000 worth of stolen items from his house on Stone Chimney Road. Many of the items, including appliances and bathroom fixtures, had been installed for use in the home.

In describing the crimes for Superior Court Judge Giles Clark, Bollinger said a Holden Beach contractor could have testified that he saw Varnam looking over the shower doors and bathroom fixtures at a house under construction the day before the items were stolen. The contractor later went to Varnam's house on the pretense of making an estimate and saw the stolen goods, Bollinger said.

The state was prepared to call Perry Brown, a co-defendant in the case, who would have described several of the burglaries on which he accompanied Varnam. Witnesses would have testified that all the

break-ins occurred at night when the homes were unoccupied, Bollinger said.

Acting on information supplied by co-defendant Wayne Brown, investigators obtained warrants to search Varnam's house. Detectives built their cases by matching the recovered items with property reported missing in recent larcenies.

Dressed in a white shirt and blue jeans, Varnam stood before the judge and chewed bubble gum as the 12 charges were read. After each one, the judge asked if Varnam was pleading guilty. Each time Varnam replied, "Yes, sir."

In all Varnam admitted to possessing more than \$11,000 worth of stolen goods. Among the items stolen were televisions, refrigerators, microwave ovens, bathroom sinks, an outboard motor, a deep fryer, pillows, bedspreads, curtains, a lawn mower, coffee makers, sleeping bags, food, a cookie jar and two toilets.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

SOUTHBOUND TRAFFIC creeps through floodwaters on U.S. 17 Saturday afternoon just south of the Shallotte bypass.

## Holden Inspector To Give Permit For Bridge To Island In Marsh

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach Building Inspector Dwight Carroll plans to issue a permit next week to allow construction of a bridge from Ocean Boulevard to an uninhabited island in the marsh.

Holden Beach Enterprises applied for a minor CAMA permit Monday to build a 900-foot-long, 12-foot-wide wooden bridge to link Ocean Boulevard West and Bacon Island.

The company doesn't plan to build the bridge or develop the island right away, said Holden Beach Enterprises Secretary-Treasurer Virgil Roberts.

"There's no immediate plan. We're not rushing into anything," Roberts said Tuesday. "We're just getting our permits in order in case we decide to develop it."

Although he expects plenty of public opposition, Carroll plans to issue the permit next Friday. He said there's nothing in town or state regulations to prohibit construction of the bridge.

Under CAMA permit procedures, residents and others interested in the proposal have until June 11 to submit comments to the local permit officer. Carroll said he would like the comments in writing.

The proposed bridge would connect Bacon Island with Ocean Boulevard West around house number 678, which is near one of the few public beach accessways on that part of the beach.

Both Carroll and Roberts said the bridge wouldn't cover or disturb any wetlands, which means the Army Corps of Engineers would not be involved in the minor permitting process.

Bacon Island, located north of Ocean Boulevard between Sand Dollar and Swordfish drives, covers approximately 25 acres. Roberts

*"We're just getting our permits in order in case we decide to develop it."*

—Virgil Roberts  
Holden Beach Enterprises

said between 12 and 16 acres could be developed.

The island and surrounding marsh was platted in the 1970s for canal property. Since government regulations no longer allow the digging of canals, Roberts said plans would have to be changed.

He said the company probably will divide the usable land on the island into 16 to 20 "real exclusive, high-priced lots" measuring three-fourths to one acre each.

Roberts said the island has some property that is 14 to 18 feet above sea level and is covered with soils that would be suitable for development with septic tanks.

"Soil studies have just been fantastic as far as being able to handle wastewater sewage," he said.

Roberts said the bridge wouldn't be built until the company is ready to develop lots. "Once it's done it will be an exclusive development like Holden Beach West," he said.

Holden Beach Enterprises developed the subdivision at the far west end of Holden Beach. A private paved road leads to the development situated near Shallotte Inlet.

Roberts said he doesn't know if the proposed bridge to Bacon Island would be open to the public.

(See PERMIT, Page 2-A)

## Water, Winds Leave Mark Over Weekend

Torrential rainfall, high winds and higher than usual tides left their mark on Brunswick County this weekend.

Tides Friday night ranged from two feet to two and one-half higher than usual, according to bulletins from the National Weather Service.

In a period of a little more than 24 hours, southwestern areas of the county received from 5 inches to 7 inches of rainfall Friday and Saturday.

At Holden Beach, the storm washed out three to four feet of sand in some places and damaged a half dozen oceanfront walkways.

Building Inspector Dwight Carroll said he tied red ribbons to about six sets of stairs that he determined to be "structurally unsafe."

Erosion was spotty up and down the beach. "We lost three to four feet in some places," he said. "Some of the places it was not noticeable at all."

Carroll said the erosion and damage was caused by a combination of an unusually high tides and strong easterly winds that blew waves onto the beach.

At Ocean Isle Beach, wind direction helped minimize damage to the island's vulnerable east

end. Building Inspector Druid Roberson said, "We fared better on the east end than I thought we would. The wind stayed out of the east, so there was very little erosion. We just had grass washed up on the road on that end."

"There was six inches of rain measured in 27 hours, though, at the (sewer) treatment plant. We found some minor repairs we need to make, that were there before the storm."

The heavy rains and high tides resulted in shallow flooding of low-lying areas around the county. In the vicinity of Shallotte, flooding was evident south of the U.S. 17 bypass.

A state Department of Transportation crew was out Saturday afternoon erecting "High Water" signs and barrels with reflectors to direct motorists away from water that had inundated the southbound lane at the southern end of the bypass.

"We've had just a tremendous amount of rainfall," said Garland Suggs. "Seven inches so far."

Suggs is project supervisor for the widening of U.S. 17 from the bypass to the South Carolina state line. The rain caused a temporary setback in roadbed preparation, with two small "blow-outs"

near Grissetown where flood waters had cut through the path of the new lanes.

Flooding also prompted temporary closure of Shallotte District Park, where water covered portions of two ballfields and a picnicking area.

Greater than normal rainfall remains in the forecast over the next few days, along with unseasonably cool weather, according to Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady.

He expects about three-quarters of an inch of rainfall on top of the 4.55 inches he measured from May 26 through June 1.

He expects temperatures to range from the lower 60s at night into the lower 80s during the daytime, continuing the existing weather pattern.

"We continue to be in a very unusual pattern for this time of year. We are continuing to have weather we should have had 30 to 40 days ago," he said.

For the period, he recorded a high of 83 on May 26 and a low of 52 degrees on May 28.

An average daily high of 76 degrees combined with an average nightly low of 62 degrees for an average daily temperature of 69 degrees, which is about five degrees below normal.

### OWNERS FEEL BETRAYED

## Beach House Needs Changes To Satisfy State

BY DOUG RUTTER

Jimmie and Sandy Monroe will probably have to tear down a wall, seal two closets, rip apart a shower and make several other revisions to their new house at Holden Beach to satisfy the state.

The mandated changes came out of a contested hearing last week in Raleigh that was called after county health officials accused the couple of building a six-bedroom home when they only had permission to build four bedrooms.

"We can't believe the state's doing this," Monroe said Monday. "We're being treated like low-rate criminals."

The Monroes and their attorney met with state health department officials and the attorney general's staff last Thursday in Raleigh to hammer out the agreement.

The Brunswick County Health Department had suspended the couple's septic tank permit for a four-bedroom house at 137 Ocean Blvd.

West last month after a final inspection of the on-site sewage disposal system. The plans called for four bedrooms and five baths.

Health officials contend the beachfront house has six bedrooms, which is two bedrooms too many, and the septic system can only handle the number of people who would be expected to sleep in four bedrooms.

The Monroes, who just retired last year and had planned to rent the house for extra income, say the house only has four bedrooms. They planned to use two other rooms for an office and a den.

"I think we were picked as a landmark," Mrs. Monroe said. "We were picked for some kind of example."

Brunswick County Environmental Health Supervisor Andrew Robinson said the permit wasn't suspended to make an example of the Monroes, although they were the first in the county to be denied final approval under these circumstances.

Robinson said three or four other homeowners have made changes to their cottages during construction when it was determined they had too many bedrooms, including two in the past week at Holden Beach.

Health department officials consider a "bedroom" to be any room that can reasonably be expected to function as a bedroom. If it has doors, closets, windows and direct access to a bathroom, they say it's a bedroom.

Overcrowding has been a hot topic at Holden Beach and other area beaches for years. Houses intended to accommodate six or eight vacationers are often advertised and rented to sleep a dozen or more.

The Monroes said they're aware people build homes with more bedrooms than they should to get the most out of their investment. But they said they had no plans to cram more people in their house than state rules allow.

"The fact that they're calling us

liars gets me more than anything," Mrs. Monroe said. "Our own government doesn't even trust us."

The exact extent of the changes required to the couple's house wasn't known as of Tuesday. The Monroes had expected to receive the necessary changes in writing from the state last week following the hearing.

Robinson said the county health department also hadn't received written notification of the necessary revisions as of Tuesday.

The Monroes said the state will likely make them tear out a wall between a bedroom and den, close a hallway entrance to the den, build an office desk and bookshelf, remove a shower and seal off den and office closets.

They said the only other option offered by the state was finding more land to add additional wastewater treatment capacity to the septic system. But that would cost more (See BEACH, Page 2-A)

## Meeting To Focus On River

Save Our Shellfish members want to know if state and federal officials are making any progress cleaning up the polluted Lockwood Folly River.

The local organization of fishermen and environmentalists hopes to get some answers when it sponsors a public meeting on Wednesday, June 10.

"They haven't let us know anything in a couple of years," SOS President Annie Smigiel said last week. "We just want some answers."

Representatives of the N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources and the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries are expected to provide those answers to questions about water quality.

Lockwood Folly River, once considered the best place in Brunswick County to gather oysters, has been plagued by bacterial pollution in recent years.

The pollution, which state officials believe comes from faulty septic tanks and stormwater runoff, has resulted in frequent closures of the river to shellfish harvesting.

Mrs. Smigiel said county commissioners and other local officials have been invited to the meeting, as well as representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Lena Ritter of the N.C. Coastal Federation will attend. Mrs. Smigiel hopes for a big turnout of fishermen and other area residents interested in the river.

"If they make a living out of that river or if they're interested in the river they should show up," she said. "We might wind up with a houseful or we might wind up with a handful."

The meeting will start at 7:30 p.m. in the Lockwood Folly Community Building, located on Stanbury Road in Supply.

For more information on the meeting, call Mrs. Smigiel at 842-6758.