

# Fired Exec Files Sexual Harassment Suit Against Chamber

BY SUSAN USHER

A former executive vice president of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce is accusing the chamber and two of its board members of sexual harassment and sexual discrimination in a civil complaint filed Tuesday in Brunswick County Superior Court.

The complaint was filed by Hollis B. (Holly) Richards against the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, Inc.; Annette Odom, immediate past president; and Terry Barbee, president.

In her complaint Richards said that she was fired "on account of her sex."

Richards, who began work for the chamber July 15,

1991, was fired April 17, 1992. A newly hired chamber executive, William Dearman of Albany, Ga., is to begin work Sept. 15.

"I have no complaint against the membership of the chamber or the citizens of Brunswick County..." Richards said in a written statement released Tuesday. "I feel that the chamber membership and the public have a right to know about the leadership of the chamber."

Richards said she was "forced" to file the suit after an offer of settlement was made to her from the chamber leadership by a third party—a chamber member she said she had agreed not to identify—to which she made a counter offer with a Sept. 4 deadline for reply.

"However, at this time the counter offer has not been

responded to, therefore we had no choice other than to pursue the suit."

During Richards' tenure with the chamber, the complaint contends, she was "subjected to sexual innuendo, suggestions, advances and harassment" by Odom and Barbee.

She asserts that after she repeatedly rejected participation in sexually-oriented activities the two "began a campaign against her to have her employment terminated."

The complaint alleges the two knowingly made "false and slanderous" accusations of misconduct "for the purpose of creating difficulty for the plaintiff in her job and either forcing her resignation or creating such an environment that her job would be terminated."

Both Barbee and Odom were contacted by the *Beacon* for comment, but neither had seen a copy of the complaint until late Tuesday afternoon. They indi-

cated they would respond after reviewing the charges, but neither had done so as of 11 p.m. Tuesday.

After reviewing some but not all of the 20-page complaint Odom told a reporter, "I am in a state of absolute shock."

Among other things, the complaint asserts that Richards rejected "nude hot tubbing" with chamber leaders, refused to date a married man recommended to her by one of the defendants and rejected defendants' alleged sexual advances.

The complaint alleges that prior to rebuffing overt sexual overtures, Richards had received no complaints about her work from the chamber, with a good 90-day review in early October.

(See SUIT, Page 2-A)



RICHARDS



BARBEE



ODOM

## THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

12/31/99 #40  
HOAG & SONS BOOK BINDERY  
P.O. BOX 162  
SPRINGPORT MI 49284

Thirtieth Year, Number 45

©1992 THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

Shalotte, North Carolina, Thursday, September 10, 1992

50¢ Per Copy 38 Pages, 3 Sections, 4 Inserts

### Fire Chief Says Inferior Pagers Cripple County 911 System

BY ERIC CARLSON

Citing what he called life-threatening deficiencies in the county's 911 communications system, a local fire chief Tuesday criticized emergency management officials for purchasing low-quality equipment from a Wilmington dealer for more than it would have cost to buy within the county.

Civietown Volunteer Fire Chief Al Nord said at a Brunswick County Commissioners meeting that the radio pagers used to alert firefighters of an emergency do not pick up signals in many parts of the county. He said the pagers, which were selected by Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan, are prone to breakdowns and are not built to adequate safety specifications.

Nord further charged that Logan acted improperly in spending \$86,832 for 324 pagers from an out-of-county source without advertising for written bids. He produced a proposal from a Sunset Beach communications dealer offering to sell the same pagers to the county at a cost of \$10 less per unit.

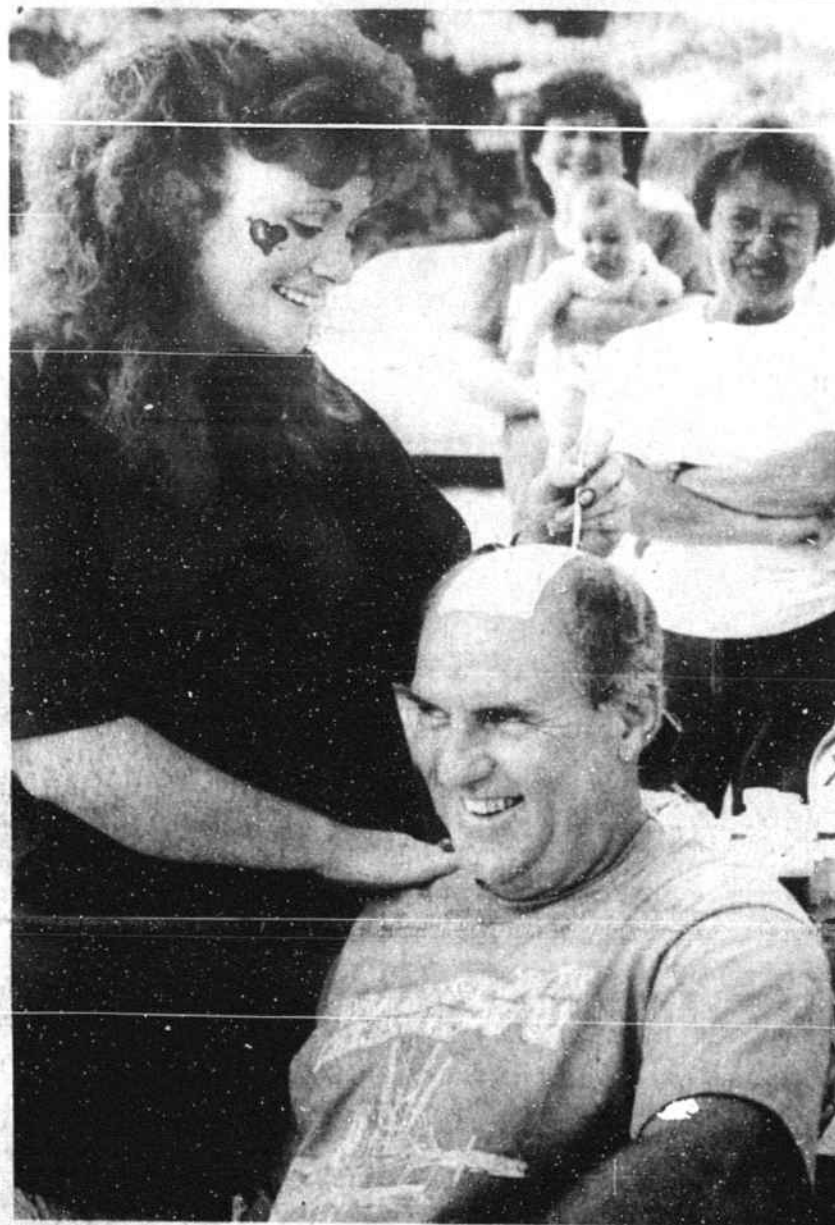
While the incoming side of the Emergency Services Center is excellent, Nord said the operation is "totally crippled" by a radio transmission system that does not cover Brunswick County.

"The consoles and the telephone equipment are state-of-the-art, but when a call comes in, those dispatchers don't leave their desks to respond to emergencies. We do," said Nord.

Logan told the commissioners that he had tested several types of pagers for six weeks and decided on the Japanese-made Shinwa model because of its lower cost. He said the pagers were bought from Wilmington Communications because the company offered better service than the local dealer, Kanoy Communications. He said the pagers met all necessary safety specifications.

"They're not the top-of-the-line pagers, but we didn't pay the top-of-the-line price," Logan said.

Admitting that county emergency communications "lost some coverage area" when transmitting antennas were moved to the 496-foot tower at the 911 center, Logan said he was "continuously working to get it right." The county has experimented with booster transmitters in (See PROBLEMS, Page 2-A)



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

### Quite The Canvas

Gaye Fulford painted a lot of faces Saturday at the Varnantown Festival and found a nice smooth spot for an American flag on the top of Danny Galloway's head. The art work and unique "canvases" brought a smile to everyone's face. More festival and parade photos, Pages 6-B and 9-B.

## Water Damage, Asbestos Fears Force Post Office Closing

BY DOUG RUTTER

Operations should be back to normal at Shalotte Post Office sometime this week after water damage and fear of asbestos contamination forced officials to close the office last Friday morning.

Area residents with mail boxes at the office were allowed to pick up their mail as usual starting Tuesday. Window service was expected to resume Wednesday.

Shalotte Postmaster Frank Bringoli said the office was closed Friday around 9 a.m. for the safety of employees and customers. Rainwater leaked through the roof onto the floor and knocked down ceiling tiles.

Postal officials closed the office for health and safety reasons, fearing release of invisible asbestos fibers might result from some of the damaged ceiling tiles. The office has been aware of the asbestos tiles for a number of years, but had not replaced them, said Bringoli, because they did not pose a safety hazard until they began breaking apart under Friday's rains.

Even then, Bringoli said safety inspectors determined there was no contamination in the building. But the old section of the post office remained closed Tuesday while workers finished removing and replacing asbestos tiles.

*"We're not leaving Shalotte ever."*  
—Frank Bringoli  
Shalotte Postmaster

The old section includes the service counter, postmaster's office and part of the mail room. It is the only section that had ceiling tiles made of asbestos, which can cause lung-related problems if sufficient fibers are breathed.

The water damage at the post office apparently happened Friday morning. The California company that owns the building and rents it to the U.S. Postal Service had started repairing the roof about two weeks ago.

Bringoli said the roofers evidently didn't seal the roof adequately when they left the job early last week. When it rained Friday, the roof leaked, causing the ceiling damage. "It looked like Niagara Falls," said Bringoli.

Shalotte Post Office employees noticed the damage when they arrived for work Friday morning, and closed the office after ceiling tiles started falling to the floor under the weight of the rainwater.

"The tiles coming down were dangerous," Bringoli said. "The big-

gest concern was that some of the tiles in the ceiling are asbestos, and when they get wet, fibers are released into the air."

Local postal officials waited all day Friday for health inspectors who could test the air inside the post office for the presence of asbestos fibers.

Bringoli said he didn't find out until 2 a.m. Saturday that the air was clean and it was safe to open the lobby so people could get their mail. Box holders were allowed inside the office Saturday to pick up Friday's mail.

Mail they would have normally picked up Saturday, however, was kept at the South Brunswick branch office and handed out over the counter to people who made the trip to Seaside.

Bringoli said he hoped the clean-up and repairs to the ceiling would be finished by Wednesday so window service could resume. Lights that were damaged by water will be replaced.

Bringoli denied rumors that the temporary closure was part of a plan to close the Shalotte Post Office for good. "We're not leaving Shalotte ever," he said.

There were plenty of frustrated people outside the post office last Friday morning after the doors were (See P.O., Page 2-A)

## Labor Board Upholds Order In BEMC-Union Dispute

BY SUSAN USHER

A National Labor Relations Board panel has upheld an administrative judge's order that would require Brunswick Electric Membership Corp. to offer to rehire a fired union leader and to negotiate certain matters with the union that represents some co-op employees.

In the three-member panel's decision announced last week, the NLRB affirmed Administrative Judge Robert G. Romano's findings and adopted his recommended order. BEMC had filed exceptions to Romano's Feb. 27 decision, none of which were upheld on review by the NLRB.

Romano's order would require BEMC to offer to rehire George Douglas (Doug) Smith Jr. of Whiteville, who at the time he was fired

by BEMC was president of Local No. 495 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. The union represents about 60 co-op employees. Smith could not be reached for comment Tuesday at his home in Whiteville.

BEMC General Manager David Batten said Tuesday that the co-op's board of directors would discuss its response to the NLRB decision Sept. 24, at its next regular meeting.

"We haven't received a summary letter from our attorney. We will see what the attorney recommends and take it to the board. The full board will make the decision," said Batten. "We've not scheduled a special meeting to discuss this."

Options include accepting the terms of the order or appealing the NLRB decision to the

4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, said Batten.

The co-op's labor relations lawyer is W. Britton Smith Jr. of Charlotte.

Smith was fired after an alleged scuffle involving Robert Walker "Chip" Leavitt Jr., BEMC assistant general manager, during a bargaining session on May 10, 1990, with the union over wages.

The panel indicated that in upholding Romano's decision that Smith's dismissal violated the National Labor Relations Act, it did not rely on the fact that Leavitt was charged with assault. It therefore found it "unnecessary" to pass on the relevancy of the verdict in the criminal case, in which Leavitt was found not guilty.

Romano's order also directs BEMC to re-

scind assignments of work to non-union eligible employees that should be done by only union-eligible employees and to stop making such assignments; begin, on request, to bargain with the union regarding the positions in question; and to require its managers to refrain from threatening or coercing union members, spying on union meetings and activities and prohibiting workers from talking about their union at work.

The original union-busting complaints, filed in 1989, said BEMC violated the labor law by creating the impression that it was spying on union activity, encouraging workers to inform on union supporters and maintaining a non-written rule about talking about the union at work.

## Holden Beach Homeowners Blast Septic Tank Rules

BY DOUG RUTTER

If Holden Beach officials approve rules aimed at stopping abuse of septic systems, they'll do so against the will of most homeowners who have spoken at recent public hearings.

Property owners bombarded commissioners with just as much opposition and questions during the hearing Saturday as they did at the first hearing on the ordinance Aug. 19.

The Labor Day weekend hearing drew about 100 people. Nearly all of the 35 speakers said they opposed the rules drafted by the town wastewater management committee.

Many people said the rules aren't enforceable and would threaten family reunions at the beach by limiting the number of people who can stay in a house.

"Everybody came to Holden Beach because it was a family-oriented beach," said homeowner Sandy Crosby. "We don't need anything that is going to disturb the current complexion of this beach."

The ordinance was written to keep people

from overusing septic systems and advertising that homes can sleep more people than they were designed to accommodate, or two people per bedroom.

Crowding of cottages is common at area beaches and typically worst in the summer, when homes are rented to vacationers. Some town officials are afraid that overusing septic systems leads to failure and pollution.

But opponents of the rules said Saturday they didn't know of many septic system failures on Holden Beach. They said the town board has no proof that septic systems are polluting ground or surface water.

One of the opponents of the rules, developer Jim Griffin, indicated that the town was approaching the problem of overcrowding from the wrong angle.

Griffin suggested the town try to control occupancy rather than tying the crowding problem to septic systems. "The committee might have the right string but the wrong yo-yo."

Many of the speakers advocated a central sewer system for the island as a means of

*"The ordinance they have proposed is seriously flawed. It is clearly discriminatory."*  
—Tom McIver  
Property Owner

solving environmental problems associated with overcrowding, and several urged the town board to get started immediately.

Former Mayor John Holden said it took six years to get the town water system on line once work began, and it will take at least five years to build a sewer system.

A committee is gathering information on a sewer system, including data on how much it would cost to build, how the town could pay for it and how much homeowners could expect to pay per month.

Tom McIver was among those Saturday who questioned the legality of the septic

system rules. He said they discriminate against people trying to rent or sell their homes.

"The ordinance they have proposed is seriously flawed. It is clearly discriminatory..." he said. "It will clearly be challenged in court."

As proposed, the ordinance would allow the building inspector to inspect vacant homes to see if they have more bedrooms than were approved on the county septic tank permit.

Fran Vogt, a permanent resident, told the board of commissioners Saturday she is opposed to the town inspecting houses to see if they comply.

"You may stick your head in my septic tank but not in my house," she said, drawing a loud round of applause.

Jim Collins, another permanent resident who said he's been visiting the beach since 1948, pointed out that the ordinance is based on state health regulations.

Although the wording may need to be changed, Collins said homeowners just can't

ignore state rules. "I don't think we're in a position to say this doesn't suit us," he said.

Rocky Harrison suggested the town leave enforcement of septic tanks rules to the county health department and focus on other issues like beach access for the handicapped.

But Collins wasn't alone in his support of the regulations. Tony Champ said he likes the rules, especially the ban on advertising homes to sleep more than their intended capacity.

Champ also said he was bothered by talk about a sewer system, which he said would encourage higher density on Holden Beach.

Hugh Stohler, who rents his home in the summer, also spoke in support of the ordinance and the continued use of septic systems on the island.

Stohler said people were using the ordinance as a "political ratchet" to push for a central sewer system.

Town commissioners could make a decision on the proposed rules when they meet Sept. 23. The next regular meeting is scheduled Oct. 5.