

# Candidates Address Accountability, Response To Parents

BY SUSAN USHER

A demand for greater accountability to parents and to taxpayers in general—from every level of the education system—dominated questions posed to all six candidates for the Brunswick County Board of Education Tuesday night in Southport.

The candidates fielded questions before an audience of about 80 people at a forum sponsored by the Southport Elementary School PTA. Moderator Johnnie Simpson, vice president for instruction of Brunswick Community College, drew at random from an envelope questions prepared in advance by

parents, educators and community residents.

Seated alphabetically by last name, the candidates took turns answering questions instead of all responding to the same questions. Responses were limited to two minutes each, with each candidate allowed a 1½-minute summary at the close of the forum.

Up for election on Nov. 5 are the District 1, 3 and 4 seats on the five-member board of education. Candidates run from the districts in which they reside, but are elected at large by all county voters in a partisan contest. Each member will serve a two-year term.

Seeking the District 1 seat are Thurman Gause, Democrat, and Janet Pope, Republican, both of the Grissetown area. District 3 candidates are William D. Carter, Democrat, of Yaupon Beach, and William Fairley, Republican, of Southport. From District 4, the candidates are incumbent Donna Baxter of Boiling Spring Lakes, Democrat, and Pete Barnette, Republican, of Leland.

Barnette responded to questions about the board's job description, parental involvement, what his proposal would be for a water-related curriculum and key factors in decision-making.

He described the board's role as "that of policy makers and implementers to the degree of passing on to administration with administration responsible for procedures..."

## DISTRICT 1

Thurman Gause

Gause was asked what he would do about cleanliness of the schools, how to bring closer to the community a school board that "has separated itself from parents and the community," his view of tenure in light of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's decision to do away with teacher tenure, and who he would involve in curriculum-related decisions.

Gause said he first would need to know procedures used for cleaning the schools. Beyond that, people are needed who are good at the job and like it, he said, because otherwise it is hard to get them to do a good job. "Most of our schools are well taken care of," he said.

To bring the school board and community and parents closer, he advocated a better communication network starting with the superintendent and extending to the student and parent levels. Parent-teacher organizations are good in that regard, he said.

"I'm willing to do anything to pull parents into the school system," said the retired longshoreman and current president of the Brunswick County Citizens Association.

He said he would involve teachers, principals and students as a "team" in making curriculum decisions.

In his closing remarks, Gause blamed "stupidity" of some county commissioners on the school system's proposed budget getting cut, and said county residents should have demanded its inclusion in the budget.

"The same thing with the school board. People should speak up," he said. "If we don't do something now, we'll pay for it later."

Janet Pope

Pope answered questions on extension of a pre-kindergarten program to all county lower schools, allowing county PTA representatives to sit in on both open- and closed-door sessions of the school board, parent access to the budget, and what "renewal" she thought Brunswick County would gain through President Bush's proposed system of school choice and vouchers.

Pope, a self-described parent activist and student advocate, said she supports anything that gives students a good foundation and good values and increases their opportunities for the future. She would study any program and is "not adverse to implementing it if it shown to be advantageous to our children."

No county business would continue in business, she said, "under the same rate of success and production of inferior products" as the school system or its "refusal to allow voting members information about its operations and expenses."

While not advocating automatic provision of a copy of the budget to every parent, Pope said a copy should be available on request to any interested party, with a "minimal fee" charged to cover costs. She suggested holding a workshop for interested taxpayers to explain where their investment is going and where the returns are.

"I don't think you can have too much openness," she said.

She echoed the same theme regarding board meetings. While she said executive sessions are provided for in state law, she leans toward making them as open as possible, rather than as closed as possible under the laws. "I would welcome the PTA (council) to be a part of that process," said Pope.

In her concluding remarks, Pope said the school board is responsible to both students and taxpayers and must be "willing and able to be held accountable to them."

"I think the critical issue is truth," she said.

## DISTRICT 3

William D. (Billy) Carter

Carter responded to questions about how to promote parent involvement in various aspects of school system decision-making, what his plan would be to unite the county school districts to move in unison, handling of tenured teachers who are not effective in the classroom, and whether he would take "assertive action" to resolve a problem or "move it from one school to another."

A supporter of parental involvement in the schools, Carter said parents need to keep their elected board members informed of their opinions on all issues.

"I cannot see how we can have any success without parental involvement," he said, while noting that people are hired to do jobs and cannot do that without support.

As for a plan to bring the "independently operated" West, South and North schools into unison, Carter said it would be "the plan our superintendent will have."

"If a superintendent is willing to make a contract based on improvement we should be willing to see what that plan is and to back it."

The superintendent also shoulders the responsibility for dealing with tenured teachers who are not effective in the classroom. Tenure laws don't prevent the dismissal of teachers, but provides due process to prevent their unjust dismissal, he said. Carter suggested the alternative is to get them to improve their performance. "Leadership leads to its own success," he said. "Teachers can be developed."

If a problem exists at a school, Carter said he believes in dealing with a problem when it occurs, and in the manner prescribed by law. "I never believe in passing on a problem. If you don't solve it when it presents itself it becomes a bigger one."

The retired Brunswick County manager is a former member of the Bladen County Board of Education. In his summation, Carter said he thinks it is important for the superintendent, teachers, principals, support

staff, parents, students and particularly board members to understand their roles and to perform them.

"One of the most important tasks for the board," he said, is taking the local (county) appropriation and applying it to the school system in a way that produces results for that investment.

Bill Fairley

Fairley's questions dealt with his willingness as a board member to negotiate with teacher representatives on issues such as local supplements and work conditions, whether he would advocate taking a program that has worked well in one school based on test score results and expanding it into other schools, how he would go about getting the \$400,000 county commissioners cut from the school board's budget request what steps he would take to make a principal accountable for job performance if he had evidence the principal was ineffective.

Fairley advocated local decision-making for schools, saying that the administration of each school and its faculty should decide what is most appropriate for the children in their charge.

"I don't think bureaucrats or board of education members are appropriate persons to decide that," said the local attorney.

His approach for trying to increase county funding for the school system would be to stress to commissioners the importance of infusing funds into the schools now to provide growth in the future, and that that's their responsibility.

Fairley said his first inclination regarding negotiating with teachers on wage and benefit issues is that it would be inappropriate. "I realize teachers deserve decent pay," he said, but if taken to its possible limits, such negotiations could result in teacher strikes, he said, hurting students. "And that's not what we are about."

Another approach to boosting low teacher morale, he suggested, is to give teachers more freedom in the classroom.

"I believe teachers would gain more self-respect and satisfaction if they are allowed to do their job the best they are able to do it. They should not be dictated how to teach as long as we are sure they are performing what they are supposed to be performing."

If he had evidence a principal were ineffective, Fairley said he would not get personally involved as a board member, but refer the matter to the superintendent.

"It is the superintendent's job to deal with the day to day operation of the schools," he said. "It is my feeling that the board has spent too much time dealing with operation of the schools when it should be dealing with policy...It seems inappropriate for a board member to be dealing with performance."

Fairley closed by suggesting voters need to look at candidates' ability to respond to problems that will arise in the future "based only on the needs of your children," and without bringing any "political baggage into office."

## DISTRICT 4

Pete Barnette

Barnette, who is executive director of the not-for-profit Brunswick County Volunteer and Information Center, said he supports parental involvement in the schools and sup-

ports encouraging more such participation on campus, in classrooms and in working with students off campus. He also supports efforts to make parents more responsible for their children's behavior.

When a student is late for school, for example, he said, "The parent can help it. I believe the parent can be and is responsible."

In making decisions as a board member, Barnette said the single most important factor should be the students, whether the result is something that will help shape them into "productive, contributing members of society."

As for a plan to incorporate swimming, water safety and additional water-related elements into the curriculum, Barnette said he would not be adverse to considering any "well-thought plan that is feasible and practical."

In closing, Barnette said he believes that every educator, student, parent and volunteer on campus has the right to "a safe, drug-free environment." He cited among his top concerns disrespectful behavior, and misunderstanding of students labeled as "miscreants" when in fact they are not.

Donna M. Baxter

Baxter was asked what she would do upon learning that an administrator was not properly documenting an employee's poor job performance, what she feels is the single-most important issue facing the board and how she would address it, what she planned to "do for teachers" as a board member in terms of work conditions, pay and other incentives, and what she would do about the slow implementation of two computerized information management systems, TIMS, for transportation, and SIMS, for student data.

If poor documentation were called to her attention, said Baxter, she would take that information to the superintendent to follow through on. "I would make sure that the people in question are being dealt with in regard to board policy," she said.

More staff development for veteran educators is a top issue facing the school system now, Baxter said. "They need help with new skills they need today, then we will be able to stay ahead of the game."

A four-year veteran of the board of education, Baxter is serving her second term as chairman. She is project administrator with EC Corporation at Sunny Point Military Ocean Terminal in Southport.

As a board member, she said her job is to set policy and to hire a superintendent who has in mind some of the concerns of teachers. Also, she said, a system is in place for teachers who feel they aren't being dealt with fairly.

As for the student and transportation information management systems, Baxter said the school system should be up to date in both this school year, meeting timetables set by the state Department of Public Instruction for their full implementation.

In her closing remarks, she stressed the importance of a board member being a group member. "You may have great ideas but if you can't get members to work with you, to follow you, you won't succeed." To serve students well, board members need to have vision, to be strong advocates and to have the ability to build structure on the board itself, she concluded.

## Calabash Asked To Form Joint Sewer Authority

BY ERIC CARLSON

The town of Calabash Tuesday was asked to consider joining Sunset Beach in forming a Southwest Brunswick Regional Sewer Authority to enhance the town's eligibility to receive grants and loans for a proposed joint sewerage project.

Appearing at the regular meeting of the Calabash Board of Commissioners, Engineer James Billups of Powell Associates, North Myrtle Beach, S.C., said the formation of such an authority "on paper" would move the project up on the ranking lists for Farmers Home Administration funding.

The sewer board, with members appointed by each town, could be formed solely for the purpose of seeking funding without granting it any powers or spending authority, Billups said. He urged the board to adopt a resolution of intent to create the sewer authority.

Sunset Beach Town Attorney Michael Isenberg last week advised his town board to consider such a resolution and agreed to present a draft at that town council's Nov. 2 meeting.

Calabash Commissioner George Anderson said he felt the town would be "jumping the gun" to form such an authority before taxpayers are told how much the joint sewerage project would cost. He noted that estimates have ranged as high as \$25 to \$30 million. He suggested the question first be put to a referendum first.

Billups said a referendum would be premature without a firm cost estimate to present to voters. He said has "no ballpark figure" of costs because funding sources have not been established.

Forming the sewer authority will increase the projects eligibility for grants and loans. He said that by phasing in the project, it might be made completely self sustaining, paid for entirely by user fees and developer contributions.

One of the first components of the proposed project would be the purchase of the Carolina Blythe sewer

system which serves several developments near the state line. The system's owners have agreed to sell it on a purchase contract basis, allowing the utility itself to serve as loan collateral without increasing the town's tax burden, Billups said.

Project engineers hope to attract federal grant funding through the Farmers Home Administration and to qualify for low-interest loans from the state Division of Environmental Management.

But only a "management entity" such as a county or city government or a sewer authority would be able to go incur debt for the project. Forming a regional authority would enhance the chances that Calabash and Sunset Beach would be approved for funding. And if either town were approved, the entire project would benefit, Billups said.

Anderson said he still had reservations about "forming a paper corporation" and suggested the town wait until it has more public input.

Calabash Town Attorney Michael Ramos said, "there would be absolutely no risk to the town" in forming the authority.

"You decide what its powers are. You don't have to give it any money. You don't have to give it the authority to do anything. But it gets you higher up on the totem pole for funding. And you can dissolve it if the funding doesn't happen," Ramos said.

Commissioner Ray Card said he was not opposed to the sewerage project, but said he was confused about what areas it would serve, how much it would cost and how it would be paid for.

The board agreed to schedule a special meeting Oct. 20 at 7 p.m. to have Powell and Associates give a presentation of the project and an update of current funding options.

In other business, the board tabled consideration of a revised garbage ordinance, a new off-street parking ordinance and the revision of several administrative ordinances until its next meeting Oct. 27.

## Brunswick Plant To Test Sirens At Full Volume

Some Brunswick County residents will hear the alert notification sirens around Carolina Power & Light's Brunswick plant tested at full volume on Thursday, Oct. 22.

The sirens will begin sounding at about 3:30 p.m. Residents within a 10-mile radius may hear the sirens for about three minutes several times.

Residents should not be alarmed by the sirens, a company news release states. Full-volume siren tests are conducted annually to ensure the siren system is functioning properly.

The Emergency Broadcast System will not be activated during the

test, and radio and television stations will not interrupt their regular broadcasting.

Activation of the sirens are never a signal that the public should evacuate, the release states. The sirens are to alert residents to listen to radio and television stations for information and instructions from the EMB during a declared emergency.

The rotating sirens are atop tall poles at 34 locations throughout the 10-mile radius of the Brunswick plant.

The Oct. 22 test will be the annual full-volume test of the sirens. Low-volume or "growl" tests are conducted every three months to ensure the sirens are working. Silent testing is done every two weeks.

## Correction

In an Oct. 8 article headlined, "Local Man Charged In Bat Attack On Fisheries Officer," it was incorrectly reported that a warrant drawn by Gary McIntyre attributed a statement to Danny Joseph McDaniel that was allegedly made by the defendant, Robert Franklin McLean Jr.

The warrant on file at the Brunswick County Clerk of Superior Court office states that McLean threatened McIntyre by "saying to Danny Joseph McDaniel if he is the one I will kill him (after asking McDaniel for McIntyre's name)."

The Beacon regrets the error.

## Clarification

The Kristi Bellamy listed in the Oct. 8 Brunswick County District Court roundup is not the Kristy Julene Bellamy who lives in the Cedar Grove Community of Supply.

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