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SESSIONS MEMBER JIM INNES (left) looks on as insurance adjuster Dave Morris takes measurements and compiles information in the aftermath of a fire Saturday that damaged the fellowship hall and temporary sanctuary of Shallotte Presbyterian Church.

Presbyterians Begin Renovating Fire-Damaged Fellowship Hall

BY SUSAN USHER

Workers Tuesday began hauling away furniture and tearing out fire-damaged wallboard and carpeting in the aftermath of a weekend fire that blackened Shallotte Presbyterian Church's combination fellowship hall and temporary sanctuary.

Shallotte Police Department is continuing its investigation of the fire, said Det. Carey Gaskins. He and Brunswick County Fire Marshal Cecil Logan said the fire originated from Advent wreath candles near the pulpit.

The Rev. Lester Dattler, pastor, said that physical damage to the church was mainly confined to the single room on the east end of the building on South Main Street, Shallotte. Elsewhere the building sustained only smoke damage.

"There was a charred section about this long in one of the trusses over the altar area," said Dattler, indicating a distance of about three feet. "Ralph (McClure) said he thought it could be pieced."

Helping contain the fire and limit its damage were five-eighths-inch-thick fire retardant wallboard and closed, steel insulated fire doors that separated the hall from the rest of the church, said Dattler.

McClure, a member of the building committee and the contractor who built the structure, said he expected renovation of the hall to begin Tuesday, following an all-clear Monday from the insurance adjuster.

He expects the renovations to take at least four weeks, but said it may take longer to obtain furnishings such as matching carpet and chandeliers and to

(See PRESBYTERIANS, Page 2-A)

FIRST TIME IN 20-40 YEARS

Lockwood Folly River Channel To Be Dredged; Bid Opening Next Month

BY SUSAN USHER

Commercial and recreational boats in the Holden Beach area should regain a traditional refuge from storms when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredges the Lockwood Folly River channel later this winter for the first time in 20 to 40 years.

Restoring the channel is expected to not only make it possible for fishermen to once again move their boats to safe harbor near the Lockwood Folly River Bridge when hurricanes threaten, but also to increase water flow—and possibly water quality—in the river.

Harold Varnam, field engineer in the navigation section of the Corps' Wilmington Regional Office, said the dredging will extend approximately two miles upriver from the Varnamtown fish houses, or about 3.6 miles above the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway.

Varnam said the Corps expects to open bids in late January. If bids come in at or below estimate, he said he hopes to have a dredge at work in the river by mid-February. He expects the work to take less than the 90 days allowed in the bid specifications.

On Dec. 21, the Corps issued an environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact on the project. The report indicates it expects no significant adverse impacts to marine life, shellfish waters or vegetation, and that it believes not dredging the channel would result in "significant adverse economic and social impacts" to the local communities by limiting navigability of the channel by commercial and recreational fishing vessels.

To limit possible harm to nesting sea turtles or piping plovers all dredging is to be completed in future years

between Jan. 1 and March 31, and in 1993 only, no later than April 30.

The Corps will continue to receive comments and questions on the project from reviewing agencies through Jan. 29.

So far Varnam hasn't had much response from residents of the area about the planned dredging and suspects they are waiting to see the project under way.

"They've been promised a lot in the past," he said. "Let's keep our fingers crossed and hope the bids are good."

Annie Smigiel of Varnamtown said Monday that the last time she had talked with Corps officials the agency wasn't sure when it would get to dredge the river. "That's great," she said, when told the project had been put on the 1993 schedule.

Smigiel is one of numerous individuals who have been outspoken in efforts to get the Corps to open up the river channel. She was president of the defunct Save Our Shellfish, an organization formed a number of years ago in an effort to focus attention on improving water quality and therefore productivity of the river. SOS members and local fishermen argued that improved flow should increase circulation and help flush contaminants from the channel.

Varnam said there has been "extensive shoaling" in some places, leaving only 15 feet to 20 feet of channel.

"It should help increase water flow," he said. "The two shoals that have given them such a time—Mary's Shell Bed and at Rourk's Landing—will be cleared. They've been almost acting like a bulkhead."

(See CORPS, Page 2-A)

Man Wounded As 1,000 Flee Gunfire Outside Local Night Spot

BY ERIC CARLSON

One man was shot and a crowd estimated at more than 1,000 people was sent scurrying when gunfire broke out in the parking lot of a popular nightclub outside Shallotte early Saturday morning, a Brunswick County sheriff's detective said Monday.

It was the third shooting reported since August at Freeman's on Mulberry Street, where local law enforcement officers say drug-dealing, guns and underage drinking are creating an atmosphere ripe for tragedy.

In the early morning hours after Christmas night, three sheriff's department vehicles, a Shallotte Police car and an Ocean Isle Beach Police officer responded to a radio dispatch alerting all units in the area that shots had been fired outside the club, Detective Tom Hunter said.

"When we got to the end of Mulberry Street it sounded like there was a firefight in the distance," Hunter said. "There were cars parked along the entire length of the road and hundreds of people were running away from the club."

As the police cars tried to make their way through the crowd, Hunter said he saw a man by the side of the road trying to help another man stay on his feet. The man had been shot one time in the side of the abdomen

with a small-caliber bullet.

"There were so many people, the ambulance could not get down the road and turn around. So I carried him out to the bypass in my patrol car," Hunter said.

The wounded man was identified as Darrell McNeil, 22, of Greenville, S.C. He was transferred to an ambulance and taken to The Brunswick Hospital, where he was kept overnight and released Sunday morning, Hunter said.

"When I came back, I could still hear gunshots," he said. "To my knowledge, nobody else was hit. I think they may have been shooting into the air."

Hunter said he spoke to the owner of the club, Freeman Hankins, who identified the man who had done the shooting. An arrest is expected in the case soon.

Witnesses said the incident began inside the building. Two men got into a fight when one confronted the other about dancing with his girlfriend, Hunter said. After Freeman moved the two outside, one of the men ran to a car, pulled out a chrome handgun and started shooting.

In a search of the area around the club, police found several spent shell casings and a few live rounds of ammunition. Some were 9mm

shells, probably from a pistol, Hunter said. Also found were live, copper-jacketed cartridges from a high-powered rifle, possibly a semi-automatic M-16.

"They ain't playing around anymore," Hunter said. "Somebody is going to get killed down there. I just hope it's not one of us."

Hunter said officers know to expect trouble when called to Freeman's and are under standing orders not to go there without back-

(See NIGHTSPOT, Page 2-A)

Inside...

- Birthdays.....2B
- Business News7C
- Calendar of Events5B
- Church News4B
- Classified1-6C
- Court Docket8C
- Crime Report6A
- Golf8B
- Obituaries4B
- Opinion4-5A
- People In The News7A
- Plant Doctor.....3B
- Sports8-10B
- Television Listings.....6-7B

County, Schools Invested For Long Term In 1992

BY THE NEWS STAFF

Their approaches differed, but both Brunswick County government and the public schools focused efforts in 1992 on investment for long-term results, despite an uncertain economy.

For Brunswick County government, the year was largely spent implementing the aggressive plans and programs initiated by the board of commissioners. Highlights included the completion of an enhanced 911 emergency phone system, expansion of the water system and the adoption of a county-wide zoning law.

Responding to concerns expressed by parents, the business community and the state, Brunswick County Schools focused on student performance and accountability for results by educators, parents and students. They adopted new management approaches, hired a new superintendent and opened a state-of-the-art elementary school.

Brunswick County Finance Officer Lithia Hahn said in January that the county was in its worst financial condition in 20 years. There were encouraging indicators of a possible recovery, such as falling interest rates, but few were in a position to take advantage of the situation, she said.

Zoning was the top issue raised in a poll of those attending a January public workshop on Brunswick County's latest land use plan update. Improved education, industrial recruitment and unemployment were

among the other concerns listed.

In early February the commissioners voted to give Planning Director John Harvey 120 days to prepare a "basic" countywide zoning ordinance. Commissioner Gene Pinkerton criticized the planning department for dragging its feet on the law it had been asked to draft two years earlier.

Commissioners took the first step toward forming a countywide library system with a unanimous vote to revert the title of the Southport library to Brunswick County, allowing it to be operated as a county department.

A high-rise bridge to Sunset Beach, a second bridge to Oak Island and a Wilmington bypass connecting Interstate 40 to U.S. 17 in northern Brunswick County were given the highest priority on the commissioners wish list sent to state highway officials in March.

Contracts for another \$2.45 million worth of work on the phase III capitol improvements project to extend water service to Shallotte Point and Seaside were awarded in early March. The work included the construction of a pumping station and elevated storage tank.

A state personnel hearing was held in April to determine if Brunswick County officials had reason to fire Animal Control Supervisor Zelma Babson of Ash, who was accused of misusing department telephone privileges and of being discourteous to fellow employees. She was suspended and later fired, an action she appealed to the State Personnel Commission.

The field of candidates vying for three seats on the

Brunswick Board of Commissioners was narrowed from 13 to six after the May 5 primary election. There was speculation that a runoff might be necessary in the District 3 Republican race in which Bob Slockett won a five-way race by only 135 votes over runner-up Steve Foster. He later chose not to call for another vote.

County officials were showing off the new 911 Emergency Services Center at the Bolivia complex. The long-awaited emergency communications program went into operation May 8, allowing residents of any area of the county to call for help by dialing the familiar three-digit number.

County Manager David Clegg presented commissioners with a \$45.3 million budget that called for no increase in property taxes. More than \$5.5 million in departmental funding requests were cut from the budget to maintain the current tax rate, Clegg told the board.

In their last workshop to finalize the budget, the board agreed to allocate \$1.5 million for a four-branch county library system. The plan called for new buildings at Leland and on Oak Island and additions to the Shallotte and Southport branches.

After years of public discussion and a final deadline issued to the planning department, a draft zoning ordinance was presented to the county commissioners in June. The board scheduled a series of joint meetings with the planning board to discuss and modify the plan.



CLEGG



DAVIS

Brunswick Emergency Medical Services was forced to shut down the county's fledgling Advanced Life Support program after state inspectors uncovered deficiencies in its emergency medical technician training program. As a result, ambulance personnel were no longer allowed to perform advanced medical procedures. An aggressive re-certification program is being implemented.

(See 1992, Page 8-A)