

Tanker Breaks Loose In Tow, Threatens To Strike Shoals

BY SUSAN USHER

U.S. Coast Guard response teams were preparing for the worst Tuesday night as winds gusting up to 75 mph pushed a 603-foot cargo vessel laden with 380,000 gallons of fuel oil on a collision course with the treacherous Frying Pan Shoals lying off Cape Fear and the Brunswick County beaches.

At approximately 9 p.m. the *Lyra* was 48 miles east of the mouth of the Cape Fear River.

"The current ETA is now midnight if we're unable to re-establish the tow or get the anchor down," said Lt. Douglas Schwam, public information officer for U.S. Coast Guard Group Fort Macon.

Brunswick County Emergency Management Cecil Logan was optimistic about the chances of the cargo ship passing just beyond the tip or over the tip of the shoals, which extend about 20 statute miles off the continental shelf from Bald Head Island.

"The shoals range anywhere from 20 feet to 2 feet," he said. "With the vessel drawing 18 feet of water and with seas of 15 feet to 22 feet, it's certainly possible it could go over, especially if it crosses at the tip, the way it appears to be heading."

"If it continues in the same path, I think it will pass to the east of the Frying Pan Light Tower," he said. "If it passes to the west of the tower then we could have some problems. And if Murphy's Law prevails, it could pop the tower, but I don't think that will happen."

The roll-on, roll-off freighter was being towed "deadship"—without crew and with engines dead—from Baltimore, Md., to New Orleans Tuesday when its towline snapped around 7:48 a.m. just south of Cape Lookout in 20-foot seas and winds gusting up to 60 mph. The cargo vessel was carrying 340,000 gallons of No. 6 bunker oil and another 40,000 gallons of diesel oil.

As of 9 p.m., efforts to slow or halt its course had come to nothing as storm conditions worsened, with seas in excess of 22 feet and wind gusts of more than 75 mph, Schwam said. "As we speak conditions are worsening, but the storm is expected to ease by morning."

"That's one of the problems we're having. If the weather was clear re-establishing a tow would be easy, but when you're rocking and rolling like a rowboat..."

Four representatives of the ship's owners, Lykes Lines, were lifted by helicopter to the *Lyra* by a Marine Corps helicopter out of Cherry Point and were still working Tuesday night to bring the careening ship under control.

The *Staten Island*, a 110-foot Coast Guard patrol boat stationed at Atlantic Beach was assisting the towboat in attempts to re-establish the tow using a 1,200-foot emergency tow line.

Efforts to drop anchor were stymied at least temporarily when a generator dropped power and went off line, said Petty Officer Wayne Weeks of the Marine Safety Office in Wilmington, the on-scene coordinator for the U.S. Coast Guard. "It's better to lower the anchor to the edge, then let it drop," he said. "It has about 1,000 feet of anchor chain attached to it."

Meanwhile, the Coast Guard's Marine Safety Office in Wilmington was coordinating on-scene response in conjunction with the Guard's Atlantic Strike Team, a response team based at Fort Dix, N.J.

"We've got three people here
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STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG MITCHELL

Seized In Sunday Raid

Brunswick Sheriff John Carr Davis displays some of the cash, guns, cocaine and gambling records seized in a Sunday raid that led to the arrest of nine people believed to be involved in a major drug and illegal lottery operation in Leland. The story is on Page 9A.

Restaurateurs Oppose Draft Health Board Plan To Certify Food Workers

BY ERIC CARLSON

Requiring any business that serves food to have a county-trained and -certified food service manager in the kitchen at all times is unfair to restaurants that have a tradition of good food-handling practices.

That was one of many criticisms heard at a public hearing before the Brunswick County Health Board Monday night as about 80 people, mostly restaurant owners, voiced opposition to proposed new regulations for food handling establishments.

After the hearing, Health Board Chairman Skip Davis said the proposal will be returned to the board's environmental health committee for modification. A second public hearing will be scheduled, he said. The board also plans to ask several restaurant owners to advise the committee.

The proposed regulations would require restaurants, cafeterias, coffee shops, food stands, lunch counters, day care centers and other businesses that prepare food to have someone on the premises at all times who has taken an eight-hour food-service manager course and passed a certification test.

The two-day course would be taught at Brunswick Community College at an estimated cost of \$35. Certification would have to be renewed every three years.

"For 24 years, I've run the kitchen at the Ocean Isle Beach Fishing Pier and every time I've been inspected I've scored between a 94 and a 96," Ethyl Williamson told the board. "I don't need a test. I'm clean."

Other restaurant owners voiced similar opinions. Several suggested that certification should be required

only for the person holding the restaurant license. Some said that sending several employees to Bolivia for eight hours of training would cost too much, especially for small establishments.

"Why are you doing this? Are we so bad?" asked Rodney Melton, owner of the Crows Nest Grill in Southport. "If the health department finds something wrong, we correct it."

"My wife and I can take the test, but we can't be there all the time. I have two or three high school students working for me. They can't get away from school and work to take this course."

Jeff Whitfield, owner of the Beach Cafe at Holden Beach, said he approves of the health department's desire to improve restaurant sanitation, but suggested that existing restaurants with a track record of good health inspections should be exempt from the law.

"If we're continuously getting an A, we must know what we're doing," Whitfield said. "Maybe only those who aren't performing should be required to take the test."

"I don't mind myself and my wife and my cooks getting certified, but what if someone has to run an errand? I wouldn't want to have to worry about who has a certificate in case the health inspector comes."

Whitfield also suggested that food workers be allowed to study the training book and take the test without taking the eight-hour course.

Robin Schuster, owner of the Robin's Nest Child Development Center in Southport, expressed the con-

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"If we're continuously getting an A, we must know what we're doing."

—Jeff Whitfield

Anonymous Donor Pledges \$150,000

A donor who doesn't wish to be named publicly has pledged \$150,000 to the Brunswick Community College Foundation to be used for its Fund for Academic Excellence.

The gift will be made in yearly donations of \$15,000 over 10 years. The majority of the annual donation will be in the form of an endowment. Proceeds of this endowment will perpetually fund student scholarships, grants and a variety of student programs.

The donor has expressed a special interest in BCC's Odell Williamson Auditorium, said Foundation Director

Glenn Barefoot. One way the balance of the yearly donation will be used is to fund student work-study opportunities in that facility when it opens later this year.

The Fund For Academic Excellence supports limited state and local funds to help ensure excellence is maintained, developed and rewarded. BCC. Monies from the fund are used to provide scholarships, to provide needed equipment and supplies for programs, minigrants for faculty and staff development, recognition and awards, work study student support, and foundation events and operations.

SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT WARNS:

No Improvements Without Change, Commitment

BY SUSAN USHER

More changes will be necessary if Brunswick County Schools are to achieve the excellence being demanded not only by parents but business and industry as well, Superintendent Ralph J. Johnston told school board members during a daylong work session Saturday.

He warned it won't happen overnight, even with the full support of staff and community.

Reaching the goal will take more than a few "quick fixes," Johnston said as he outlined his vision for the system and broad goals for the 1993-94 school year.

"These ideas are revolutionary for some people because they are not the normal way of doing business," he warned while assuring board members the goals can be met.



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—Ralph J. Johnston
 Brunswick Schools Superintendent

His general approach will be to help increase the overall performance of the system by improving the lowest performers, in terms of students and schools, without neglecting top performers.

Because the state requires it, the system's improvement will be measured primarily by

52 achievement standards addressed by the Performance Based Accountability Plan (PBAB). Among other things the plan requires that classroom teachers, those working closest to the students, be involved heavily in planning, decision making and setting goals.

Work has already begun on Brunswick

County's plan, which Johnston expects to be ready to submit to the state around April 1. He is drawing on school improvement teams already in place at the county level and in most schools to help speed the effort.

Projecting from three-year averages, staff members are developing performance goals for the three years covered by the plan as well as annual milestones. For each indicator the school system must set a goal at least higher than its current performance level. Based on the goals set for the system, each school must then submit its own achievement plan for review by an advisory group that will include six teachers, three principals, two administrators, three parents, one classified employee and a chairperson representing the administration.

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FBI Investigates Owner Of Shallotte Computer Store

BY ERIC CARLSON

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is looking into possible money laundering violations in connection with last week's seizure of a Shallotte computer store and the arrest of four men on charges of conspiring to accept stolen goods.

The owner of Pyramid Computers on Main Street, along with his father, the store manager and an employee, were set up in a joint sting operation by the Shallotte Police and the Brunswick County Sheriff's departments.

The four were arrested Jan. 17 after they allegedly purchased a truckload of video games, computers and electronic equipment from an undercover officer who represented the items as stolen, said Sheriff's Detective Billy Hughes.

In fact, police had loaded the truck with \$40,000 worth of merchandise borrowed from the Wal-Mart store in Wilmington, which cooperated in the investigation, Hughes said. After negotiating in the store parking lot, the men agreed to purchase the truck's contents for \$4,000.

"They had \$23,000 in cash on them, so they were ready to deal," Hughes said.

After completing the purchase, police closed in and arrested store owner Douglas E. Tompkins Jr., 25, and Douglas E. Tompkins Sr., 45, both of Red Springs, along with manager Steve Caudill, 39, of Calabash and James C. Hartsell, 25, of Longwood. All are charged with conspiracy to receive stolen property.

Detectives sealed the store and seized an estimated \$191,000 worth of property, mostly computer equipment and video games. It has not yet been determined whether any of the items inside the store were stolen, but "it is very possible," said Shallotte Police Chief Rodney Gause.

Tompkins Jr. owns 13 stores, mostly in the Red Springs and Lumberton areas, Hughes said. The Pyramid store at Shallotte Plaza, which opened about six months ago, was Tompkins' only computer store. The others are video and video game rental operations, he said.

The FBI was called in when the local investigation became suspicious that Tompkins may have been purchasing stolen goods from other states, Hughes said.

Special Agent Craig Ackley of the FBI's Wilmington office said

Friday that his investigation was "in the preliminary stages" and that no federal charges had been filed in the case. "However, that doesn't preclude the possibility," Ackley said.

Asked if there might be evidence of federal money laundering violations, Ackley replied, "I don't want to blow this thing out of proportion, but that's one of the things we're looking into."

One form of money laundering involves using illegal profits in a bona fide business to establish legitimate financial records that can disguise the source of the money. Doing so is a violation of federal law.

Ackley, Hughes and Gause spent much of last week taking inventory of items seized in the Pyramid Computers store with the help of Caudill, who has assisted investigators in the case since his arrest, Hughes said.

According to court records, it was Caudill who last month asked a store customer if he could get 100 Super Nintendo games during his travels to New York. What Caudill did not realize was that the man was a sheriff's department informant, who relayed the information to detectives.

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STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON
 YELLOW TAPE and a police car block the entrance to the Pyramid Computers store in Shallotte Plaza after it was seized in the arrest of four men charged with conspiring to accept stolen goods.