

GOP Commissioner Shaw Charges Clegg Forced Out By 'Bad Democrats'

BY ERIC CARLSON

Three months after Democratic Party leaders called on their newly-elected commissioners to fire him, and amid speculation of mounting pressure for his dismissal, County Manager/Attorney David Clegg Monday ended his eight-year tenure in Brunswick County government.

Planning Director John Harvey has been named interim county manager. Charlotte lawyer Michael Ramos will act as interim county attorney. As Clegg's Administrative Assistant Kelly Barefoot struggled unsuccessfully to hold back tears, Commissioners Chairman Don Warren read Clegg's letter of resignation to a hushed, standing-room-only crowd at the board's regular meeting Monday night.

The letter was printed on old county stationery bearing the names of the five previous Republican commissioners who hired Clegg, a Democrat, as their county manager in January 1991. Clegg was named county attorney in 1984 and subsequently served as assistant county manager, acting county manager and interim county manager.

In guardedly polite language, Clegg's letter spoke of his pride in the county's "dedicated employees" and his "highly personal commit-



CLEGG

ment" and "unwavering desire to maintain the highest standard of excellence, integrity, honesty and accountability" in county government.

Only once in Clegg's letter did he hint at the political pressures that reputedly swirled around him since the incoming Democratic commissioners gave him a lukewarm three-to-two vote of confidence when they re-appointed him last December.

"I leave with the knowledge that I was never intimidated into compromising my personal or professional ethics to bow to the baneful wishes or agenda of another," the letter said.

After the meeting, Commissioner Donald Shaw charged that the new Democrat majority had caved in to their party's leadership by not actively supporting

Clegg, suggesting that he was forced to resign for ethical reasons.

"There was a lot of political pressure from a few bad Democrats," Shaw said. "Some of them wanted him to do some things that were not exactly honest and he would not yield to them. So he had to go."

"He told me he had about all he could stand," Shaw said.

When asked for an example of what things Clegg had allegedly been asked to do, Shaw said only, "You be here and you'll see."

Asked about Shaw's charges, Warren said, "I don't know what he's talking about."

Warren said he was not surprised by the resignation (See CLEGG, Page 2-A)

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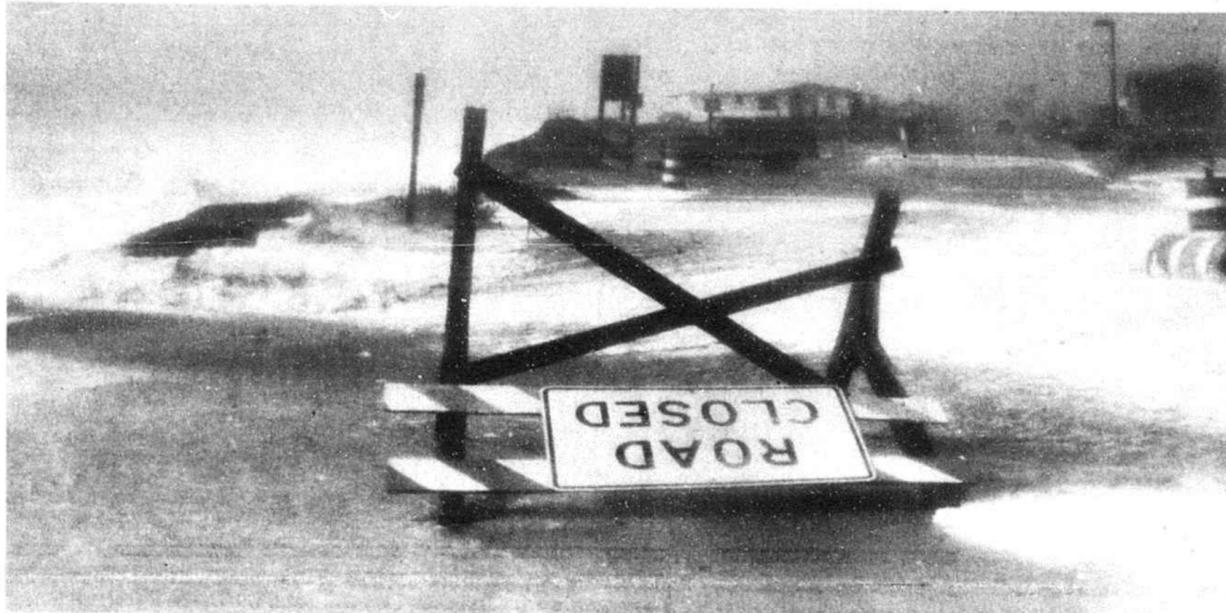
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COUNTYWIDE DAMAGE ESTIMATED AT \$23 MILLION

Intense Winter Storm Wreaks Hurricane-Like Damage



WAVES WASH OVER THE STREET at the east end of Holden Beach Saturday afternoon. Hurricane-force winds knocked down the "Road Closed" sign. More storm photos, Page 6-A and throughout this issue.

STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

BY THE NEWS STAFF

Still reeling from a severe winter storm that left shingles and other roof debris littering yards from Calabash to Leland in its wake, Brunswick County residents hoped Tuesday that weather forecasters erred in predicting rain Wednesday.

By late Monday mounting storm damage estimates exceeded \$23 million, with seven municipalities and other agencies still to report to the county emergency management office. Damage estimates were ranging from \$230,000 at Sunset Beach to \$8 million at Holden Beach.

"If it rains we could have a lot more serious structural damage," said Cecil Logan, Brunswick County's emergency management coordinator. "I wish the rain would hold off until people can get these roofs patched."

"If we get this inch-and-a-half of rain they're calling for, with all the shingles off, we could triple this figure."

One roofing contractor, Lynn Smith of Ash, said he had received more than 100 service calls by Monday.

Logan arrived at his office at 10 a.m. Monday to coordinate the post-storm response, having struggled since Saturday morning to return early from a radiation protection conference in San Diego, Calif. Logan praised the team that operated in his stead throughout the storm: Brenda Freeman, his administrative assistant; Jerry Webb, county utility director; and Kelly Barefoot, public information officer/clerk to the board of commissioners.

Rain, snow, flooding, tornadoes, high tides and gale force winds statewide led Gov. James Hunt to declare a state of disaster in Brunswick and 39 other North Carolina counties Monday and to ask President Bill Clinton to declare the state a federal disaster area. A state damage assessment team was expected in Brunswick County Wednesday.

The severe winter storm, described as the "worst storm of the century" as it swept up the East Coast, battered Brunswick County throughout the day Saturday with steady gale force winds and occasional gusts of Category II hurricane force (96 mph to 110 mph), topped by a late-evening dusting of snow. Pressure-packed breakers pounded the coastline, gnawing away 10 or more feet of oceanfront dunes, while wind-propelled high water caused island canals to overflow their banks and flood surrounding properties and roadways.

Shalotte Point weather watcher Jackson Canady said the storm was "very close in intensity to Hurricane Diana (in September 1984) with one difference—top winds during Diana arrived at high tide, causing more extensive dune overwash and water-related damage."

At the Brunswick County Airport on Long Beach Road a wind sock that extends fully in 50-mph winds was ripped off, breaking a 4-inch by 4-inch metal pole, reported Lt. Carl Pearson of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department.

Chuck Holtzinger, a weather service specialist with the National Weather Service office in Wilmington, said the winter storm had the lowest pressure of any system measured by the Wilmington office since Hurricane Donna in 1960. Barometric pressure fell to 980 millibars over land during Hurricane Donna, just 8 millibars less than the 972 millibars of pressure measured during Saturday's storm.

"It should have produced winds equivalent to a Category II hurricane—96 mph to 110 mph," said Holtzinger. "We did have gusts of up to 95 mph recorded at Figure Eight Island, at the Bridgetender Restaurant."

At Shalotte Point, 105 miles per hour was the highest gust recorded by wind gauge mounted at Tripp's Fishing Center.

"There were 6-foot waves in the Intracoastal Waterway with whitecaps all the way across," said Joyce Land. Water rose approximately two feet inside the tackle shop, about the same as during the 1987 New Year's Day storm.

On the hill nearby a cedar tree blew over, uprooting a bed of turnips. "I was up on a stepladder picking turnips from the roots of the tree," said Land. "I got a mess of them."

Falling trees and limbs downed electrical power lines "all over," disrupting service at one time or another to 90 percent of Brunswick Electric Membership Corp.'s 47,000 customers in a four-county area, said General

(See STORM, Page 2-A)

Holden Takes Hardest Hit With \$8 Million Loss

BY DOUG RUTTER

The worst storm since Hurricane Hugo sliced dunes, shredded roof shingles, flooded homes and smashed decks and walkways at Holden Beach Saturday—causing an estimated \$8 million in property damage.

"It was a devastating storm," Mayor Wally Ausley said. "We had warnings we had a severe storm moving up, but I don't think anybody anticipated the hurricane-force winds."

Steady winds of 45 mph to 50 mph were recorded for 10 hours straight, with gusts up to 83 mph, said Building Inspector Dwight Carroll. "It hit 75 several times."

As a result, nearly every house on the island sustained at least some roof damage. Powerful winds flipped heavy shingles through the air like sheets of paper.

"From one end of the island to the other we had shingle damage," Town Manager Gary Parker said. A few homes lost portions of their roofs, while others had vinyl siding ripped away.

"We were just littered all over with debris," Mayor Ausley added. "I heard some folks say the wind was stronger than it was during Hugo."

State officials were expected to visit Holden

"It was a devastating storm. We had warnings we had a severe storm moving up, but I don't think anybody anticipated the hurricane-force winds."

—Mayor Wally Ausley

Beach Wednesday to determine if the town should receive government assistance. "If we can get declared a disaster area we'll get a whole lot more money," Carroll said.

Strong winds were responsible for much of the damage, including flooding of the bottom floors of most canal homes. Storage areas and living units of older homes were flooded with several inches of water when the man-made canals couldn't contain the wind-driven high tide

Saturday at mid-day.

Canals overflowed around noon and the water rose rapidly until it covered yards and streets. The strong winds apparently kept the tide from receding.

Town employees were called in over the weekend to help clear streets and help ensure the public's safety. Volunteer damage assessment teams went to work Sunday to figure the losses.

Parker said the most extensive damage occurred east of Holden Beach Bridge, where beach erosion was at its worst and several homes had portions of their roofs lifted off.

The storm left 11 Holden Beach residences uninhabitable due to damage to roofs or septic systems. Carroll said the homes can be used again after repairs are made.

Parker said the storm washed away an estimated six feet of sand dune from the east end of the island to the 900 block of Ocean Boulevard West. There wasn't much erosion west of that point.

"We had a good bit of beach damage," The town manager estimated that 90 percent of the walkways east of the 900 block were damaged. Many were washed away and left scattered along

(See HOLDEN, Page 2-A)

Push For New Bridge At Sunset Renewed After Cars Are Stranded

BY LYNN CARLSON

After 100 cars carrying day visitors were stranded on the island of Sunset Beach for more than nine hours Saturday, the town council has asked for a renewed push toward replacing the old—and controver-

sial—pontoon bridge.

"People sat over there all that time running their engines for heat and running out of gas," Mayor Mason Barber said. "I was there when they came back across, and they looked like they'd been through the Battle of the Bulge."

The bridge cannot be safely operated in winds higher than 30 miles an hour, Barber said. Orders came from the N.C. Department of Transportation to swing the structure open and tie it off at 12:30 p.m., as winds began to howl and the wind-driven tide reached flood stage.

The water went down, but the wind did not subside enough for the bridge to be used until 9:30 p.m.

The storm escalated rapidly, beginning Saturday with a pre-dawn thunderstorm and stiff winds, though by mid-morning the sun was shining and the temperature in the 60's. However, the barometer dropped and winds increased, driving the mid-day high tide out of the bounds of canals, marshes and waterways. By early evening, the temperature was falling toward freezing.

Many had assumed the early storm was all there would be; by the time the need to evacuate could be considered, it couldn't logistically be done.

"We had five minutes' warning that we had to tie off the bridge," said Sunset Beach Town Administrator Linda Fluegel. That time was used to dispatch a fire truck and fire fighter—who is also a Shalotte police officer and emergency medical technician—to the island.

Ironically, one person in need of help during the bridge closure was one of the most vocal opponents of the proposal to replace the span with a high-rise bridge. Warren D. "Bud" Knapp Sr., a 75-year-old diabetic who recently underwent surgery, got caught at his island house without insulin.

"We went over to check on things when we heard that 30 mile-an-hour winds were forecast, and we thought we were on an outgoing tide," said Knapp, whose other residence is in Carolina Shores. Knapp's family contacted the mayor for help later in

(See SUNSET, Page 2-A)



HIGH WINDS and high water forced closure of the floating Sunset Beach Bridge to vehicular traffic without notice shortly after noon Saturday. The state Department of Transportation requires that the bridge be swung open during winds exceeding 30 miles an hour to prevent the span from being damaged. About 100 day visitors were stranded on the island for nine hours, according to Mayor Mason Barber.

STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

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