



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

**The Blues Are Back!**

Tom Bruneau of Floyd County, Va., lands a nice "eatin'-size" blue fish from the Holden Beach Fishing Pier Tuesday morning. He was one of several anglers who hooked Spanish mackerel and small blues as the sea water temperature reached that magical 70-degree mark.

**Officer's First Drug Operation Nets Four Arrests**

BY ERIC CARLSON

The older, more experienced detectives warned Ocean Isle Beach Officer Dan Hunter that his plan to arrest a suspected drug dealer probably wouldn't go down according to the carefully crafted script he had prepared.

Hunter had made plenty of drug busts and helped in other raids before, but this was his first attempt at coordinating a full-scale surveillance and apprehension operation requiring officers and vehicles from three local law enforcement agencies.

"They told me not to get my hopes up, because these things never go according to plan," Hunter said. "A lot of times, we end up sitting around, waiting, and nothing happens."

Call it beginner's luck, but Hunter's "Operation Party at the Mart" came off like clockwork Friday afternoon, resulting in the arrest of the alleged dealer and three other men who reportedly purchased marijuana while police looked on.

Acting on information from local "concerned citizens," Hunter said he had been keeping an eye on a man suspected of selling bags of marijuana at local construction sites. He learned that the man allegedly set up shop near a convenience store on the Ocean Isle Beach causeway on Friday afternoons and sold drugs to workers who came there to cash paychecks and buy beer. The convenience store was not connected with the alleged drug deals, officers said.

So Hunter drew up a detailed plan and sketched a map calling for three unmarked police vehicles to establish a triangulated surveillance of the store parking lot while three other marked cars hid nearby to aid in the arrest. At 3 o'clock Friday after-

noon, police units from Ocean Isle Beach, Shallotte and the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department moved into position.

As if on cue, the prime suspect arrived at 3:15 and parked his pickup truck at the exact spot designated on Hunter's map. A few minutes later a Chevrolet El Camino pulled in and the driver got into the pickup, where Hunter said he and a sheriff's detective "watched a suspicious exchange" from about 20 yards away.

"I was ready to jump out and make the arrest, but we decided to wait," Hunter said.

Their decision paid off as another car pulled into the lot "nearly door-to-door" with Hunter's surveillance vehicle. The driver of the El Camino got out of pickup and into the car, he said. Then a third suspect walked over, squatted down by the car door and pulled out his wallet, said Hunter.

Deciding they had enough fish in their net, the officers closed the trap and arrested the four men.

Howard George Hirt Jr., 36, of N.C. 130, Shallotte, was charged with possession with intent to manufacture, sell and deliver a controlled

substance (marijuana), sale and delivery of a controlled substance, maintaining a vehicle with the intent to sell and deliver and carrying a concealed weapon.

Willie Albert Batten, 32, of Shallotte, was charged with possession with intent to sell and deliver marijuana. John Wayne Holland, 32, of Ocean Isle Beach was charged with maintaining a vehicle for the purpose of keeping or selling marijuana. Norman Timothy Smith, 30, of Whiteville was charged with misdemeanor marijuana possession and driving while his license was revoked.

Police confiscated a total of 21 bags of marijuana with an estimated street value of \$1,200 along with \$1,700 cash, a 9mm semi-automatic pistol, a boot knife, a 1988 El Camino, a 1983 Mercury Cougar and a 1975 Chevrolet pickup truck, Hunter said.

Hunter said that as the officers wrapped up the operation, he saw "several other known buyers" exit the convenience store and look in his direction.

"I told them, 'The shop's closed today, fellows,'" Hunter said.

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**NationsBank Presents: Seniors Week May 17-21, 1993**

If you're a Senior (and you're not expecting graduation presents this year), you are invited to attend Seniors Week at the main office Shallotte, Sunset Beach, Calabash & Holden Beach Banking Centers. Each day, from May 17-21, a specialist from NationsBank or an expert from the community will be available to discuss the following topics:

- Monday, May 17: What you should know about tax sheltered investments
- Tuesday, May 18: Investment Planning And Will Preparation.
- Wednesday, May 19: Health and Fitness
- Thursday, May 20: The Benefits of Mutual Funds Versus CDs
- Friday, May 21: Deluxe Banking For Seniors

Come in any day of the week, or all of them. You'll find the topics interesting and the experts an excellent resource to help answer your questions and make suggestions about your financial well-being.

**Workshops Schedule:**

- 11:00 AM Main Office Shallotte Mon. thru Fri.
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