

Happy Independence Day!

Island Living
Supplement included in this issue.

Anglers' Alert!
They're 'totin' 'em off by the coolerful' at local piers. Page 11-B



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County Explores Firing Supervisor Following Felony Drug Arrest

BY ERIC CARLSON
Brunswick County Attorney Michael Ramos began reviewing the evidence against suspended Animal Control Supervisor Robert Grissett Tuesday to determine whether Grissett should be fired because of his arrest on felony drug charges last week.

Sheriff's department narcotics agents raided Grissett's mobile home on Royal Oak Road, Supply, Wednesday night (June 23) after he allegedly sold three ounces of marijuana to a Carolina Beach man.

In a search of Grissett's home, Detectives confiscated 94 marijuana plants and about three-fourths of a pound of marijuana in various stages of processing for sale, Detective David Crocker said shortly after the arrest.

Grissett, 33, has been charged with possession with

intent to sell and deliver marijuana, the sale and delivery of marijuana and felonious possession of marijuana.

He was freed on \$15,000 unsecured bond Wednesday night and made his first appearance in Brunswick County District Court Friday. He was indicted on the three charges by a grand jury Monday. A probable cause hearing has been scheduled for July 7.

Grissett was suspended from his position without pay Friday under state personnel policy guidelines allowing a county employee to be relieved of duties for up to 45 days while under a criminal investigation, Ramos said Monday. The county attorney said he plans to consult investigators and review Grissett's case file before making a recommendation as to whether Grissett should be fired.

Detectives said they were surprised to discover that Grissett had been dealing marijuana and said he was not under investigation at the time of his arrest. Grissett had even worked on animal control investigations with some of the narcotics officers who raided his home, one detective said.

Investigators say they now believe Grissett may have been growing and selling marijuana for more than a year.

Local authorities were alerted to Grissett's alleged drug activities after the New Hanover County Sheriff's Department received information that a Carolina Beach resident Harvey Lee Holder would leave his job site there and travel to Brunswick County to purchase marijuana, Crocker said.

New Hanover vice agents, accompanied by Brunswick authorities, followed Holder as he drove to Grissett's home, Crocker said. He went inside and left a short time later, Crocker added.

Holder was followed back across the Cape Fear River, where New Hanover detectives pulled him over. Inside the car they found 66 grams of marijuana and \$550 cash. They placed Holder under arrest.

In an interview with New Hanover Lt. Sid Causey, Holder allegedly admitted buying the marijuana from a "subject named Bob," Crocker said. Holder also said that "Bob was with Brunswick County Animal Control."

Brunswick narcotics detectives immediately obtained a warrant to search Grissett's home and went to the resi-

(See GRISSETT, Page 2-A)

Motion Claims Chamber Suit Frivolous; Legal Fees Sought

BY ERIC CARLSON
Two former presidents of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce will ask a superior court judge to order fired chamber executive Hollis Richards to repay the defense costs of what their attorney called her "frivolous" lawsuit against them.

"Her allegations were scandalous and without merit factually or legally," Winston-Salem attorney Michael Greeson Jr. said Tuesday on behalf of Annette Odom and Terry Barbee. "My clients have incurred a substantial amount of costs defending against a frivolous lawsuit. We want that back."

Last February, Richards voluntarily dismissed the 20-page lawsuit against Odom, Barbee and the chamber in which she claimed she was fired "on account of her sex." The suit included numerous graphic accusations about the personal behavior of the two chamber directors while Richards served as its executive vice president.

Those charges were denied in the chamber's counterclaim, which asserted that Richards was fired for failing to perform her duties as director.

Although the suit was dismissed Feb. 1, it was done so "without prejudice," giving Richards one year to reopen the action. The terms also allow the defendants the right to "pursue sanctions" against Richards by asking the court to make her pay the defendants' legal fees.

In order to recover those costs, the judge would have to find that Richards' suit "was not well grounded in fact and was not warranted by existing law...and that it is interposed for an improper purpose."

A July 6 hearing has been scheduled to hear Greeson's motion. But that action may be postponed because Richards' lawyer, William Shell, is involved in the defense of Candace Nifong in a murder trial currently underway in New Hanover County.

Shell is in court this week and could not be reached for comment on the Richards' suit Tuesday. A spokesperson at his law office said she was unsure whether Shell would

(See MOTION, Page 2-A)



ROBERT GRISSETT, Brunswick County animal control supervisor (in photo above), awaits processing in the county jail Wednesday night shortly after his arrest on felony drug charges. At left, narcotics agents who are unnamed because their work requires anonymity, unload some of the 94 marijuana plants confiscated in Grissett's arrest at his home on Royal Oak Road, Supply. Grissett was charged with possession with intent to sell and deliver marijuana, sale and delivery of marijuana, and felonious possession. Free on \$15,000 unsecured bond, Grissett was suspended from his position with the Brunswick County Health Department.

New Manager Says He Hopes For A Decade Of Service

BY ERIC CARLSON
Soon enough, he will face the challenges of finding a replacement landfill site, of implementing a new zoning ordinance and of overseeing the day-to-day operations of Brunswick County government.

But like anyone preparing to begin a new job, recently hired County Manager William Wyman Yelton spent his first few days in Brunswick County last week looking for a place to live.

County department heads welcomed Yelton (who prefers to be called by his middle name, Wyman) during a Monday morning reception at the county government complex.

Yelton, a former manager of Wayne and Sampson counties, said he didn't come with any preconceived notions about transforming Brunswick County government. He said at first he would spend much of his time getting to know the area and its citizens.

"The first thing I need to do is sit down with the commissioners and get a handle in my mind on what their concerns are," he said. "I need to understand their different priorities and philosophies. And I need to look over the facilities and get acquainted with the budget. That's quite a challenge."

Noting that Brunswick County is "not a typical eastern North Carolina county" dominated by agricultural interests, Yelton noted that the area has an "unusually diverse" population.

"You have farming communities and beach communities. You have retirees and people who are new to the area and people who live here part time. And you have people who have lived here all their lives. That's quite a contrast," Yelton said.

Yelton said economic development should be "a high priority," but said he has "no specific plans yet" for dealing with the county's chronically high unemployment rate. He said the problem is a difficult one that cannot be solved overnight.

"I'm sure all those people need and want employment. And those who are employed want everyone to

be self-sufficient. But we have to realize that we can't have a utopia. We can't have 100 percent employment," he said.

Like most newcomers, Yelton's first priority was to get a roof over his head.

"I found a place to rent near Shallotte," Yelton said. "Now I just need to sell my home in Rocky Mount so I can buy one here."

Yelton, 56, said his wife Kay plans to remain in Rocky Mount while their home is on the market. The Yeltons have a 26-year-old son, Scott, a sales manager in Wilmington, and a 25-year-old daughter, Stephanie, a sales representative for a mobile communications firm in Raleigh.

A native of Rutherford County, Yelton spent the past several years as regional administrator for the N.C. Council of Governments in Rocky Mount. A veteran of nearly 17 years in county government, Yelton began his career as a finance officer for Burke and Catawba Counties. He was manager of Sampson County for more than six years and Wayne County for four years.

As one of four finalists interviewed by the commissioner for the

(See YELTON, Page 2-A)

House OKs Funds For Channel Study

The U.S. House of Representatives last week voted to give \$50,000 to the Army Corps of Engineers so it can further study a plan to re-open the Eastern Channel at Lockwood Folly River.

If approved by the Senate, the money will be used to study the feasibility of closing Lockwood Folly Inlet and opening Eastern Channel, according to Congressman Charlie Rose's office.

Eastern Channel served as the inlet between Lockwood Folly River and the ocean before the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway and existing inlet were dredged about 50 years ago.

Located near the western tip of Long Beach, the channel has become clogged with sand in recent years. Some local fishermen say lack of water flow through the chan-

nel is related to pollution problems in the river.

Much of Lockwood Folly has been closed to oyster and clam harvesting due to bacterial pollution, and the proposal to re-open Eastern Channel to improve water circulation as gained a lot of support locally.

In May, the newly-formed Brunswick County Environmental Coalition called for the re-opening of the channel at a meeting with federal, state and county officials.

Coalition members said dredging the channel and closing off the existing Lockwood Folly Inlet would improve water flow in the river and therefore allow the river to purge itself of bacterial pollution.

However, a 1991 study by the Corps of Engineers

(See FUNDS, Page 2-A)

Contract Awarded For Sunset Bridge Environmental Study

BY LYNN CARLSON
A \$580,000 study on the environmental impact of replacing Sunset Beach's pontoon bridge—just getting under way now, though it was ordered by a federal judge three years ago—may take until late 1994 to complete, says the project manager.

The N.C. Department of Transportation has awarded a professional services contract to prepare a full environmental impact statement to Greiner Inc., an international engineering firm whose earlier design for a high-rise span at Sunset was nixed by the court after a lawsuit by the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association. Greiner is also the firm which solicited public opinion on the issue last fall as part of a pre-study "scoping" project.

Ten to 12 alternatives, including a tunnel or a ferry across the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, will be ex-

plored along three prospective corridors, including the existing roadbed, Project Manager Franklin Price said in a Monday telephone interview.

As the study progresses, alternatives determined not to be "reasonable or feasible" will be discarded, he added, predicting that "when it gets to be really serious," the likely options are a low drawbridge, medium-height drawbridge or a fixed high-rise span similar to the bridges at Ocean Isle and Holden beaches.

"We're just getting cranked up," Price said. His company will soon be making plans to hold two more "scoping meetings" and a formal public hearing on the issue. DOT has begun peak-usage traffic counts to make sure any future changes will improve traffic flow to and from the island.

Interest in the bridge issue heightened following a severe winter storm March 13 in which high tides

and strong winds made the bridge inoperable for more than nine hours. During that storm, high-rise bridges to Ocean Isle and Holden beaches were also closed to the traffic, but for shorter times and not to emergency vehicles.

Following the storm, the Sunset Beach Town Council reiterated its support for a better bridge and resolved to ask that the environmental impact statement be stepped up. It was not clear whether council's resolution had anything to do with the timing of the contract award.

At Greiner's public meeting last fall, nearly 250 people turned out, most telling planners they want something better than the existing bridge but short of the high-rise span the state first proposed.

It has been 13 years since the DOT began making plans to replace the one-lane pontoon swing bridge with a high-rise fixed span which

would allow simultaneous land and waterway traffic.

In 1990, the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association won a court battle aimed at halting construction of a new bridge. U.S. District Judge Earl Britt ordered the state to complete a full environmental impact study and voided all permits already obtained for the multi-million project.

Because of the court order, Price said Greiner will be placing particular emphasis on environmental concerns, such as threatened and endangered species which might be affected by bridge construction.

Equal weight will be given several "quality-of-life" issues, such as whether the existing bridge endangers public safety because of its vagaries of operation, and whether a high-rise bridge would degrade the quaint atmosphere of Sunset Beach.

The social and economic components have been subcontracted to

Hayes and Associates, planning consultants already under contract to the town government for other projects; and Apogee Research of Bethesda, Md.

Consultant Peggy Hayes was employed because she drafted the town's land use plan and can give a "local flavor" and "first-hand knowledge" to Apogee researchers as they explore the social and economic issues surrounding the bridge, Price said.

All other components of the study will be done in-house by Greiner, which has no plans to set up a local office, opting instead to work out of the town hall when its staffers are in town. Price said between 5 and 15 people would be working on the study at any given time.

Meanwhile, Mayor Mason Barber and Police Chief J.B. Buell say they try to keep their fingers crossed

and their patience intact.

This past Monday morning, traffic backed up in both directions as the bridge shut down for a 45-minute cable replacement. There were no emergencies during the closure, but it remains "a dangerous and costly situation," the mayor said.

Officers must be posted on either side to keep an eye on the traffic situation, Barber said. Buell added that despite the inconvenience, residents and visitors on the island side have been mostly cheerful about delays and willing to go back to their cottages and wait rather than remain in a traffic clog.

"I feel sorry for those people coming back to the island from the Food Lion," the mayor said, laughing. "I've seen women out there giving away ice cream sandwiches they knew were going to melt while they were waiting to cross."

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