

DON'T ANTAGONIZE OWNER, SOLES WARNS

Redwine To Propose \$1 Million Toward Bird Island Acquisition

BY LYNN CARLSON

Bird Island Preservation Society leaders heard welcome news and stern advice when they gathered last week to celebrate the organization's first birthday. Rep. E. David Redwine, D-Brunswick, said he will ask the N.C. General Assembly for \$1 million toward purchase of the island as a nature preserve.

But Sen. R.C. Soles, D-Columbus, warned that if Bird Island preservationists antagonize the island's affluent, politically connected owner, "she can line up just as many legislators against you as you can line up on your side."

When BIPS steering committee members met Sept. 1 with state and local officials and conservation group representatives, there was considerable speculation about

"I believe in my heart of hearts that they really don't want to build condos on that island. I think they are simply trying to establish a measure of its value."

—Rep. David Redwine

the plans and motives of Bird Island owner Janie Pace Price of Greensboro. There were no guesses offered about Price's chances of developing her property and connecting it with Sunset Beach via a mile-long bridge-and-causeway system.

Redwine called Price a "good environmental steward" who has for years put up with trespassers using her private property, as well as the publicly-owned beach, like

a public park.

"I believe in my heart of hearts that they really don't want to build condos on that island," he said. "I think they are simply trying to establish a measure of its value. The Prices, at some point, are going to entertain an offer. I'm just trying to get a figure in my mind, to begin putting something out on the table for us to talk about."

Setting a price for the island has been a problem for

both sides. Price's agents have said she is pursuing the bridge and development proposals because she has no other way to determine its potential on the market.

Preservation advocates have said they have no idea how much money they might offer Price for the island, or what the source of such funds would be.

Price's bridge/causeway application is stalled before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers until she provides more information about development plans. But Price can't make real plans until the Town of Sunset Beach settles on zoning restrictions for Bird Island.

The town is proposing to create a Conservation Reserve Zoning District, including Bird Island, in which development would be restricted to one single-family (See REDWINE, Page 2-A)

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STAFF PHOTOS BY ERIC CARLSON

A New School Year Begins

Briana Barnhardt (in photo above) goes right to the task of organizing her workplace on the first day of classes at Supply Elementary School last Wednesday. Briana is the daughter of Brian and Mary Barnhardt of Shell Point. In photo at right, Julius Melvin gets some last-minute advice from his dad, Andrew Melvin of Supply. Both students are in Ollie Hickman's first-grade class. More back-to-school photos are on Page 1-B and throughout this issue.



Merchants Hope Brisk Sales, Strong Summer Occupancy Forecast Busy Fall Season

BY LYNN CARLSON AND DOUG RUTTER

"Really something."
"Maxed out."
"No complaints."

Those comments seemed to encapsulate sentiments of local merchants, restaurateurs and real estate agents at the close of a busy Labor Day weekend ending what some say was the best tourist season for business in recent years.

"It was really something," said Jerome Walker, manager of the Seafood Barn at Holden Beach. "It was the best summer we've ever had. The only way we could have fed any more people was to have opened earlier and stayed here working all night."

Walker said he believes the Labor Day weekend "broke all records" in the restaurant's 15-year history.

"We've never had as many take-out orders as we had Saturday night, probably because people didn't want to come stand in the line and wait. It was all we could do to answer the phone. Sunday night was even busier."

"It was wonderful," Will Stub-

bert, one of the owners of Sunset Properties at Sunset Beach, said of Labor Day weekend. "Every house we had was rented or the owner was here."

Stubbert expects to see a lot more vacationers over the next month, when cottages rent for less, the weather is cooler and beaches and roads are less crowded.

"September's shaping up to be a wonderful month," he said. "I don't think there's any doubt the season is getting longer. We do some golf packaging and that helps."

He's not alone in hoping strong summer sales are a harbinger for the fall fishing, festival and golf season. Bill Dearman, executive vice president of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, said many businesses are expecting tourists to carry them well into September and October. "The fall is shaping up to be a real good one."

"Generally speaking, I'm hearing the summer was very good, especially from a rental standpoint and occupancy standpoint," said Dearman.

"All in all, everybody seems to be

pleased. I've had some restaurants tell me this is the best year they've had since 1990, and that was the best year we've ever had."

Real estate agencies, like Cooke Realtors at Ocean Isle Beach, reported full occupancy of rental units over Labor Day weekend. "We were totally booked," Frank Couvillon said. "For us it was maxed out."

Vacation cottages will be rented all of September and half of October. Couvillon said fall renters will include "everything from quilting parties to people coming down to look at property."

Bonnie Rotundo, co-owner of The Italian Fishermen Restaurant at Sunset Beach, said business this summer was up slightly over last year.

"Labor Day was a little bit off. Not a lot. The weather probably had something to do with that."

Before dawn Sunday, the South Brunswick Islands were rocked with a severe thunderstorm that unloaded about five inches of rain between 3 and 5 a.m. Later in the day, some areas had received more than six inches.

It was a month's worth of rain in one day, coming at the end of one of the hottest, driest summers on record.

"Usually I'm praying for rain," said Clark Callahan, owner of Callahan's Nautical Gifts, Callahan's Golf and St. Nick Nacks Christmas Shop. "There wasn't much of it this year, but it was so incredibly hot and humid that people (See MERCHANTS, Page 2-A)

Sunset Officer Said OK After Lightning Strikes Department

BY LYNN CARLSON

A Sunset Beach police officer is expected to be back on the job later this week despite having taken a potentially lethal jolt from lightning early Sunday.

In the height of a severe pre-dawn thunderstorm, lightning ran into the Sunset Beach Police Department—probably through a radio antenna—

and knocked Senior Patrol Officer Anna Dosio out of an office chair where she sat typing a report, according to Chief J.B. Buell.

Dosio, a four-year veteran of the department, had just returned from the county jail after processing a drunken driver and was typing a report when a bolt of electricity threw (See LIGHTNING, Page 2-A)

EMPLOYEES SHOCKED BY FOOD FOLKS' ABRUPT CLOSING

Shopping Center Owner Says He's Negotiating For New Grocer

BY DOUG RUTTER

The owner of a Shalotte shopping center says he is negotiating with two companies interested in opening a grocery store in the space vacated by Food Folks.

The Lumberton-based grocery chain closed its Shalotte store last Wednesday, much to the surprise of employees who say they weren't told about the closing in advance.

"It's really not fair," said Jim Farrell, one of 18 part-time employees who lost their job. "I

think they should have given us a little time to find something else."

Dewey Hill, president of Hillcrest Corporation, which owns the Main Street shopping center, said Tuesday he hopes to have another grocery store in the plaza as soon as possible.

"We feel like we're going to be able to get another food store in there that will be competitive and serve the area," said Hill. He said he doesn't know how long it will take to lease the space to another tenant.

"I don't have anything positive. We're just negotiating now," he said. "We do have a couple of companies interested in this store. Both are food companies. Our ambition is to get another food store in there."

Food Folks, formerly called Hill's Food Store, served as an anchor in the shopping center. Other tenants are Moviemax, Rite Aid, Pawn USA and Cheryl's Hair Designs.

Donald Andrews Jr., executive vice president of Food Folks, could not be reached for

comment. He did not return phone calls to his office Friday or Tuesday, and attempts to contact him at the store were unsuccessful.

A woman who answered the telephone at Food Folks' corporate office in Lumberton said Andrews was the only person who could respond to questions about the store closing.

The closing affected 18 part-time workers and seven full-time employees. Full-timers were reportedly offered jobs at Food Folks (See LANDLORD, Page 2-A)

HONEYMOON ENDING?

Commissioners Split Over New Manager's Proposals; Restructuring OK'ed

BY ERIC CARLSON

The honeymoon may be over for the Brunswick County Commissioners and newly hired County Manager Wyman Yelton.

In close votes that crossed party lines, the board denied Yelton's request to have a consulting firm analyze county purchasing and barely approved his restructuring plan to put Emergency Management Director Cecil Logan under the supervision of Emergency Communications (911) Director Doug Ledgett.

Yelton's proposals, made at the board's regular meeting Tuesday night, brought sharp criticism from Commissioner Donald Shaw, who said he is "not pleased" with the new manager's job performance and accused Yelton of avoiding responsibility.

"I've given him plenty of time to get started," Shaw said in a brief interview after the meeting. "But it seems to me like he wants to retreat back into a room somewhere and only deal with one or two people. I

think he needs everybody's input, not just a few people's."

Yelton, in explaining his request to reorganize emergency services, said placing Logan under Ledgett's direction will give the county manager one less department head to supervise.

"The less people that answer to me over all, the better a manager I will be for Brunswick County," Yelton said. "Currently, there are a significant number of department managers answering directly to me, and I feel that I need to reduce that number."

Yelton noted that Logan "has done an excellent job" and said the restructuring was not due to "any kind of bad perception" of his performance. He said the change would have little effect on the day-to-day operations of emergency management or emergency communications.

At the close of Yelton's remarks, Shaw immediately criticized the proposal. He praised Logan's job performance and said

"The less people that answer to me over all, the better manager I will be for Brunswick County."

—County Manager Wyman Yelton

Ledgett already has enough responsibility.

Commissioner Wayland Vereen also opposed the change, but for a different reason. He said he feared the move might lead the county toward hiring paid fire personnel who would compete with local volunteer departments.

Logan currently acts as liaison between the county and its volunteer firefighters.

While Ledgett has a similar relationship with local volunteer rescue squads, he is also working to develop the county's paid Emergency Medical Services system.

"I think the county has about all the paid staff it can handle," Vereen said.

Board Chairman Don Warren said he does not think the commissioners should get involved in personnel decisions that ought to be left to discretion of the county manager.

That sparked a sharp reply from Shaw.

"I wonder how long you are going to keep up this charade?" he said. "We've got five people on this board who are supposed to stand for something. I think we ought to keep it the way it is."

Warren asked Shaw if he wanted to put that in the form of a motion and he said he did. It was defeated 3-to-2 with Warren, Jerry Jones and Tom Rabon voting to support Yelton's proposal.

Ledgett said he had "no comment" when asked if he thought the reorganization was

needed. Nor would he say if he had been consulted about the move.

"Cecil and I work together very well," Ledgett said. "Operationally, I don't see anything that needs to be changed. I don't anticipate making any changes unless I'm instructed to."

Ledgett said he has "no intention" of moving the county's emergency services toward an all-paid system. Nor does he foresee a need for the county to hire paid firefighters or to purchase fire fighting equipment.

Earlier in the meeting, another close vote went against Yelton's request to sign a contract for an expense analysis aimed at saving money on purchases of office supplies, computer supplies, printing, cleaning supplies and water treatment chemicals.

Under the proposed contract, the county would have agreed to pay J. Thomas Associates of Goldsboro 50 cents of every (See MANAGER'S, Page 2-A)

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