



### What's Up?

Check our calendar on **8-B** to find out about fun-filled Labor Day activities.

**Island Living**  
Supplement included in this issue.



### Oh, September!

So begins the time of year all anglers anticipate. Read Capt. Jamie, Page **6-D**.

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# NICK BEACON

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### Going To-To-Toe

A toe-to-toe confrontation is the only way to describe this battle between North Brunswick's Grey Smith (left) and West Brunswick's Jay McRoberts. West prevailed. The story is on Page 1-B.

## Man's Tragic Obsession Ends In Suicide On Inlet Dune

BY ERIC CARLSON

Roger Dean Armbruster just couldn't seem to get over the break-up with his former wife. Since May, he had been writing suicide notes addressed to his mother but left unposted in his mobile home off Kirby Road in Holden Beach.

Last month he left a note under a windshield wiper of Margaret Ann Martin's car, parked outside her home in Supply. After four years of marriage, she recognized the handwriting of her ex-husband and understood his message. Unfolding the paper, she found a bullet and the words "Boy's got a death wish?"

Last week, Martin found a bag of red hair on her porch that she recognized as Armbruster's. With it was another note that said, "Now there won't be no mistake about which Roger it is."

Last Friday, Armbruster walked into *The Brunswick Beacon* lobby and wrote a check for a quarter-page advertisement. He handed one of the office managers a photograph of a smiling couple, standing arm-in-arm. He wrote down the message to go with it.

The ad, with the words "Because I love you Margie," was supposed to run in today's paper.

Early Saturday morning, after pounding on Martin's front door and firing a pistol from the porch, Armbruster drove his van over the Holden Beach bridge and onto the sand at the east end of the paved road. In the pitch darkness, he swam across Lockwood Folly Inlet and watched the sunrise from the west end of Oak Island.

Flying overhead in search of the armed suspect who had eluded police several hours earlier, a Brunswick County Sheriff's deputy saw a man sitting on the inlet beach with his feet dangling in the water. Circling back, the pilot saw the man walk across the dune. Then he suddenly collapsed.

Dropping for a closer look, the deputy saw a message scrawled in large letters in the sand.

"I love you Margie," it said.

That was how sheriff's deputies and court documents described the relentless obsession and the long downward spiral that ended when Roger Armbruster put a .380 caliber pistol to his heart and pulled the trigger Saturday morning.

"From the looks of things, he had this planned for quite a while," Armbruster's sister Renee Neller of Jacksonville, Fla., said Monday on the porch of his neatly maintained mobile home in the Forrest Hills subdivision. "I don't think he wanted anyone to talk him out of it or to change his mind."

His mother, Rosemary Armbruster described her son as a hard-working, "happy-go-lucky guy" who had seemed to be enjoying life, until just recently. He ran a successful business as a licensed electrician and had made lots of friends in the area since he and Martin moved here from Charlotte in 1990, she said.

That was shortly after their marriage, which Mrs. Armbruster found puzzling, even though the two had been seeing each other for several years.

"I was surprised when he called and told me," she said. "It seemed like they fought more than anything else. And she was 20 years older than him."

The two "started from scratch," buying some land to develop a mobile home park near Holden Beach, Mrs. Armbruster said. But after a couple of years together, things apparently turned sour. They signed a separation agreement in April, 1992. Their divorce was finalized last December.

Living in Charlotte, Mrs. Armbruster said she didn't realize how profoundly the break-up had affected her son. Even after their divorce, Roger and Margaret seemed to maintain an off-and-on relationship and even flew to the Bahamas together last February for a vacation.

Then last week, Mrs. Armbruster got a call from

(See SUICIDE, Page 2-A)

## Tough Classes Will Help Students Improve SAT Scores: Superintendent

BY SUSAN USHER

Brunswick County's 1994 graduating seniors scoring an average of 30 points lower on the SAT than their counterparts a year ago, a sign, says Superintendent of Schools Ralph Johnston, that local students need to enroll in more rigorous academic courses.

"The students who rank in the top 10 percent do well, but other students taking the test do not do well," said Johnston.

The SAT, recently changed from Scholastic Aptitude Test to Scholastic Assessment Test to better reflect that it is an evaluation of learned verbal and mathematical skills, is used by most college and university admissions offices as one predictor of how well high school students will perform as college freshmen.

Countywide, 176 seniors took the SAT last school year, for a participation rate of 39.4 percent. While most college-bound students take the battery for the first time during their junior year, some retest during their senior year with the hope of improving their score.

Countywide results show a big disparity between students' verbal and math scores, and between scores for black and white students. The average math score for all county students was 408, 60 points higher than the average verbal score of 368.

### Brunswick County Schools

Unit	Verbal	Math	Total
West High	.373	.413	.786
South High	.379	.428	.807
North High	.343	.365	.708
Brunswick County	.368	.408	.776

### 1994 SAT Total Scores

System	Score	Rank*
Brunswick Co.	.776	.15
Columbus Co.	.769	.17
Whiteville City	.817	.7
Bladen Co.	.774	.16
New Hanover Co.	.863	.1
North Carolina	.860	
United States	.902	

\*in Southeast N.C. region

South seniors scored highest on both the verbal and math sections, and North students scored lowest on both sections, with a 36-point difference in verbal averages and a 63-point difference in math averages. West Brunswick students fell in

the middle, 5 points lower than South on verbal, and 15 points lower than South on math.

Also of concern to local educators is the 144-point difference between average scores of black students and

(See BRUNSWICK, Page 2-A)

## County, Schools To Argue Over \$14 Million Jury Award Today

BY ERIC CARLSON

Brunswick County commissioners and the board of education are scheduled to face off in court again today (Sept. 1) to argue over the county's request for a new trial in last month's jury award of \$14 million for schools.

The county has filed three motions asking the court to reverse the decision, which would give the board of education \$4.8 million more than was earmarked for schools in the county's 1994-95 budget.

Commissioners say the award, if upheld, will force the county to raise taxes by 10 cents per \$100 valuation.

Trial Judge Jack Thompson was scheduled to hear the county's motions Monday morning, but agreed to postpone the hearing due to a death in the family of school board attorney Glen Peterson.

If the judge denies the motions, the county will have one month to decide whether or not to appeal the ruling and/or the verdict to the N.C. Court of Appeals. The commissioners say they will wait for the judge's ruling before discussing a possible appeal.

The county's first motion requests a "stay of execution" to delay awarding the additional school funding until the other two questions are

(See SCHOOLS, Page 2-A)



### Just A Few More Pages

A rising tide threatens to wash over Pauline Kingry as she enjoys the final chapter of a book she was reading on the strand at Holden Beach last week. The Kingry family was vacationing on the Brunswick Isles from their home in Charleston, W.Va.

STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

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## GOP Nominates Leonard For County Commissioner

Theron "Woody" Leonard Jr. of Winnabow will be the Republican challenger facing incumbent Democrat Tom Rabon in the District 4 county commissioners' race this fall.

The Brunswick County Republican Party Executive Committee voted unanimously last week to name Leonard as the party's nominee for District 4 county commissioner.

Shirley Babson, county chairman of the GOP, said the 29-year-old resident of Town Creek Road was the only person nominated at the execu-

tive committee meeting last Wednesday night at party headquarters.

Leonard will replace Pete Barnette of Leland, who earlier withdrew from the commissioners' race.

Babson said she nominated Leonard after interviewing him for about an hour. "I was very impressed with him. He had a great knowledge of local issues," she said.

Leonard is a county native who recently completed a seven-year stint in the military. He has a wife and one child.

## COUNTY, SHALLOTTE TO MEET

# Merged ABC Systems Could Build Liquor Store In Supply

BY ERIC CARLSON

State Alcoholic Beverages Control (ABC) officials have been asked to attend a joint meeting of the Shallotte and Brunswick County ABC boards to discuss a merger of the two systems that would allow the construction of a liquor store in the Supply area.

At its regular semi-monthly meeting Aug. 24, the county ABC board agreed to hold off on tentative plans for an ABC store in Ash, pending the outcome of negotiations aimed at merging the county system with Shallotte's.

Characterizing the idea as a "win-win situation for both sides," county ABC board Chairman John Ramsey said the merger would not only increase profits for both partners, but it would open up the possibility of building new stores that are currently prohibited by law.

Special legislation sponsored a few years ago by State Rep. David Redwine prohibits the county ABC board from building a store within seven miles of a town that already has a liquor outlet. Brunswick is the only county in the state that has such a law.

With 11 municipal ABC systems in the county, the legislation prevents the construction of any liquor stores on the U.S. 17 Bypass from New Hanover County to the South Carolina line. As a result, the county has been considering the construction of a store in Ash, which one ABC board member described as "the last frontier" for expanding the system.

The county currently has liquor stores near Holden Beach and on U.S. 74/76 near the Columbus County line. Shallotte has one ABC store on Main Street.

By merging the Shallotte and county ABC systems,

the joint operation would no longer be prohibited from building a store within seven miles of Shallotte, opening up the bypass east of the town to a point about one mile beyond Supply.

Due to the special legislation, no ABC stores can be built on the bypass between there and the Lanvale area because that portion of the highway falls within seven miles of the Boiling Spring Lakes town limits. From Lanvale north, U.S. 17 is within seven miles of Belville. South of Shallotte, the highway remains with-

(See ABC MERGER, Page 2-A)