



# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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## Sheriff, 35 others called before federal grand jury

BY STACEY S. MANNING  
MANAGING EDITOR

Some 36 Brunswick County residents, sheriff employees and other groups have been subpoenaed to appear before a federal grand jury in Raleigh later this month.

Exact details of the investigation are unknown. However, among those subpoenaed are Brunswick County Sheriff Ronald Hewett, some of his deputies, district attorney Rex Gore and individuals and agencies associated with Hewett's election campaign committee and groups possibly affiliated with campaign contributions.

On Monday afternoon, The Brunswick Beacon filed an open records request to county attorney Huey Marshall arguing the subpoenas were a matter of public record because they had been received by public officials "in connection with the transaction of public business by any agency of North Carolina government or its subdivisions." Marshall immediately complied and released the information to local media outlets.

The subpoenas require all those listed to appear at the Terry Sanford Federal Building in Raleigh at 9 a.m. on June 20 and 21. Additionally, the subpoenas request original documents including:

- Personnel files such as time sheets, payments received and vacation taken by those named;
- Federal funds;
- Information relating to the Committee to Elect Ronald Hewett;

### WHO IS ON THE SUBPOENA LIST?

IN ADDITION TO SHERIFF RON HEWETT, DISTRICT ATTORNEY REX GORE AND OTHERS HAVE BEEN CALLED TO TESTIFY. SEE **PAGE 2A** FOR THE COMPLETE LIST.

- Campaign contributions including those made directly or indirectly to political parties, candidates, political action committees and/or trade associations;

- Bank accounts;
- Telephone accounts; and
- Information about documents relating to vehicles, computers and communication equipment used by sheriff's office workers.

The subpoenas were issued last Thursday and shortly after Hewett issued a statement saying, "I do not know what the focus of this investigation is at this time. I intend to fully cooperate with this investigation. I have not been accused of nor charged with any wrongdoing."

Brunswick County director of elections Greg Bellamy said Friday he had not received a federal subpoena, nor had the U.S. Attorney's Office requested any of Hewett's campaign records from the Brunswick County Board of Elections.

Gore, who is among those subpoenaed, said that while he was not privy to any details of the U.S. Attorney's Office investigation, he had spoken with the assistant U.S. Attorney involved with the investigation.

"After talking with [the assistant U.S. Attorney], I am satisfied, in my own mind, that this investigation will not hinder or reduce our ability to try cases involving Brunswick County officers or those officers whose investigations are underway," Gore said. "This investigation will not have any impact on public safety. Sheriff's deputies will continue to do their day-to-day job as the investigation continues."

SEE SUBPOENA, 2A

### NAACP: More work needed to close gap

Pushing schools  
to do more

ROGERS WALKER JR.  
STAFF WRITER

Brunswick County schools are working to close the achievement gap, Superintendent Katie McGee recently told members of the Brunswick County NAACP.

"The continuous improvement necessary to raise achievement and close gaps is a non-negotiable for teachers and instructional staff," McGee wrote in a letter that outlined various efforts the district is taking to close the gap.

The letter lists such things as annual school improvement plans and teacher training programs, but school board member Ray Gilbert believes more should be done.

Gilbert, who said he was not made privy to the information in this letter, said, "I am not aware of anything that is a wholesome effort to improve the test scores of the students who are performing below standards."

At the board's last meeting, NAACP education committee chairman Joseph Butler thanked McGee for her response and emphasized that his organization is still concerned about minority students' test scores.

"We know that there are special programs for ESL, and exceptional children. Here is our question: What is currently being done for African-American children that will enhance their educational chances?" Butler asked.

Butler said the problem with many of the diversity awareness efforts listed in McGee's letter is that they are usually not implemented uniformly in all of the district's schools.

He cautioned that programs like Black History Month activities often require the initiative of individual teachers to be

SEE GAP, 2A

# The BIG PRICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

## Making a go of small business in Brunswick

BY SARAH SHEW WILSON  
STAFF WRITER

Sixteen years ago, Kim McKnight moved to Brunswick County. She found no well-paying jobs for someone with a degree in business administration, so she went into business for herself.

She opened Kimberly Jo's Boutique on Beach Drive near Ocean Isle Beach, drawing on her previous experience in business as well as her education, and she hasn't looked back since. Her store overflows with unique designer swimwear, large beach bags and resort-style clothes and accessories that are also in line with the latest fashions. The store's tanning bed is also a big draw, McKnight said.

McKnight says her clientele includes mainly locals, part-time residents and vacation homeowners. In fact, business was so good she opened branch locations in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., and later, on the island at Ocean Isle Beach.

This year, she closed those two locations to enter into a new business venture with her husband, Al Crawford, the Ocean Isle fire chief and owner of Coastal Mechanical. The two opened the Ocean Isle Beach Creamery in the former location of the island store, and business is already booming.

McKnight and Crawford and their employees make their own ice cream, and crowds line up to the end of the parking lot for a cool treat, particularly at the end of a long day.

"It's hard work, but a rental on the causeway doesn't come along every day," McKnight said. The next day she gets up early to work at Kimberly Jo's. There, her

one employee, Norma Jean Powell, splits her duties between the boutique and the adjacent Coastal Mechanical.

McKnight says she enjoys being busy, but there are downfalls to being your own boss.

"Whatever happens ends up falling back on you," she said. "You're always on call."

Working for themselves isn't always easy, but small business owners like McKnight and Crawford wouldn't have it any other way. They are just two of the many small business owners who make up a vital part of Brunswick County's economy.

According to the Eli Smith of the local N.C. Employment Security Commission office, 80 percent of Brunswick County's businesses have fewer than 30 employees. Ninety percent have fewer than 20.

Senior economist Woody Hall of UNC-

Wilmington's Cameron School of Business said the most successful small businesses in the Southeast region, and Brunswick County in particular, include retail stores like McKnight's, rental/real estate companies, medical offices and financial services such as insurance companies and business consultants.

"Small businesses are continuing to do well most of the year, according to Hall, compared to years ago when all business was dependent on the summer tourist season.

"You're heavily dependent on tourism for sales and income for jobs, but the level of economic activity used to rise substantially in May through August, which is still the case, but not as much as it was," Hall said.

SEE BUSINESS, 14A



STAFF PHOTO BY SARAH SHEW WILSON

Norma Jean Powell, an employee at Kimberly Jo's Boutique, checks out the selection of swimsuits in the store, which has a loyal following of locals and vacation homeowners, according to owner Kim McKnight.

### Woman gets more than 20 years for murder

STAFF REPORT

A Bolivia woman charged with a September 2006 murder has been sentenced to more than 20 years in prison.

Monday, Martha Evelyn Farmer was sentenced to between 196-254 months on a second-degree murder charge and between 73-987 months on a first-degree kidnapping charge. Farmer pleaded guilty to both counts. Cumulatively, the sentences range between 22.5 years to 28.5 years.

Farmer had faced the possibility of life in prison without parole.

She was arrested in 2006 and charged with killing Carla Lea Bussard, 36, of Wilmington. According to previous reports in The Brunswick Beacon, Bussard's body was found around 1 a.m. on Sept. 5, 2006, in a parking lot of the abandoned Becky's Seafood on Green Swamp Road. Bussard died from gunshot wounds.

According to early reports, Farmer initially claimed she had taken Bussard to meet a man named "Wayne" shortly after Bussard got off work from Eddie Romanelli's Restaurant in Leland. She described him as a white male between the ages of 30 and 40, with blonde hair in a ponytail and a scraggly goatee. Police immediately launched a search for "Wayne" but later found his identity had been made up.

Farmer, who was then a member of Coastline Rescue Squad, was among rescue units that responded immediately after the shooting.

"I think what really hurt her attempts to conceal what she did was the fact that the murder was discovered so shortly after it occurred by a neighbor who heard the shot and went out to investigate," said Capt. Gene Caison, of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office.

"It didn't give her enough time to get her alibi in order before she had to respond right back out there as a rescue worker."



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INSIDE  
ARE EMERGENCY SERVICES READY IF A TERRORIST ATTACK OR MAJOR DISASTER HAPPENED HERE? SEE TRAINING ON PAGE 23A.