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Storming back – 1C
Cougars rally back to defeat the St. Pauls Bulldogs, 63-60.

Old county courthouse: 'deteriorating' and 'inadequate' for Southport's needs Aldermen may buy building, relocate City Hall

By Jason Tyson
Staff Writer

The Southport Board of Aldermen is contemplating the purchase of a building that would become the home of city offices if approved, a measure they plan to vote upon during a Thursday morning workshop.

At a special meeting held Tuesday afternoon in the current City Hall, which officials have described as "deteriorating" and "inadequate," the board viewed its options to upgrade city office space.

Mayor Robert Howard presented each of those options to the board from reports by the Building Improvements Committee: renovate the current building on East Moore Street by public or private means, build a new facility, or acquire an existing facility to house all departments of city government.

City leaders have been discussing its long-term space needs since early 2010.

The building up for consideration is located at 1029 North Howe Street, in the same block as the city fire station and diagonally across the street from Doshier Memorial Hospital. The two-story facility was constructed in 2006 and is currently owned by Manthybug LLC of Warrenton, Virginia.

"I want to thank the Building Improvements Committee and staff for the long hours they spent putting this report together," Howard said. "We have found what we think is the most cost-effective solution, for our City Hall and code enforcement buildings do not meet the current needs of the city."

If approved, the total project cost to purchase 1029 North Howe Street would be just over \$2.1-million, which includes the \$1.8-million purchase price. The

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City aldermen are considering purchasing this office building on North Howe Street to convert into a new City Hall. It's located in the same block as the city fire station and across the street from Doshier Memorial Hospital.

Photo by Ed Harper

'Tis the season



Kids gathered candy and also got a view of Santa Claus during Saturday's annual Christmas by the Sea parade on Oak Island. The festive occasion sponsored by the Southport-Oak Island Area Chamber of Commerce drew beautiful weather and a nice crowd. More photos of the parade are on page 12C.

Photo by Jim Harper

Brunswick County

Brennick guilty, gets 15-18 years

Drunk driver who killed Oak Island mom convicted of second-degree murder

By Amanda Hutcheson
Staff Writer

Daniel Brennick was found guilty Friday of second-degree murder, driving while impaired (DWI) and death by motor vehicle after the 2010 wreck that killed Oak Island single mother of three Satu Harris.

He was sentenced to a term of 15 years to 18 years and nine months in prison. Judge Thomas Lock recommended that Brennick receive substance abuse treatment while in prison.

After sentencing, Brennick's defense attorney, Mike Ramos, immediately entered notice of appeal, a common action.

As he walked past the table where assistant district attorneys Gina Essey and Chris Thomas sat, on his way out of the courtroom, Brennick looked at them and said, "I'll see you again."

"As far as I'm concerned, that indicated a complete lack of remorse on his part," Thomas observed.

Through two days of testimony, Thomas and Essey had introduced witnesses and evidence to prove that not only did Brennick drive carelessly and while drunk the night his vehicle crashed into Harris's, his actions showed so little regard for life that they con-

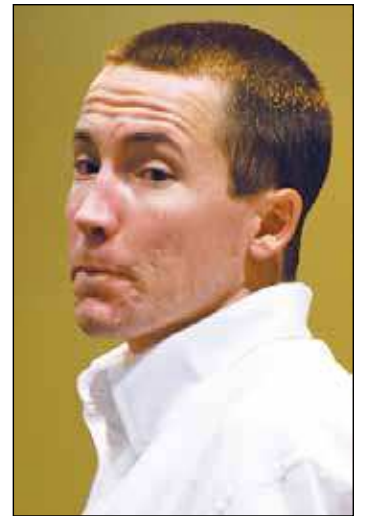


Photo by Amanda Hutcheson
Brennick has filed notice of an appeal following his conviction last week.

stituted malice, which is required for a conviction of second-degree murder.

May 7, 2010

The night of May 7, 2010, Brennick and a friend went to Duffer's Pub and Grill in Caswell Beach, four employees testified. There, Brennick reportedly consumed three beers and three shots of liquor with no food in approximately an hour and a half, they

See Trial, page 12A

Fish and Wildlife chief visits

Owner lays out vision for Orton Plantation

By Jason Tyson
Staff Writer

Ongoing efforts to restore the vast tracts surrounding Orton Plantation have cleared another hurdle, and its owner was on hand last week to serve as tour guide for that progress.

Louis Moore Bacon, who purchased Orton in May 2010, brought along Daniel Ashe, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), to view new restoration efforts ongoing in three areas of the 8,400-acre property, and to address invited media. Bacon also gave statements regarding the possible future direction of the grounds and plantation home.

Moore is a direct descendent of Roger Moore, who built the current Orton residence in 1735.

A newly announced, 93-year "Safe Harbor" agreement with Ashe's agency gives Orton new classifications, rights and abilities for forest management and preservation of its endangered species. But the announcement of securing a series of federal and state permits was the most welcome piece of news for property staff.

"It's a home run to obtain these permits," Orton's property manager Dillon Epp said.

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Photo by Jason Tyson

Orton Plantation owner Louis Moore Bacon, center, is joined by the director of U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Daniel Ashe, left, and property manager Dillon Epp during a tour to view progress on the restoration effort last week.

Oak Island council

Water bills for low users could shrink under plan

By Lee Hinnant
Staff Writer

After years of assessments, fees and other increases, Town of Oak Island water/sewer customers may soon be getting some good news if they are not prolific water users.

At its regular meeting next Tuesday, December 11, town council is scheduled to consider a restructured rate system for water consumption that would mean lower bills for the majority of customers who use less than 8,000 gallons per month.

Mayor Betty Wallace and town staff have been working on the proposal for months. Wallace said 75-percent of the town's utility revenue comes from customers who use less than 4,000 gallons per month, and more than half comes from users averaging less than 2,000 gallons a month.

Wallace's suggestion would eliminate the 2,000 gallons of water included in the monthly base rate of \$77.99. A customer who uses no water would instead pay \$67.75 a month, while someone using 2,000 gallons would pay \$75.34, a decrease of \$2.65.

A customer using 4,000 gallons of water a month now pays \$84.85. Under the proposal, that bill would drop by \$1.92 to \$82.93.

The plan would also impose a \$12.50 surcharge on every 1,000

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Oak Island

Employees the subject of proposed town study

By Lee Hinnant
Staff Writer

Oak Island town manager Steve Foster said he intends to ask town council for permission to have an outside agency perform a pay and personnel study of town employees.

It has been about a decade since the town performed such a study, although a study of workers in the utilities department was done several years ago.

Foster said he knew of at least one instance where a town employee has no written job description. The point of the study would be to develop complete job descriptions and suggest the pay grade and range for the jobs performed. It is possible that some jobs are duplicated or that some jobs might be better performed by outside contractors, he said.

Foster said he would ask council for permission to employ the N.C. League of Municipalities to perform the work, since few private companies would be interested and the league is famil-

iar with how local government operates. He estimated the study could be done for \$13,000.

The league is an advocacy and research group for towns and cities across the state.

Mayor Betty Wallace recently wondered aloud why Oak Island, with 8,386 residents, has more than 100 full-time employees, while Leland, with 12,623 residents, has about 70 employees. She cited figures from the N.C. League of Municipalities.

Foster pointed out that, unlike Leland, Oak Island experiences an annual influx of thousands of seasonal residents and visitors. Also, it is more than 11 miles from the Oak Island town limits on N.C. 211 to the Swain's Cut Bridge and then to the Barbee Bridge, whereas Leland is fairly compact.

Still, the study might show ways the town could be more efficient, Foster said. The item is expected to come before council at its regular December 11 meeting at 6 p.m.



Photo contributed

Parade float winner

The Southport-Oak Island Area Chamber of Commerce has announced the winners of the Christmas by the Sea Parade float decorating competition. In first place was Gilligan's Oak Island Christmas (above) by Oak Island Animal Control, complete with a live pelican on loan from Sea Biscuit Wildlife Shelter. Second place went to the Oak Island Beach Preservation Society and third place to the Oak Island Beautification Club. There was a tie for the Judges Award between Archer Daniels Midland and Walmart of Southport.

Orton: could one day become historic landmark

Continued from page 1A

"The restoration process can now go full steam ahead and we can commence important work on these grounds."

Efforts are currently focused on rehabilitating plantation ricefield paddies, longleaf pine forests and the endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers found within. A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wetlands permit will allow the work on restoring the old plantation-era ricefields to begin. It's all part of a decades-long effort by Bacon to preserve tracts of land he owns here and in other states in various capacities.

"When I was in school in Vermont (at Middlebury College) I was taken by a lot of the theories I learned from a land management class, but I never thought I would put them to use in this way," Bacon said. "Restoration and preservation of natural habitats was something my grandfather Louis was interested in, so it is kind of in my genes. It is something that only seemed natural to do."

Bacon has also been working

'From our standpoint, the preservation of the ricefields are good for migratory birds, and the restoration of red-cockaded woodpeckers here is absolutely vital.'

Daniel Ashe
USFWS director

with Ashe on 177,000 acres in the San Luis Valley in Colorado. He has two other similar projects in New York State from property purchased in the 1990s.

Epp and Ashe both stressed the significance of local efforts, labeling them as unlike any other in the country.

"From our standpoint, the preservation of the ricefields are good for migratory birds, and the restoration of red-cockaded woodpeckers here is absolutely vital," Ashe said. "This unique public and private cooperation

will show to the world what a working rice plantation will look like. Louis (Bacon) has been a very important conservator over the years."

Bacon said he felt his investment in Orton's future was more a heartfelt one than an intellectual one. Bacon grew up in Raleigh, but spent a significant amount of his youth hiking and fishing, where he said he developed a reverence for nature.

"To be able to restore a place such as this one, what Lawrence Sprunt once called 'the old fam-

ily home place,' is something that not only comes up once in a generation, but once in a lifetime," Bacon said. "I have no plans to make Orton my home at this time."

Bacon said he had not ruled out re-opening Orton to the public someday, but indicated he hoped the future of the site would be a more cultural one, envisioning academic, historical and ecological programs taking place here.

He stressed that scenario is still some years into the future, with the current focus of work expected to take a significant amount of time.

"We wish to enhance Orton's position within this community and develop it with a purpose-oriented future in mind," he said.

Bacon previously has stated he hopes to one day see Orton, including the ricefields, become a National Historic Landmark. The plantation has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1973.

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Emergency federal funds totals \$56K

Brunswick County has been awarded \$56,533 in federal funds made available through the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program to supplement local emergency food and shelter programs.

The selection was made by a National Board that is chaired by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and consists of representatives from The Salvation Army, American Red Cross, United Jewish Federations of North America, Catholic Charities USA; National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.; and United Way Worldwide.

The National Board was charged to distribute funds appropriated by Congress to help

expand the capacity of food and shelter programs in high-need areas around the country.

A Local Board made up of community leaders and volunteers will determine how the funds awarded to Brunswick County are to be distributed among the emergency food and shelter programs run by local service organizations in the area. The Local Board is responsible for recommending agencies to receive these funds, and any additional funds available under this phase of the program.

Under the terms of the grant from the National Board, local organizations chosen to receive

funds must: be private voluntary nonprofits or units of government; have an accounting system; practice nondiscrimination; have demonstrated the capability to deliver emergency food and/or shelter programs; and if they are a private voluntary organization, they must have a voluntary board. Qualifying organizations are urged to apply for funds.

Brunswick County's Local Board previously has awarded emergency food and shelter funds to Brunswick Family Assistance Agency, Hope Harbor Home, South Brunswick Interchurch Council, Family Emergency Teen Shelter Inc. and Southport-Oak

Island Interchurch Fellowship Food Pantry.

Public or private voluntary organizations interested in applying for emergency food and shelter program funds must contact Percy Woodard, Local Board chairman, at 754-8484 for an application. The deadline for applications is Friday, December 7.

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