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# THE SUMMERFIELD HAYSEED

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Volume 1, Issue 1

October 2009

## Youth Sports Embezzlement Case Update

*Trial Date Set for Nov 16, 2009*

**By Dwayne Crawford**

*Editor*

According to Assistant District Attorney Stephanie Reece (Guilford County), whether or not Thomas R. Valent's alleged embezzlement case will be heard before Guilford County Superior Court on Nov 16, 2009, hinges on Valent's acceptance or rejection of a plea agreement late this month. Valent, former Director of Sponsorships for **Summerfield Recreation Association, Inc.** (SRA), a non-profit youth sports organization, is charged with six counts of felony embezzlement from the SRA. His was arrested on July 15, 2008.

Concern over Mr. Valent's for-profit registration of the "doing business as" (DBA) name of "**Summerfield Recreation Associates**" was first brought to the attention of then SRA President Jay Copeland by this Editor on Nov, 2006. In a letter written to the "Guilford Record" in early 2007, Town Councilmember Becky Strickland expressed concern and questioned Valent's creation of a personal business account with the same acronym as **Summerfield Recreation Association, Inc.** (SRA).

*continued on page 2*

## Town Mayor, Employee, & Volunteers Blocking VFW Memorial Site

*Small Group Attempts Derailment of VFW Site Location*

**By Dwayne Crawford**

*Editor*

Just after the November, 2007, municipal elections, a previously underreported series of events occurred between the Town of Summerfield and our local Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Chapter 7999. These events culminated in a show of force by the VFW, when local, state, and national VFW members in full regalia packed the March 31, 2008 Town Council meeting.

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*"The VFW is in for a fight if they try to secure the 'grove of trees' site for a veterans memorial."*

**George Holub, Town Employee (Park Custodian)**

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Mayor Mark Brown had previously promised them (VFW) a site in Summerfield's Community Park specially reserved for their VFW memorial. However, false obstacle after false obstacle raised by the Mayor, staff, and some Parks and Recreation (P&R) committee members clearly intended to challenge, block, or exacerbate the cost of construction and placement of the VFW memorial promised.

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*"It is official! It is a 'done deal'. The VFW proposed site is on the septic repair area."*

**Summerfield Mayor Mark Brown's false statement to VFW member**

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Ironically, attempts to deceive the VFW backfired on the deceivers.

First, the Mayor, staff, and committee tree huggers claimed that tree damage would occur to the "grove of trees" site chosen during memorial construction. But tree damage already existed—done by P&R Custodian George Holub during construction of the large concreted picnic shelter near the

*continued on page 3*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1 Youth Sports Embezzlement Case Going to Trial

1 Town Mayor, Employee, & Volunteers Town Blocking VFW Memorial Site

4 Friends for Summerfield and the Northwest Observer, Political Allies

5/6 Letters to Editor & Opinion

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*“Part of the proposed (Town of Summerfield) budget is \$36,000.00 for...SRA...we are not wasting money...”*

**Jay Copeland, Summerfield Rec. Assn. President**

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Councilwoman Strickland also asked for the required appropriate documentation from the Summerfield Recreation Association during Copeland’s and Valent’s tenures after that organization requested money from the Town of Summerfield, per the Town’s budget. When the requested paperwork was not forthcoming and Valent had his real estate license revoked by the State of North Carolina for other reasons, Councilwoman Strickland expressed her concerns over the Town of Summerfield giving **any** public funds to the SRA without full financial disclosure by that organization. The amount of tax payer money requested by the SRA was also noted on the NWO Forum, dated June 11, 2006, by Councilman Wray’s nephew and then SRA President Jay Copeland when he wrote, *“Part of the proposed (Town of Summerfield) budget is \$36,000.00 for...SRA...we are not wasting money...”*.

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*“I was asked to be a liaison between the SRA and the Summerfield Parks and Recreation Committee,”*

**Thomas Valent, SRA liaison to the Town of Summerfield**

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In response to Strickland’s role in monitoring town expenditures and her letter expressing her concerns, Valent stated the following in a March 9, 2007 letter to the Editor in the “Northwest Observer” that, due to his active involvement on the Spears YMCA Board of Directors, he had intended to “*phase himself out*” of the SRA, but had only stayed on in order to help with the creation of “*something positive*” in Summerfield. *“I was asked to stay involved and get something accomplished for Summerfield. I was asked to be a liaison between the SRA and the Summerfield Parks and Recreation Committee,”* said Valent.

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*“I can’t tolerate anyone criticizing our volunteers. At this time, I’d like to ask that this stop.”*

**John Wray, Contract driver for IM Copeland, Inc.**

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In defense of Valent and in condemnation of Councilwoman Becky Strickland for her scrutiny regarding the budgeted public funding of \$36,000.00 allocated for the Summerfield Recreation Association, John Wray, spoke before Council on Mar 13, 2007. He stated, *“I was very disturbed when I read it. An elected official [attacked] volunteers of the community. I can’t tolerate anyone criticizing our volunteers. At this time, I’d like to ask that this stop.”* Void of any understanding pertaining to Councilwoman Strickland’s responsibilities to the tax payers in her

oversight and questioning of how Summerfield budgets tax revenues, Mr. Wray’s commentary served only to help misrepresent and foster the erroneous idea that Becky was ‘attacking’ volunteers. Instead of applauding Becky for her reasonable requests and due diligence, the Friends for Summerfield and other entities within our community joined the ‘Strickland attacks volunteers’ choir. The personal and often anonymous smears against her began in earnest. *“I have no respect for Becky Strickland and I don’t care who knows it,”* posted Steve Adkins, co-founder of the Friends for Summerfield. Unfortunately for our community, this kind of rhetoric and other false allegations continue to this day.

In a posting to the “Northwest Observer (NWO) Forum” dated March 20, 2007, then SRA President Jay Copeland stated that he (Copeland), Valent, George Holub (Town park employee), Councilman Bob Williams, and Copeland’s son (for player input) comprised a ball field search committee for the Town of Summerfield. In a later NWO Forum posting (Aug. 23, 2007), Copeland stated this ball field search committee had narrowed candidate ball field properties from 20 to 9, and finally down to the Friddle parcel adjoining Councilman Bob Williams’ commercial parcel on Summerfield Road (co-owned with then Summerfield Parks and Recreation Chairman, Debbie Hoffman).

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*“I personally had over 4 years in this (ball field project) with the help of Tom Valent...”*

**Jay Copeland, SRA President**

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On August 23, 2007, in another post in the NWO Forum, then SRA President, Jay Copeland, commented on the length of time he and Tom Valent had lobbied the Town of Summerfield to bank roll the ball fields by stating the following, *“I personally had over 4 years in this (ball field project) with the help of Tom Valent...”* Both Valent and Copeland resigned from the SRA in late 2007, each citing different reasons for their resignations.

At some point an official police investigation ensued by the Guilford County Sheriff’s Department. Detective R. J. Melton said that Valent’s DBA (“doing business as” “Summerfield Recreation Associates”) account was a personal one of Valent’s. Detective Melton explained that people writing checks to the real association would often use the acronym “SRA” which could then be deposited into any account with the same acronym. After a full investigation, Valent’s felony charges ballooned to 69 checks he allegedly embezzled from the SRA non-profit organization between Feb. 13 and Sept. 7, 2007.

*continued on page 3*

*“There’s money to be made in youth sports.”*

**Jay Copeland, SRA President, 2006**

It is interesting to note that prior to Copeland and Valent’s resignations, both men along with now Councilman John Wray, were working out of the same office space leased by IM Copeland, Inc., located at 311-D South Westgate in Greensboro. Commenting at the February 2006 Summerfield budget workshop, then SRA President, Jay Copeland, stated the following, *“There’s money to be made in youth sports.”*

*“He (Valent) didn’t do what he said,” and “no restitution had been paid.”*

**Assistant District Attorney Reece**

In conclusion, according to Assistant District Attorney Reece, Valent previously stated that he had made restitution to the SRA as of July, 2009. However one month later, further investigation by Reece revealed that *“He (Valent) didn’t do what he said,”* and *“no restitution had been paid.”* Valent declined the ADA’s Sept, 2009, offer to plead guilty to all felony embezzlement charges. Public Defender Wayne Baucino, whose office is appointed for indigent defendants charged with State crimes, is Valent’s attorney. ❖

park’s main entrance. VFW officials know routinely what steps they must take by a certified arborist during memorial construction to prevent tree damage. The Town’s pre-existing tree damage caused by Custodian Holub during picnic shelter construction remains untreated to this day. However, it must be addressed by the veterans before VFW memorial construction can begin.

Next hurdle: Mayor Mark Brown, staff, and some P&R committee members claimed the “grove of trees” site could not be used because a memorial would encroach on the Summerfield Community Center’s secondary repair septic area. That area is officially designated by the Guilford County Health Department and is off limits to any construction whatsoever. Wishing to verify, the VFW members asked town staff numerous times to produce maps indicating location of the septic area. Town staff produced nothing. VFW officials then made a special trip to the Health Department to obtain necessary documents. Using official county maps as a guide, Danny Nelson’s on-site measurements showed the “grove of trees” site selected by the VFW and promised by Mayor Brown DOES NOT IN ANY WAY encroach on the Community Center septic repair area. During this discovery process, however, it was revealed that the same large picnic shelter near the park entrance was, in fact, constructed on top of the said repair septic area by Park Custodian Holub.

Within minutes of observing VFW member Danny Nelson taking memorial site measurements, Mayor Brown called VFW memorial project representative Richard Beeson, claiming: *“It is official! It is a ‘done deal.’ The VFW proposed site is on the septic repair area.”* To this day, elected Mayor Mark Brown has yet to account to the VFW or the public for his making false “official” claims and statements regarding their chosen site.

*“From our point of view it appears that a person or persons...has decided to prevent us from obtaining this site.”*

**Danny Nelson, VFW Memorial Project Representative, Addressing council on March 31, 2008**

With the March 31, 2008, VFW site discussion coming to a close, Councilman Williams stated: *“I’m all for the memorial, but I feel a better location can be found.”* Councilwoman Flowers stated she felt the VFW had addressed all issues and she supported their preferred site in the “grove of trees.” Flowers made a motion to approve the VFW chosen site, and Councilwoman Becky Strickland seconded. The motion passed unanimously, with Williams reluctantly casting the last approval vote. ❖



Picnic Shelter Being Built on top of Septic Repair Field

**SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE VFW MEMORIAL PROJECT**

VFW Post 7999 is accepting your 100% tax deductible donations today! Contributions can be sent in by mail or by stopping by your local Bank of Oak Ridge branch. VFW Post 7999’s mailing address is:

VFW Post 7999  
PO BOX 684  
Summerfield, NC 27358

When making contributions at the Bank of Oak Ridge, tell clerk you wish to deposit money into the “VFW Post 7999 Memorial Fund”

# Friends for Summerfield and the Northwest Observer, Political Allies

*Who are the "Friends for Summerfield" and what do they stand for?*

**By Dwayne Crawford**

*Editor*

If you go to the Friends for Summerfield's web site you'll learn that the Friends for Summerfield (FFS) stand for "open" and "positive" change in our town. After I re-published scrubbed content from the FFS website which included all their meeting Minutes following the arrest of one of their members, Tom Valent, on July 15, 2008, I am no longer allowed access using my home internet connection. Further, I am aware of at least three people, two of whom are Summerfield citizens, who were asked to no longer attend future FFS meetings.

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*"One of this year's subrosa or secondary issues may well be the NWO's (NW Observer's) uneven and underhanded treatment of some political candidates in Summerfield. There is clearly a double standard at work here and people of intelligence can see it."*

**Jim Flynt, Stokesdale Resident**

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Paul Scott lives in Summerfield's Historic District, surrounded by the many houses and properties owned by sisters & FFS members Sue Beeson (Summerfield Parks & Recreation Chair), and Linda Southard (Summerfield Historic Committee Chair). He was kicked out for making statements adverse to the FFS ideology. Mr. Scott was not rude or confrontational. However, he stated a view contrary to some members within the Friends for Summerfield organization and as a result, he was told that his attendance was no longer wanted nor welcome.

Stokesdale resident Jim Flynt was told 'do not come back' when he challenged Friends for Summerfield members to reconcile their actions with their stated "open/positive" beliefs. His sin was to point out that the actions of Friends for Summerfield members didn't meet their stated goal of entertaining opposing points of view. However, Mr. Flynt's observation concerning the Northwest Observer's political bias was considered to be blasphemous by the Friends for Summerfield when he stated the following in 2007, "*One of this year's subrosa or secondary issues may well be the NWO's uneven and underhanded treatment of some political candidates in Summerfield. There*

*is clearly a double standard at work here and people of intelligence can see it."* His statement is applicable today.

Friends for Summerfield co-founder Steve Adkins informed Mrs. Alicia Flowers over the telephone that after a unanimous vote by the members, she was no longer welcome. The reason? She voiced an opinion outside of the Adkins' home following one of the FFS meetings she had been attending that was contrary to that of member Beth Kaplan. Mrs. Flowers had not been rude or confrontational, nor had she ever been argumentative during any of the many meetings she had attended. Regardless of her conduct, openly sharing her opinion over one issue that was contrary to Ms. Kaplan's was enough for Mr. Adkins to request that she no longer attend any of the Friends for Summerfield meetings. The Friends for Summerfield stated ideology of "positive" and "open to dissenting points of view" are noble aspirations, but as Mr. Flynt pointed out early on, their actions are to the contrary.

In a recent note published in the NW Observer on July 31, 2009, Publisher/Editor Patti Stokes stated she is not a member of the FFS. However, look back at the Feb. 2, 2007, NWO edition cover page, above-the-fold account of the first FFS meeting, "Taking Back Their Town." Sandra Smith reports Northwest Observer Editor Patti Stokes' husband, Leon Stokes, saying, "We (the Friends for Summerfield), want to say we don't like paying taxes, but, yes, some things are worth paying for." In a subsequent NWO edition, FFS Co-chair & NW Observer Forum Supermoderator, Steve Adkins, thanked Editor Patti Stokes profusely for the great coverage the newly-formed FFS group was receiving from the paper.

The Friends for Summerfield have just as much right to express their opinions as anyone else and it appears they have the full support of the Northwest Observer and its staff. I am a devout advocate for freedom of speech and I would never try to silence an opposing point of view. However, it's important to remember that inherent with our right to free speech comes responsibility and accountability for the words we use. As Thomas Sowell recently wrote, "Common decency should be the first line of defense, so that people who smear others will pay a price in outrage that their lies should provoke, even among decent people who do not agree with the target of their smears." Councilwoman Becky Strickland has been the Friends for Summerfield's favorite target.

Often misquoted and falsely accused, Strickland has been intentionally smeared and maligned publicly and anonymously for years by the NWO forum participants, many who are still active members of the Friends for Summerfield and the local paper. These are not the tactics of decency and they

*continued on page 5*

certainly should not be the tactics that characterize the community of Summerfield. Councilwoman Strickland's diligence in monitoring how Summerfield taxpayers' money is spent was and continues to be rewarded with persistent factual distortions in letters to the editor as well as edits in the Northwest Observer on a weekly basis. For four years Strickland's discussions on council have been quoted out of context and her image vilified by visceral and often anonymous NWO Forum postings as well as in the paper's anonymous Grins & Gripes section today. Many, if not all of the negative commentary has been made by members and attendees of the Friends for Summerfield organization which includes friends and family members of Councilman Bob Williams, Councilman John Wray (up for election) and council candidate Dianne Laughlin as well as Leon Stokes, husband to Northwest Observer owner, Patti Stokes.

What could have been a wonderful arena for our community to openly exchange ideas, the Northwest Observer's on line forum instead degenerated into nothing more than a haven for those who were eager to anonymously smear the character of individuals with whom they disagreed. The editors of the Northwest Observer bear much responsibility on that front,

especially when one considers the following example: "Is Mark Brown in Paul Milam's pocket, inquiring minds want to know?" This ugly and arousing statement was anonymously posted by 'zippitydoodah' who was posing as a Summerfield resident. Sadly for our community and for the Northwest Observer, zippitydoodah is none other than the Northwest Observer's co-editor, Sandra Smith. Regardless of her intentions, her statement served to foster hundreds of like minded and harmful posts.

Although the Northwest Observer's on line forum is no longer up and running, many citizens residing within our community are still reeling from the poison that was so readily foisted upon them under the Northwest Observer's umbrella of anonymity. For those of you who don't wish to own your words, you can still make anonymous statements about people you like or dislike in the Northwest Observer in their 'Grins and Gripes' section. As Dan Gillmore recently noted on the Citizen Media Law Project site, "One of the norms we'd be wise to establish is this: People who don't stand behind their words deserve, in almost every case, no respect for what they say. In many cases, anonymity is a hiding place that harbors cowardice, not honor." I couldn't agree with him more. ❖

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## Letters to the Editor...

For your consideration...

I would like to encourage Summerfield citizens to get to know Jeff Johnson and vote to put Jeff on the Summerfield Town Council. I have had the pleasure to sit with Jeff on the Comprehensive Plan Committee. Through that work, I have seen and heard intelligent citizen-focused ideas, suggestions and solutions from Jeff. He has a very positive attitude with a willingness to partner toward a solution. He has integrity and respect for the position of that is a "representative of the citizen". Jeff Johnson knows he would be working for YOU and would not take that lightly. Jeff Johnson is a person I want guiding decisions about Summerfield's future.

I also encourage people to look at the voting records of Becky Strickland. She does not go with the flow, that's for sure, but I like someone who's willing to ask the important questions about spending and policy. I like that Becky's first and foremost goal is to vote for the citizens; without personal agenda. We don't need smooth talkers and schmoozers on the council - we need strong minded, action oriented, smart people. And, that's Becky Strickland.

Vote for Jeff Johnson! Re-elect Becky Strickland!

Sincerely,  
Peggy McPartlan

To The Editor:

How often have we heard the lament, "my vote doesn't count" when citizens justify their absence at the polls? It's easy to understand that kind of frustration when those in positions of leadership often disregard their constituents. In local elections, every vote counts and a winner is often decided by ten votes or less. Thomas Jefferson stated, "The people get the government they deserve".

Who do you deserve representing you in Summerfield? Someone who isn't prepared to discuss items on the agenda yet votes on them anyway? Someone who ignores the majority at the benefit of the few? Someone who goes along to get along? Someone who hasn't cared enough to regularly attend council meetings?

In contrast, Becky Strickland does hours of research before taking her seat at the council table. Always prepared, Becky's willing to openly ask the hard questions even when they are unpopular. Maligned and often misquoted, her commitment to the taxpayers of Summerfield is obvious. Her direct and pointed discussions reveal her desire for accountability in how your hard earned tax dollars are spent by the town.

Who do you want questioning how your taxes are spent, a pit bull or a lap dog?

Robert Flowers

# Summerfield Hayseed Opinions

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OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

## THE MISSING 12 – YOUR “OPEN” GOVERNMENT

By BECKY STRICKLAND

Late in the October 13, 2009, Summerfield Town Council meeting, pursuant to Town Attorney Bill Hill orders, the Council unsealed 12 sets of previously Closed Session (Executive Session) minutes taken between March, 2002, and September, 2004, when Council candidate Dianne Laughlin was Assistant/Town Clerk and Custodian of Records, William Trevorror was the Town Attorney, and Michael Brandt was the Town Planner/Administrator. Dena Barnes was Mayor.

The “missing 12” were shocking to Councilwoman Becky Strickland, as she had filed at least two NC Public Records Act Requests in March and May of 2005 prior to being elected to Council, and requested all such minutes be unsealed and disclosed. Councilwoman Strickland did not know these Minutes even existed, as they were never disclosed to her as a private citizen in 2005 upon proper request, nor as a Councilperson until she saw them in her September, 2009 Town Council packet. After she read them, she realized why they had been concealed from her: to protect the majority incumbents.

Generally, a government may go into Closed (Executive) Session to discuss only three things: personnel, land acquisition, and litigation involving the Town. Discussion of committee members does not qualify as “personnel” under the law.

The unsealed 12 Executive Session Minutes showed then Mayor Dena Barnes, Councilpersons Bob Williams, Mark Brown, Jane Doggett, Carolyn Collins, and Bill Peterson going into illegal closed sessions to discuss committee appointments in private to suit their own personal agendas. Bob Williams wanted Mike Stewart appointed to the Water Committee. John Wray also wanted to be appointed to the Water Committee but was not after Bill Peterson expressed concern over past experiences he had with John Wray. Zoning Board Applicants were discussed as were other committee appointees who “wanted” to serve on various committees. Former Mayor Bill Peterson, to his credit, tried to open up the committees to the public and told Strickland that he left some of those meetings because the others were conducting business illegally. Since November, 2005, when Becky Strickland was elected to Council, there have been **no** illegal closed Executive Sessions in the Town of Summerfield.

Now, Mayor Mark Brown tries to hide behind “we did what the Town Attorney told us to do” defense. Sorry, Mayor Mark, Mayor Pro-Tem Dena, and Dianne Laughlin, that explanation just “does not wash” for the intelligent citizens of Summerfield. The fact that you all were conducting Town business illegally behind closed doors, which is evidenced by the revelation of these minutes, and the citizens did not know about it because you concealed the minutes in violation of the public records law, has probably affected the outcome of at least two elections: 2005 and 2007. Shame on you!

The “Missing 12” and related data may be read at [www.BeckyStrickland.net](http://www.BeckyStrickland.net). If you want open, honest, and transparent government in Summerfield, you voters know what to do November 3.

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The Summerfield Hayseed publication is privately owned and paid for by Summerfield Resident Dwayne Crawford

Letters to the Editor, OP-ED submissions, corrections, story ideas, and advertising inquires should be sent to: Hayseed, c/o Dwayne Crawford, PO Box 331, Summerfield, NC 27358

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### ELECTION DAY IS TUES, NOVEMBER 3

Voting will be held at the polling places from 6:30 AM to 7:30PM

Bur-Mill Clubhouse Early Voting:

Saturday, Oct 24, 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Monday – Friday Oct 26 to 30, 10:00 to 6:30 PM

Saturday, Oct 31, 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM

THE SUMMERFIELD HAYSEED

On the Internet at: [summerfieldhayseed.com](http://summerfieldhayseed.com)