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# Local & State

Smithfield, Isle of Wight, Surry, Suffolk section B

## Sheriff nears end of term without hoped-for peace

By STEVEN WINGFIELD Staff Writer

ISLE OF WIGHT — Sheriff B. F. Dixon had been looking forward to an easy autumn. He announced his retirement long ago and will be out of office by January.

Then came the month of September. Isle of Wight is hardly the crime capital of Tidewater. Before March there hadn't been a slaying in the county in more than two years. The grand jury meets every three months to consider indictments and usually has fewer than 20 indictments to review.

Since the first of September, however, there have been three slayings, an abduction of a 6-year-old girl that brought a nationwide manhunt, and two armed robberies. On top of that, Dixon's wife, Virginia, was involved in a traffic accident Sept. 21 that landed her in the hospital for several days.

Dixon, who will turn 72 in December, said he can't remember another month like September, and he's been sheriff since 1963. "I haven't been another like I've forgotten it," Dixon said. "I have a busy September and articles of clothing in the pickup. Dixon said he immediately suspected foul play was involved in the disappearance of David Knudsen, 20, of Hampton, and Robin Edwards, 14, of Newport News.



Sheriff B. F. Dixon

That suspicion panned out two days later when a henchman found Edwards' body along an isolated section of riverfront, and Knudsen's body was found a short distance away within an hour. Dixon theorizes the pair were surprised while parking in the same private parking lot, forced to dress hurriedly and then marched away to the river. There they were shot and pulled into the river, Dixon believes.

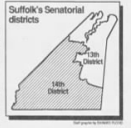
Just when Dixon thought things had settled down in the county after Nancy returned to her family Sept. 21, a missing-person report was filed in Hampton and the missing man's truck was found at Rugged Island at the south end of the James River Bridge. With the keys in the ignition, a radio playing

## Zig-zag line divides, confuses Senate voters

Many don't know their district, registrar says

By JOHN SEZEMORE Staff Writer

SUFFOLK — Before residents can decide whom they want in the state Senate next year, they have to figure out where they live in relation to a winding line that splits this city into two senatorial districts.



Saturday is the deadline to register for the Nov. 3 election. Voters will find only one contest on the ballot in the General Assembly candidates this year: the 14th District seat now held by Sen. William T. Parker, D-Chesapeake.

Parker is challenged by Republican Mark L. Earley of Chesapeake. That race marks the first contested general election here since the General Assembly redrew the lines dividing the state into senatorial districts. In the minds of many Suffolk residents, those lines are not clearer now than they were when established in 1982.

The way Suffolk is split into districts defies simple description. The 13th District lies generally in the northeastern part of the city and the 14th in the southwestern part. But the dividing line is a zig-zagging sort of diagonal that runs along roads, rail lines, the Nansemond River and even the Washington Ditch cut through the flimsy Swamp.

To make matters more confusing, in three cases the line even divides residents who vote in the same polling place. Warren often gets calls from residents asking who their state senator is. For those residents who have voted in Suffolk previously, perhaps the best way to explain it is according to precincts, despite the three split precincts.

The 14th District includes all of Chesapeake and about 40 percent of Suffolk's population. The rest of Suffolk is included in the 13th District, which also includes all of Portsmouth. The 13th District is represented by incumbent Democrat Johnny S. Jeannotte, who is unopposed in the upcoming election.

## Easy loans credited with bankruptcy boom

By RON SHAWGO Staff Writer

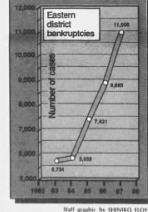
The number of bankruptcies being filed in the Eastern District of Virginia is growing at a record pace, and court officials believe one of the main reasons is easy credit.

A 20 percent district-wide increase has been reported since June, but Norfolk showed a 25 percent increase, the highest of the four cities, said Michael M. Sheppard, court clerk. Authorities can only guess what is causing the steady rise in cases.

"Everyone asks me that," Sheppard said. "It's just an impossible question to answer. But most authorities agree that the ability of consumers to get credit easily is one of the primary reasons. As credit becomes easier to get, it becomes easier to abuse," said John R. Roberts Jr., a bankruptcy court trustee and lawyer.

Another reason might be that bankruptcy has become an easy alternative to paying bills, and some people believe the government is obliged to help them when their finances get out of hand. To them "this is just another form of welfare," Romney said.

About 90 percent of the cases that come before him are Chapter 7, or consumer, bankruptcies in which most debts are forgiven, Romney said. Many of those simply had their credit cards cut the best of them, he added. The increased docket means more work for the trustees. "Instead of looking at 20 cases, we're looking at 300," Roberts said. "It makes my job a little more difficult."



See Bankruptcy, Page B3

## Oyster season to open

James remains last good site

By CINDY ELMORE Staff Writer

The James River opens its 21,000 acres of public oyster grounds to watermen today, the only East Coast waterway left where oysters aren't dying from parasites and disease.



Robert Morgan puts new handles on a set of tongs on his boat at Merchville Marina.

but to scrape and bring the James River bottom together this year. "We're expecting 350 to 400 boats by Monday. There's 60 coming in that we know of from Tangier (Island) and a lot of people from up in the Colonial Beach area," said Billy Moore, president of the Virginia Watermen's Association. "We're in hopes that all the families can be fed."

He estimates 275 oyster boats were working the James River at the peak of the season last fall, helping to harvest 341,000 bushels of oysters by the end of the season May 20. For 10 seasons before that, the average annual take from the James had been one-fourth that amount — just 87,000 bushels.

Virginia is losing its once-rich oyster grounds to two formidable diseases that so far have no cure. Experts stamped MSX, a parasite, and Dermo, a marine fungus, wiped out the oyster industry in Delaware and are believed to have infected 90 percent of the oyster grounds in Maryland.

In Virginia, "we have a large death rate all over the bay," said Moore. "There aren't any oysters there in harvest. They're all dead. Fortunately, they're all still living."

## Rocks in the water force wells to close

By SUSAN NORMAN Staff Writer

SUFFOLK — Two old wells serving residents of Chucklatch have been shut down, and the city's Public Utilities Department is deciding now whether or not to ever use them again.

Screens around the inner wall of the wells normally separate the drinking water from surrounding granite rock and dirt. But the well casings have "badly collapsed," said David J. Murphy, assistant director of the department, on Wednesday. "It's the most major problem we have had to date," Murphy said, adding it's an indication of the general condition of the small system, which serves only the village of Chucklatch.

But the wells are at least 20 years old, Murphy said, and a cost estimate of the repairs will determine whether or not they reopen. "We've had a contractor come in. He is assessing the problem and will get back with our estimate," Murphy said. "At that point, a decision will be made whether or not we will make the necessary repairs."

The problem with the wells was discovered Tuesday on a routine inspection. Rocks and granite were in the water supply, and the city immediately shut down the wells and switched residents to city water. Some Chucklatch residents, however, said Wednesday they've had this week has been since the city made the switch.

See Water, Page B4

## Station wants Fawn's voice

By BILLY WARREN Staff Writer

SUFFOLK — A TV news reporter from Fawn Hill coming to Hampton Beach as a TV news reporter has been moving faster than a court case since Nov. 10 radio is making TV out of the spotlight.

Last week Hal Lewenson, news director at WAVY-TV (Channel 10), said he had been approached by a William Morris Agency representative for Hal Oliver North's former secretary and dancing waitress at the Fran-Contra Inn. Hal reportedly wanted WAVY to train her as a reporter. Lewenson said he was interested but needed to talk to Hall.

See Fawn, Page B4