

Trees illegally cut down on Sullivan's Island

By HELEN RAVENEL

MOULTRIE NEWS

Chief Building Inspector and Codes enforcement Officer for Sullivan's Island, Thomas R. Robinson and other investigators have not determined who illegally cut down trees in the 'accreted land' district.

On lots adjacent to the 'accreted land' three residents had hired Arborscape Tree Preservation to trim and prune their yards.

David Christmas, owner of Arborscape Tree Preservation has been cited by the Town of Sullivan's Island for using a Bob-cat (heavy machinery) in the accreted land to remove Myrtle debris. He will appear in court Aug. 12. Arborscape has not been charged with illegally cutting the trees.

Residents are miffed by the allegations and the mysterious tree-cutting. At last Tuesday's council meeting, two Sullivan's Island residents stood up for public comment to make state-

ments in reference to recent news about illegal tree-cutting on the island in the RC-1 District.

Citizen, Norman Khoury, stood up concerned about the tree issues saying that there is a deficit in the tree ordinances.

"Who would benefit from cutting?" he asked. "The permit holders said that they don't know who did the cutting. I take their word," Khoury said.

Khoury suggested that perhaps residents could place an ad for information on the tree cutting and a volunteer citizen could observe what is going on.

He suggested that the bond for cutting could go up to \$10,000, opposed to the current \$5,000 bond posted by each of the three local homeowners for work performed by David Christmas, owner of Arborscape Tree Preservation.

Another resident, Nicky Bluestein, whose name has been associated with the

recent illegal tree-cutting activity, stood up and said that he was appalled that his name is being associated with breaking the law and that he resents these allegations where there is no proof.

"I would like for council to give me a polygraph to prove my innocence," the planning commission member said.

Mayor Carl Smith replied, "that won't be necessary."

Design Review Board Chairman Pat Ilderton and Town Councilman Jerry Kaynard have also been linked to this investigation.

Several willow and cedar trees were unlawfully removed from the residents' lots adjacent to their residences, according to a letter dated May 30, 2008 from town prosecutor John Dodds to Sullivan's Island Town Administrator, Andy Benke.

The tree-cutting is a violation of the town's trim-

ming and pruning municipal ordinance which states that Southern Wax myrtles, Eastern Baccharis' and Popcorn trees may be trimmed from Nov. 1 through Feb. 28.

Homeowners must apply for a \$250 permit and post a \$5,000 bond prior to commencing the trimming of any trees.

They must be trimmed no less than 5 feet in height, says the ordinance.

According to a letter written by Sullivan's Island Building Official Randy Robinson to Benke, Robinson said that he and the island's tree consultant, Jeff Jackson found that the cuts on the cedars and willows were not the same as seen on the legally cut shrubs.

In addition there was a blade found embedded in one of the Willows "which indicates that a professional did not cut the Willows and the Cedars," Robinson wrote.

Christmas said that he and his workers did not cut or were not approached about anything other than the Wax myrtles which were cut to the approved 5 foot height, according to the letter.

According to Robinson's letter to Benke, Christmas did acknowledge his company's use of heavy equipment in the accreted land to remove the Myrtle debris and would take full responsibility for their actions.

According to the Charleston County Sheriff's Office report, Bluestein, Ilderton and Kaynard denied involvement or knowledge of removal of willow and cedar trees.

Therefore, the sheriff's office was unable to make a clear determination as to who cut down the trees.

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