



### BUZZ'S LIFE AFTER UNCW

Catching up with the former UNCW basketball coach. SPORTS 1C



### NARRATOR GIVES VOICE TO BOOKS

SUNDAY 1D

# StarNews



T-STORM? 87/79° FORECAST 10B

STARNEWSONLINE.COM • SUNDAY, JULY 13, 2014 • \$1.50

EX-BRUNSWICK SHERIFF WAS BEING HELD ON GUN CHARGE | NO DETAILS RELEASED

# Hewett dies in NHC jail

SBI in charge of investigation

By Adam Wagner  
Adam.Wagner@StarNewsOnline.com

Ronald Hewett, the former sheriff of Brunswick County, died Saturday while in custody at the New Hanover County jail, according to a U.S. Marshals Service spokesman.

Few details were immediately available about Hewett's death, which the Marshals Service spokesman said is being investigated by the N.C. State Bureau of Investigation.

A New Hanover County Sheriff's Office release said Hewett died while in the facility shortly after 2 p.m. Saturday. New Hanover County Sheriff Ed McMahon and the New Hanover County District Attorney's Office requested the SBI investigation because that is standard operating procedure on deaths in the jail, the sheriff's office spokesman added.

Hewett was being held at the jail on a federal detainer. He was arrested Wednesday and charged with violating federal laws regarding the possession of a firearm that had crossed state lines by a felon after agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and deputies from the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office found multiple firearms in his Holden Beach Road home. "Hewett's girlfriend... was at the residence when the warrant was executed," wrote ATF Special



Former Brunswick County Sheriff Ronald Hewett during a manhunt in 2005. Hewett died Saturday while in custody at the New Hanover County jail, a U.S. Marshals Service spokesman said. He was being held on a federal firearms charge. Below, in court in 2008 on corruption and embezzlement charges. StarNews file photos



Ronald Hewett was being held in the New Hanover County jail on federal charges.



## TIMELINE: HEWETT'S RISE AND FALL

Born in Wilmington in 1963, Ronald Hewett was sworn in at age 20 as North Carolina's youngest certified police officer. He started at the Holden Beach Police Department and then moved to the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office two weeks later. After ranking up several times including U.S. DARE Officer of the Year in 1993 and promotions to patrol sergeant and lieutenant, Hewett decided to take a chance at becoming sheriff in 1994, when former Sheriff John Carl Davis

retired. Running as a Democrat, Hewett defeated Republican James Brown by 5,131 votes. His sworn challengers in 1998 and 2002 to keep the post, and ran unopposed in 2006. The sheriff became known around Brunswick County and beyond as "Hollywood Hewett" because he was seen so often in television newscasts and newspaper photos after a major crime or event. From 1999

See TIMELINE | 8A

Online | For past coverage of Ronald Hewett, including audio recordings and documents, go to [StarNewsOnline.com/hewett](http://StarNewsOnline.com/hewett)

## HEWETT

Continued from 1A

Agent Chad Nesbit in court documents. "(She) told (an agent) that she moved in with Hewett in March 2014 and that none of the firearms in the residence were hers."

Hewett was awaiting a July 18 probable cause hearing on the charges, at which time his custody status was to be reviewed.

If convicted of the charges, Hewett faced up to 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and three years of probation.

Hewett was the youngest sheriff in North Carolina when he was elected in 1994, at the age of 31.

During Hewett's time in office, he was known around Brunswick County as "Hollywood Hewett" because of his propensity for landing on newscasts and on newspapers' front pages.

In 2006, though, a grand jury began investigating Hewett's office amid allegations that the sheriff had ordered a detective to not arrest a distant relative of his because it would be politically damaging to him.

When 25 then- and former office employees received subpoenas to appear in front of a grand jury in June 2007, Hewett cornered several of them and asked them to be vague in their testimony.

After several people testified, Hewett asked them about what they said.

In at least one instance, the employee felt like he was punished for not disclosing his testimony. Capt. Keith Smith said Hewett took away his office keys and assigned him to an older vehicle.

In spring 2008, staff members said Hewett required them to do construction and landscape work at his home and aid with his political campaigns while they were on county time.

Hewett was suspended from office on May 27, 2008 after an employee-initiated petition alleged embezzlement, sexual harassment and extortion. He was indicted on state charges of embezzlement and obstructing justice on May 31 and resigned on April 15.

Hewett pleaded guilty to one count of obstructing justice and was sentenced to 16 months in federal prison. He began his sentence at Butner Federal Correctional Complex near Raleigh in November 2008. He was released in January 2010.

Brunswick County Sheriff John Ingram, who succeeded Hewett in office, said his thoughts and prayers were with Hewett's family and friends.

Adam Wagner: 343-2096  
On Twitter: @AdamWagner1990

## TIMELINE

Continued from 1A

to 2001, filmmaker Daniel Kraus followed Hewett around for the documentary "Sheriff," which premiered on PBS in 2006.

In June 2007, a federal grand jury in Raleigh issued subpoenas signaling an investigation of the sheriff and his department. Hewett kept doing his job, but slowly stopped responding to press interview requests and phone calls.

In spring 2008, Hewett's former and current staff members signed affidavits accusing him of requiring them to campaign on county time and perform other duties, including construction and landscape work at his home. Hewett was suspended from office March 27, then indicted on state charges of embezzlement and obstructing justice. He resigned April 15.

Hewett was charged in May 2008 by the U.S. Attorney's Office with felony obstruction of justice, accused of trying to "influence, obstruct and impede" the almost yearlong federal grand jury investigation into his office.

Hewett pleaded guilty to the charge in federal court June 2.

In October 2008, Hewett was sentenced to 16 months in prison by a federal judge.

Hewett also pleaded guilty that month in Brunswick County Superior Court to three felony counts of embezzlement by a public official. He was sentenced to four months in prison, running concurrently with his federal sentence, and three years of supervised probation. At the same time, Hewett pleaded no contest to a state charge of obstructing justice and was fined \$100.

Hewett started serving his sentence at Butner Federal Correctional Complex near Raleigh on Nov. 18, 2008. On

Oct. 15, 2009, Hewett's custody was transferred to a halfway house. While at the halfway house, Hewett worked part time for Coastal Companies, a development company in Brunswick County run by Mark Saunders.

He was officially freed on Jan. 12, 2010, more than two months before his original sentence, because of 62 days of "good time" credit and two days of time served credit.

In December 2010, Hewett was named salesperson of the month at the Jones Ford dealership in Shalotte. At the time, the dealership's owner said Hewett had been employed there about six months.

A customer accused Hewett of communicating threats in September 2011, claiming the ex-sheriff had threatened him and showed him a closed fist after the customer ran late during a test drive. Hewett denied that he'd threatened the customer, and he was never formally charged.

Hewett was arrested Wednesday after agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and deputies of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office found several guns at his Holden Beach Road home in Supply. He was charged with being a felon in possession of at least one firearm that had crossed state or international lines. Hewett was facing up to 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and three years of probation.

On Thursday, Hewett made a first appearance in front of Judge Robert Jones Jr., who said the former sheriff would have a probable cause hearing July 18. Hewett's custody status was expected to be reviewed at the July 18 hearing.

Hewett died Saturday in the New Hanover County jail.

— From StarNews staff reports

See HEWETT | 8A