

## Sinclair takes office as supervisor

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by CHARLES L. WARNER

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Bringing Union County together to address its problems and chart its future will be the first priority of its new supervisor.

Tommy Sinclair was sworn in Monday morning as supervisor by Clerk of Court Freddie Gault in a ceremony at the Union County Courthouse. Gov. Mark Sanford appointed Sinclair to serve out the unexpired term of Donnie Betenbaugh who was suspended from office after being indicted

on 40 counts of federal corruption and drug charges.

Sinclair, who will serve as a supervisor for a salary of \$1 a year, told the crowd of public officials, courthouse staffers and the general public his focus will be working with Union Council and its governing bodies and public officials to determine the county's needs and address them.

“Our focus today is to start the process of assessing where we are, the problems we have and the resources we have to go against the problems,” Sinclair said. “I’m going to put them in priority with county council and start addressing them. That’s the first thing.”

“The second thing, which is not necessarily less important but is simultaneous, is to get a sense of what the council sees as most urgent,” he continued. “The sense I have talking to three council members this morning and one on Friday is they want to pursue the procedure to have a referendum to have a change of government. Those I’ve talked to that seems most on their mind.”

Sinclair’s appointment was announced Friday afternoon, less than an hour after council, in special session, voted unanimously to consult with the county attorney on setting up a referendum to change the county’s system of government from supervisor-council to council-administrator.

The change was recommended by District 4 Councilman Joey English who said he felt now was a good time to change the system and put county administration on a more professional footing. English said there are only a few counties in South Carolina that still have the supervisor system, pointing out that, regardless of their qualifications, anyone could be elected supervisor.

He said under a council-administrator system the county would be able to hire a trained, experienced professional administrator to handle the day-to-day operations of county government. While he feels Sinclair will do a good job as supervisor, English said he still feels changing the county's system of government is the right thing to do and will be supported by the public.

County council will meet in special session at 3 p.m. Thursday to discuss the matter further.

In addition to working with council, Sinclair said he will also work with the county's other governing bodies and public agencies to chart the county's future. He said over the next two or three days he will meet with all county department heads and with Brown Fant, the outside auditor of the county's funds.

He has set up or is in the process of setting up meetings with the Rural Fire Association; Jonesville Town Council; the Union County School Board; the directors of the Union County Chamber of Commerce and the Union County Development Board; and with the municipal councils of Union, Lockart and Carlisle.

"What I'm trying to do is get us all headed down the road together," Sinclair said.

Sinclair was one of 44 persons to apply for appointment as either clerk of court or supervisor and one of eight recommended to Sanford for the positions by the Union County Legislative Delegation. The delegation also recommended Gault for appointment as clerk of court.

Delegation Chairman State Rep. Mike Anthony attended this morning's ceremony and praised the governor for cooperating with the delegation. He said the delegation looks forward to working with Sinclair and Gault.

"We're happy that the governor was willing to work with the delegation," Anthony said. "We're grateful we had as many as 44 people apply for these jobs. We as a delegation are excited about the appointments. We look forward to working together in the months to come."

District 5 Union County Councilman Randall "Chump" Hanvey said the council is ready to work with Sinclair.

"I'd like to say, not only for myself but for the council as a whole, we're here to work with and assist Mr. Sinclair in any way we can," Hanvey said.

Sinclair, 62, worked for 27 years as an educator and administrator in a variety of positions at the middle and high school levels for the Union County School District, including chemistry and physics teacher, assistant principal, principal and adult school director and assistant superintendent. He served in the U.S. Army for three years and then 35 years in the South Carolina National Guard, retiring with the rank of brigadier general. For a 10-year period in

the 1970s and 1980s, he was co-owner of a construction business.

In 2000, he ran as an Independent for the S.C. House District 42 seat, the county's lone seat in the S.C. House of Representatives. Sinclair said this morning that he will serve as an Independent rather than as a Democrat or Republican.

The supervisor's office is chosen by partisan election and Sinclair's appointment makes him the first Independent to hold that office and only the second non-Democrat to hold county office since Reconstruction.

Gault, who was appointed clerk of court a week earlier, is a Republican.

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