

Topsail Tides (Spring 2014) Volume 1 Issue 1



Message from the Mayor : The Newsletter Returns

A few years ago Topsail Beach published a periodic newsletter for residents and property owners, popular because it gave a broad overview of our Town's projects, problems, and events, until it fell victim to mounting printing and postage costs.

But that was before the internet and this website. In addition to the site's wealth of detailed information, that old "big picture" summary is back too, starting now. We hope it's helpful, adding a perspective beyond the more-frequent emails and phone calls. It's written and edited by a team of citizen volunteers.

Beyond just the news, each issue will feature personal stories about one or two of Topsail Beach's employees, elected officials, and volunteers. Sometimes too, a bit of historical local trivia. This newsletter will highlight the major issues and accomplishments of the year past, and will outline the Board of Commissioners' priorities for the current year.

Enjoy!

Get to Know our Town Board Members: An Interview with Mayor Howard Braxton

Mayor Howard M. Braxton has been an outstanding citizen of Topsail for many years. Howard has served as Mayor since 2007, after serving as Commissioner (2002-2005), and as interim Mayor for a short period during those years. The most important role of the Mayor in a town like Topsail Beach is to represent the town with dignity and decorum, which Mayor Braxton certainly does. He holds his own with State and Federal dignitaries and is well known and respected at local and regional functions. He is approachable and always ready to answer the concerns of his constituents, even if there is disagreement. He presides over monthly Town Board meetings in a professional but friendly manner, using the gavel apologetically when needed. Howard encourages and enjoys citizen awareness and involvement. Please view the website below for Howard's education including an ED.D from UNCG, his past work experiences, honors and service to Topsail including a 34 year teaching career, the awesome honor of being named National Distinguished Principal in 1986 and many contributions to organizations on Topsail Island:
[http://www.topsailbeach.org/Government/ElectedOfficials/HowardBraxton/
tabid/165/Default.aspx](http://www.topsailbeach.org/Government/ElectedOfficials/HowardBraxton/tabid/165/Default.aspx)



Mayor Howard Braxton Jr.

Inside this issue:

- *An interview with Mayor Howard Braxton*
- *Topsail Trivia*
- *An interview with Kurt Polzer—Public Works Supervisor*
- *2013 - Celebrating the Past; Building for the Future*
- *Town Board's 2014 Priorities*
- *Current Town Center Information*
- *Missiles and More Museum Reopened*
- *Return of Plunder Days*

(Cont'd on next page)

Interview with Howard Braxton (continued)

Howard's involvement with Topsail goes way beyond the Town Boardroom, though; and in fact, his love of Topsail is a family affair. Although his accent is distinctly Virginian, Howard actually grew up in Scotland Neck, NC, a small town north of Rocky Mount. He met his wife of over 50 years, Pat Mallard Braxton, while they were both students at Guilford College. Pat had been coming to Topsail with her family since 1949 and brought Howard here during their courtship, in 1962. They knew even before they were married that they wanted to eventually retire to Topsail and purchased their first Topsail home in 1987. Between that first time here as sweethearts until their retirement, many summers were spent at Topsail with their son Bob who is now father to two children of his own, McCoy and Claire. Bob grew up here with his extended family during those summers. Howard's brother Frank is also a Topsail resident, along with wife Claire, and serves on the Planning Board, dedicating many hours of service to the Town of Topsail Beach himself. Pat's sister, Merle, and husband Monroe Morris also enjoyed having their children here during the summers and now live here full time.

Currently Howard and Pat are active in Emma Anderson Memorial Chapel, where they both sing in the choir and play handbells. Howard puts both heart and time into everything he does, from basketball, football and track in college, where he was named to the Guilford College Athletic Hall of Fame, to serving on the Boards of several organizations. He succeeds in being an active member, not just a name on a list.

Asked about the most memorable thing during his service on the Town Board, good or bad, Howard said the hardest time was during his first term as Mayor, when the taxpayers and the council were split on the issue of beach nourishment: should it happen and, if so, how should it be paid for. Thanks, in part, to Howard's leadership and patience, the issue was finally reconciled with a very successful beach nourishment program that will be ongoing for many years to come. He is most gratified by the successful inlet dredging permits that are now in place so that we can control our beach and its re-nourishment in the future. He is also pleased with the recent finalization of the Town Center plan, which he feels is vital to the town's future.

Howard says he is undecided whether he will run for office again in 2015. He is pondering "taking a few years off" to travel in North America by Recreational Vehicle with Pat since traveling by RV is something they have enjoyed together in the past. Having served 12 years on the Board, Howard may welcome some time to golf, travel, and do other normal retiree activities!

Citizens, both residents of Topsail Beach and non-resident property owners, should be proud to have Mayor Braxton representing them. If you don't already know Howard personally, make it a point to meet him, shake his hand, and thank him for his contributions to our town. You can find him at any public event.

*"I can assure you, public service is a
stimulating, proud enterprise. It is
not just
A way of life, it is a way to live fully."
Lee. H. Hamilton*

Timeless Topsail Trivia

Following is a transcript of a newspaper article from the early 1960s (Louis Orr was the owner of the Jolly Roger Pier, as well as Topsail's first Mayor):

ALLIGATOR IS ROPED NEAR N.C. BEACH

TOPSAIL BEACH (UPI) - Nobody believed Louis Orr last year when he told them a sea lion came out of the ocean near his fishing pier here.

This week, Orr spotted an even stranger sight in the surf - an alligator - and was determined not to be scoffed at again. He lassoed the reptile.

Orr said he and several companions spent about three hours chasing the 'gator before he was able to get a rope on him.

He said the sea lion was more elusive last year and he only got pictures. "But the negatives got lost and nobody believed me. This time I got the proof...."

Orr said the capture marked the first time he had ever heard of an alligator being in the ocean.



Another Sea Lion? A rare Harbor seal was spotted on a Topsail Sound dock, winter 2011

Getting to Know Our Town Employees: Kurt Polzer: Public Works Supervisor

It is hard to drive down the street at Topsail without seeing the friendly face of Kurt Polzer as he works on something for our town. As Public Works Supervisor, Kurt's favorite part of his job is being outside.

Kurt was raised in Livingston, New Jersey and, along with his four brothers and one sister, spent his teenage years enjoying the Jersey shore. After graduating from high school, Kurt studied welding in Technical School. He worked for the public works department in his home town for 10 years, as well as in construction for 15 years before moving to Topsail Beach.

(Cont'd on next page)



If you see one, it is there by accident and you can rest assured that it is trying its best to get out of the salt water as soon as possible!

More recently, in July 2009, another small alligator was spotted surfing the waves off Topsail Island.

After several sightings, that 'gator came ashore and was captured by Topsail's Police and Fire Departments and relocated inland.

It is important to stave off any panic by our visitors by saying that alligators are not prone to be in salt water and cannot survive for long periods of time in salt water.

If you see one, it is there by accident and you can rest assured that it is trying its best to get out of the salt water as soon as possible!

Getting to Know Our Town Employees: Kurt Polzer: Public Works Supervisor (continued)

He first came to Topsail in his late teens in the mid 1970s, visiting his oldest brother who had purchased the northernmost oceanfront house at Topsail Beach as a vacation home. His brother eventually sold that house to their parents, who retired here in the late '70s. Kurt's mother, Betty, had been a school teacher and was especially interested in history. Even though she lived here less than 20 years, she had a huge impact on the island. It was largely due to her efforts that the Assembly Building was preserved. She was a Charter Member of the Historical Society of Topsail Island, and was a prominent contributor to [Echo's of Topsail](#) by David Stallman, the definitive book of Topsail's early history. Kurt's father Louis had a passion for public service and was instrumental in starting the Topsail chapter of the Kiwanis Club, which has become so important to our entire area.



Kurt Polzer

Both parents have passed away now, and that northernmost beach house was sold. Kurt describes the memory of his brother riding out Hurricane Fran in it in 1996: since local shelters wouldn't allow dogs, his brother chose to stay at the house. As the waves broke against the street side walls of the house, "he said he saw God that night!" Kurt says.

Having fallen in love with Topsail when he first visited his brother here, Kurt finally moved to Topsail for good in 1997. He immediately applied for a position with the town and worked in construction while waiting for that position to open. He joined the Topsail Beach Fire Department in 1999 and eventually became a Certified Level 2 Firefighter and a Captain in the TBFD. In 2000 he started working in the Public Works Department for Topsail Beach, and was promoted to Public Works Supervisor in 2010.

Kurt supervises three people in the department and says he is happy to be working with experienced people who are willing to learn new technology such as the recent water system upgrades. The primary duties of the department include overseeing our water system, street and sign maintenance, and beach access maintenance. He enjoys the constant new challenges of the job, and the fact that he does something different every day and most of that is outdoors. "I am not a desk man," Kurt said several times during our interview.

Kurt's past experience in construction, including pile driving, made him an expert on a bulldozer, which is evident when you see him pushing our dunes or scraping snow off our streets! Even on the coldest day he would rather be outside. When he is not outside working for the town you'll see him in front of the Fire Department working on the trucks or at Bush Marina tending the flowers.

Kurt and his wife Joyce have one daughter, Cheryl, who is an Inventory Assistant at Topsail Island Trading Company. Asked what he does in his spare time, Kurt says he spends most of it at the Fire Department, which he says is a 24 hour on call job. As a teenager living near the Jersey shore, Kurt did all the things beach lovers do - boat, swim, fish. But now that he lives and works here at Topsail, he finds that his job and his work with the fire department consume most of his time even when he is not on the clock. He is well liked by the town's citizens, and is happy to help out when called on during his off hours to help them with something. Kurt appreciates his wife's support of his dedication to his job, even though it takes a lot of his spare time.

Not surprisingly, Kurt's least favorite part of his job is speaking in public. Once or twice a year he is asked to stand up in front of the citizens and Commissioners to give a progress report or to say what he needs budgeted for the upcoming year.

When he retires, Kurt intends to stay at Topsail Beach. "I care about this community," he says, "and I think that shows. I'm proud of what I do here." He would love to stay active with the Fire Department as long as possible. And he may try to become more active with the Historical Society to keep his mother's memory alive.

Take the time to stop and chat with Kurt one on one and you will find a very soft spoken man who truly cares about Topsail Beach and is very proud of his role with the town. Although shy, Kurt is a warm and friendly person who will be happy to help you at any time.

2013 –Celebrating the Past; Building for the Future

50th Anniversary

Last summer was a major milestone in Topsail Beach's history. We celebrated both the 50th anniversary of the Town's 1963 incorporation and the 40th year of our Fire Department. Coordinated by a hard-working citizen committee led by Steve Smith and Pat Braxton, the 50th year events kicked off with a capacity-crowd Brunswick stew dinner in the Assembly Building on the true anniversary date, March 19, then built to a big late summer perfect-weather celebration on Labor Day weekend. With live music, street dancing, and a delicious BBQ & fried chicken 'n fixin's dinner for just over 3000 people, it was capped with an intensely colorful booming 30-minute fireworks display over the Sound. What a day and evening! We hope you were here to enjoy and be a part of it. Thanks to everyone who gave their time to make these celebrations possible!

New Water System

After several years of planning and engineering, Topsail Beach completed a major project to modernize much of our town's aging water system. The 30-year old water tower behind Town Hall, which pressurized the entire system, was replaced with a new one across the street, triple the capacity and 20 feet higher. Combined with water main improvements, the town now enjoys routinely good water pressure everywhere and can get necessary volume from our fire hydrants.

The old elevated tank stayed in place until the new system was fully operational. For a short while in late summer Topsail Beach had the peculiar look, especially from the Sound, of a little town needing two tall tanks, almost side-by-side. Then in October the old one was demolished, in pieces – all in less than 24 hours.



'Tanks' for the memories!

Topsail Beach water comes from a network of four deep wells, all within town limits, drawing from the Pee Dee Aquifer, then is stored in a combination of the new elevated tank and a new concrete ground-level tank behind the fire station. Together these tanks give us the capacity to more comfortably ride out the peak demands of summer and assure adequate reserve in case of fire. All the control systems for the wells and distribution network were replaced with radio controlled electronics. Finally, at the other end of the system, all home and business water meters were replaced with radio-readable meters. Though one of the least costly phases of the overall project, these meters have eliminated about 80% of the time required to

(Cont'd on next page)

read the old meters manually and prepare the water and garbage bills. That process, previously unfeasible more often than quarterly, now is done monthly. These savings will pay for the radio meters & billing part of the new water system in about six years.

Our Water Fund Reserve Account had not been adequately funded over the years to meet the full \$3.5 million expense of the new water system, but we were fortunate to receive a 20-year interest-free loan from the NC Division of Water Resources for this amount. In addition to meeting these \$175,000 annual loan payments, the town's Board of Commissioners is committed to gradually building up the Reserve sufficient to replace the new system at the end of its minimum expected life without risking the possibility of such a favorable loan not being available again. To this end, the Facility Charge on each water bill was increased from \$45 per quarter to \$30 per month for residences. (The charge for actual gallons used has not changed.)

Town Board Elections

2013 was an election year for the Topsail Beach Board of Commissioners. In November Ed Broadhurst and Grier Fleischhauer completed four years of dedicated service, and were replaced by Morton Blanchard and Tom Eggleston; Julian Bone was reelected. (Linda Stipe, Larry Combs, and Mayor Howard Braxton remain; all are midway in their current 4-year terms.)

Board duties are time-consuming and demanding to represent the needs and interests of not only our residents, but also of our many non-resident property owners and tourists Topsail Beach attracts and serves. The work and service of all Board members, past and present, is appreciated.

"Town Center" Park

During the several years before 2012, the Town had been looking for a site to build a town park. Before their election as Commissioners, both Ed Broadhurst and Larry Combs had chaired the Planning Board, directing the task of identifying and evaluating potentially available sites for a "Town Center" within the business district that would serve as a public space and provide for public restrooms.

When the old Florida Apartments 1-acre lot diagonally across from the Beach Shop & Grill became available in late 2011, it was proposed to the Commissioners at \$550,000, though appraised at \$585,000. That triggered one of the most protracted and divisive public issues the town has debated in recent years, revolving mostly around cost but also on need.

To make the potential project cost-feasible, the Commissioners chose to seek a North Carolina Parks & Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) 50/50 cost-share grant that would cover half the park's total cost for land and new facilities.

The grant process is lengthy, the award decision time unsure, and the amount, if any, unpredictable. In case it might have become necessary to purchase the property before submitting the application, the PARTF Authority granted Topsail Beach a special waiver that kept us from having to exclude the land's value from the grant amount applied for.

After many workshops, public hearings, surveys, a petition and a negotiated price reduction, the property was purchased for \$500,000 in late 2012. During this same period, a PARTF Grant application for \$439,910 was submitted to assist with both the land cost and the development of a centrally-located "Town Center" with restrooms, play areas, gathering areas, and parking; a projected \$880,000 value to the Town.

The grant application process was extensive, requiring thorough documentation of purpose, plans, and benefits --- plus, we were in competition with many other NC cities and towns. Thanks to the hard detailed

(Cont'd on next page)

work of the current Planning Board, especially by chairman Frank Braxton, we 'hit the PARTF lottery': in December, we were notified that Topsail Beach had been awarded the full \$439,910 grant! Additionally the town has received a generous private donation of \$20,000 to assist with the children's play area.

Overall, the resulting net cost to the Town to acquire the Town Center's land and develop its various facilities for the pleasure and convenience of our residents and guests will be approximately \$335,000.

Information about the Town Center's design and development schedule is elsewhere in this newsletter and website.



Town Manager Tim Holloman; Town Attorney Steve Coggins; Commissioner Linda Stipe; Commissioner Tom Eggleston; Mayor Howard Braxton; Commissioner Morton Blanchard; Commissioner Larry Combs; Commissioner Julian Bone

Pressing Forward: Town Board's 2014 Priorities

[The following article was contributed by Town Board member Morton Blanchard, Town Board Champion for communication and liaison to the citizen Communications Committee.]

One of the Board of Commissioners' first tasks each year is to hold their annual Retreat. This two-day workshop, held on 22-23 January this year, was to summarize the significant events of the year just past (see the preceding article about 2013), and to use this as a springboard for identifying and prioritizing the major needs and projects for the new current year. The Mayor and Town Manager participate in the discussions; an outside facilitator moderates the process. Citizens and property owners submitted written suggestions for topics of discussion prior to the Retreat.

Of the many issues identified and discussed, the top nine were selected for specific attention this year. For each of these initiatives Board Members assumed responsibility as "Champions". The Champions' role is to shepherd its continuing progress, including involving other individuals (town staff, citizen volunteers, etc.) as needed.

The priority initiatives for 2013, with the Champion and other team members for each, are:

- Ensure thirty year dredging-sand on beach funding- engineering-reserve remains intact
Champions: Julian Bone, Larry Combs
- Stay abreast of insurance changes and be proactive (homeowner's, flood, and employee health)
Champions: Howard Braxton, Julian Bone
- Long range strategic planning (justify increased positions-comprehensive review of space and equipment as well as all department long range needs)
Champions: Tim Holloman, Town Manager and Management Team

(Cont'd on next page)

- Implement Town Center Plan
 Champions: Linda Stipe, Tom Eggleston, Planning Board
- Bush Marina Plan / Turtle Hospital property plan
 Champions: Tom Eggleston, Howard Braxton, Larry Combs
- Maintenance facility for storage and repairs of town owned equipment
 Champions: Julian Bone, Morton Blanchard
- Better communication with resident and non-resident owners; (Newsletters, website, town hall meeting room, email)
 Champion: Morton Blanchard
- Review Personnel Policy
 Champions: Linda Stipe, Tom Eggleston
- Maintain adequate public beach and sound access
 Champions: Howard Braxton, Morton Blanchard

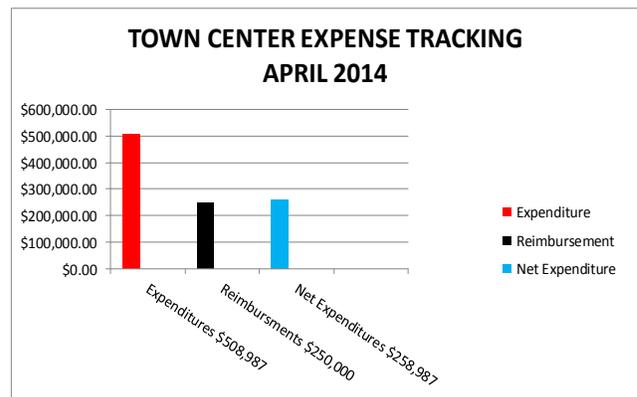
Since the workshop, commissioners have been attending local and regional meetings for updates and information. These meetings cover everything from ethics education to dredging, turtle nesting and piper habits (potential areas of habitat restrictions). It is amazing the number of things that can potentially impact our town and its future. We assure you; at least one or more of us will attend all these seminars to keep our town up to date. We're looking forward to addressing the opportunities for the Town of Topsail Beach for 2014.

Current Town Center Information



Town Center Design

Topsail Beach has officially accepted the Parks & Recreation Trust Fund grant and completed its funding agreements with the State of North Carolina. The Town has received notification of the 50% reimbursement payment (\$250,000) for the land acquisition. Design and construction of the Town Center's Phase I elements (parking lot, restrooms, and children's playground) are in progress with a goal for these to be available this summer.



Missiles and More Museum Reopened for 2014

Topsail Island's Missiles and More Museum opened for the season on Monday, April 7th.

The museum is housed in the historic Assembly Building in Topsail Beach, listed in the "National Registry of Historic Places." It portrays the history and artifacts of the area; from prehistoric times to present day.

Exhibits Feature:

Operation Bumble Bee: The top secret U.S. missile project that operated on Topsail Island shortly after the end of WWII. Included is a booster rocket that washed ashore in 1994.

Camp Davis: An important anti-aircraft training center and POW camp during WWII.

WASPS: The select group of young women and the first females trained to fly and test military aircraft during WWII.

Pirates of the Carolinas: The

stories of 10 notorious pirates who sailed the waters of the Carolinas during the "Golden Age of Piracy." Highlighted is Blackbeard and the island's own "Gold Hole."

Barrier Island: Explains the physiology, fragility and manageability of this magical island we call home.

Osprey: The V-22 Osprey aircraft exhibit depicts the development history, unique design and

its military use within the Marine Corps and other branches of the Armed Forces.

Native American artifacts and International Shells of the World exhibits are also displayed.

This interesting and child friendly museum is located at 720 Channel Blvd. in Topsail Beach. The museum is open 2 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday until Memorial Day weekend.



A missile exhibited in front of the museum

The Return of Plunder Days



The success of last year's craft market has encouraged Dottie and Herb Netherton to manage it again this summer. Come pillage in the village at Plunder Days craft market returning to downtown Topsail Beach during the months of June, July and August on Thursdays between 10am and 3pm. This year's market has drawn several new vendors as well as those who participated in last year's market. Crafts will include pottery, jewelry, fabric arts, sea glass, weathervanes and scissor cutting. If interested in participating please contact Dottie or Herb at (910)541-0274.

