

# Island Gives Non-Residents Voice In Government

BY SUSAN USHER

As the first councilmen for the state's youngest and most unusual municipality took office Friday afternoon on Bald Head Island, their charge was simple.

"Please tend to our business as we throw out our hooks," asked Bald Head Island Association President George Freeman, who had previously distributed copies of a handbook for municipal officials, each bound in pink ribbon.

Moments earlier, at the foot of "Old Baldy," one of the oldest lighthouses on the east coast, N.C. Court of Appeals Judge Jack Cozort administered the oaths of office to councilmen Thad Wester, John Messick, Kent Mitchell, Jim Harrington and John Lindsey. Watching was an audience of about 100 people that included property owners, local municipal officials and state legislators.

Later that afternoon, Wester was elected mayor and Messick mayor pro tem in the council's first meeting. Wester, president of the Bald Head Island Nature Conservancy, also is Robeson County's public health director. Messick is director of marketing for Bald Head Island Ltd. Their council meeting was to continue Saturday morning around Harrington's pool. A former Bald Head Island executive, Harrington also is state secretary of transportation.

Joe McCutcheon, finance officer for Bald Head Island Ltd., will serve as interim clerk and budget officer.

The council plans to meet at 9:30



APPEALS COURT JUDGE Jack Cozort administers the oath of office to the Bald Head village council in a ceremony beneath "Old Baldy."

STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

a.m. the third Friday of each month. Brunswick County's 14th municipality, the Village of Bald Head Island is unlike any other incorporated community in the state because it gives non-resident property owners a voice in decision-making.

In fact, all five councilmen own se-

cond homes on the island rather than primary residences.

Charters for other towns require voters to be registered there before they can vote in local elections. At Bald Head, however, with approximately 10 year-round residents, members of the first council were ap-

pointed by the developers and the board of directors of the property owners' association. The directors, in turn, are elected by the property owners.

The decision to incorporate in this fashion, said Wester, grew from a combination of factors.

"We had a desire to insure we could determine a municipal structure to meet our unique needs," he said. "Many of the people who come here are resort-vacation oriented and want non-structured living. We need-

ed health and protective services, but not really a lot of other things."

The island's property owners also wanted to guard against future annexation by adjoining towns, he added.

Incorporation also resolves another dilemma for the community, where the illegal restaurant sale of alcoholic beverages was abruptly ended last winter.

The village's chartering bill includes an addition to Chapter 18B of the state's Alcoholic Beverage Control laws that presently affects only Bald Head Island. It allows "offshore resorts"—developed islands off the state's coast not connected to the mainland—to apply for and receive certain ABC permits without benefit of a referendum. All that is required is the favorable vote of the village council.

The bill to incorporate the village was first readied for introduction by Rep. David Redwine in 1984, but was withdrawn at the request of the property owners' association. It was introduced in the 1985 session by Sen. R.C. Soles Jr.

In dealing with the proposed annexations of Shallotte Point and Calabash this year, Redwine had pledged not to introduce any bill for incorporation that did not require a referendum of the residents of the proposed area.

Bald Head Island, 3½ miles from Southport, is reached by private passenger ferry. It is one of three islands that make up the Smith Island complex; the others are Middle and Bluff islands. According to an article in the July issue of "Wildlife in North Carolina," the complex is "perhaps the most significant maritime forest in North Carolina."

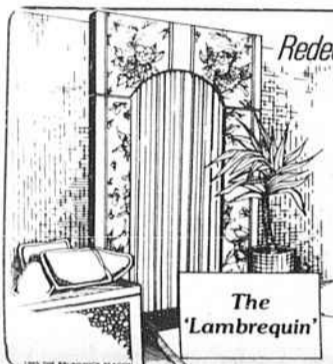
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