

Back On The Beach Again!

Surf Chairs Free Elderly, Disabled To Enjoy Strand

BY SUSAN USHER

"It rides so smoothly!" South Brunswick Islands Pilot Club President Martha Jo Hall reports gleefully after a brief spin along the strand at Holden Beach.

Clumps of tan, moist sand cling to yellow bubble tires and a stiff sea breeze tugs at the bright blue-tilted umbrella. Hall borrows a rod from a surf fisherman and her chair attendant, Jean Miller, a fellow Pilot, nudges the Surf Chair into the water's edge.

"This is great! Now if I could just catch a fish!" She's serious.

So is the Surf Chair.

Hall doesn't need this colorful and sturdy set of wheels, but there are others who love the tang of salt air and the crash of the surf who could make good use of it. That's why the Pilot Club recently donated one Surf Chair to each of the three local beach towns, Ocean Isle Beach, Sunset Beach and Holden Beach.

People like Ruth Coppedge of Twin Lakes, who hasn't been out on the beach strand in five years, though there are few places she would rather have been.

"That's why I moved down here, to be near the beach," says Ruth. "I like being down on the beach. I used to walk it. And I love going into the water."

With her left side paralyzed as the result of a stroke, a wheelchair maneuvered by her husband, Channing, provides Ruth mobility. But there are still places she can't go.

Sunset Beach has two public walkways to the beach that are accessible to the physically handicapped or disabled. They're at Third Street and at the gazebo at the foot of Sunset Boulevard. As a matter of practicality they cross gradually over the dunes and come to rest in dry sand.

"I can go up to the edge of the beach but I can't go down on it. The wheels of my regular wheelchair sink and it's too hard to push."

So she sits in the sun near the gazebo, with a good view of the panoply of human activity on the beach in summer and quieter moments at other times. If Ruth gets too hot, she cajoles Channing into taking a sand pail and splashing her with a little ocean water.

Channing, a member of the Sunset Beach planning and zoning board, spotted the chair perched in a corner at town hall the day it arrived last week. Like Town Administrator Linda Fluegel, he was eager to share the news with Ruth.

"Linda said she couldn't wait to call and tell me it was here," Ruth said. "She called me first. It was good news."

"Custom-made in Daytona Beach, Fla., a fully-equipped Surf Chair costs more than \$1,000 and can accommodate a passenger weighing up to 300 pounds.



PILOT CLUB PRESIDENT MARTHA JO HALL (seated) checks out a colorful Surf Chair at Holden Beach with the help of fellow Pilot Jean Miller. The club has provided one chair for each of the South Brunswick Islands beaches—Holden, Ocean Isle and Sunset—so that more people can enjoy the ocean strand.

Comfy bright blue nylon mesh cushioning rests on a frame of white PVC pipe, with a matching foot rest. A large, blue tiltable umbrella offers some protection from the sun, while big, inflatable yellow tires roll the chair easily across the sand. A fishing rod holder makes the chair even more versatile, and the arms are removable to facilitate transfer from a regular wheelchair. Necessities such as sunscreen and good beach read can be tucked into the handy carryall attaches to the back of the chair. Strapping secures the passenger from any unexpected tilt.

Even the Surf Chair has its limits; it is only as good and as safe as the attendant who pushes it.

The chair is so lightweight it doesn't take much of a sea breeze to send it rolling along the beach; brake levers help hold it in place.

While the Surf Chair handles well along the water's edge, move into water deeper than six inches and the chair floats out of control and can easily topple over.

But it does what no other chair can—make the beach a place the elderly, physically handicapped and disabled can enjoy more fully. "Anyone who can't get to the

beach strand without assistance," said Wendy Milazzo, fundraising chairman for the Pilot club.

Pilot International is a service organization for professional women that gives high priority to the needs of the disabled. Members of the local club began researching the Surf Chair last year as part of their work plan. This February they launched a shopping spree ticket fundraiser in conjunction with Wal-Mart of Shallotte.

Manager Leon Graham encouraged the club to set its goal high—for three chairs, not just one, and club members and store employees like top ticket seller Marie Garvin pitched in and met their goal with the help of individuals and businesses. The store chipped in for accessories for one chair, while Pilot club member Jean Miller's children donated accessories for the Holden Beach chair in memory of their father, Jim, who loved the beach.

When he was alive, Jean recalled, "He would sit from dawn to dusk on the strand at Holden Beach," perfectly content.

Thanks to the Pilot Club, more people with physical

limitations will be able to enjoy that setting.

All three communities are working out reservation or check-out procedures and anticipate the Surf Chairs will be big bits at the beach.

"I think this is just fantastic," said Holden Beach Mayor Gay Atkins as she watched the chair skim along the beach strand during Hall's test roll.

The Pilot Club's donation may be just the incentive the town needs to budget money for a second chair, Atkins added, as well as to keep working on development of a handicapped-accessible beach walkway. A spot had been chosen but was cut away by storm erosion; the search is on for another suitable location that offers both beach access and adequate parking.

At Ocean Isle Beach, the Property Owners Association has been eyeing purchase of a chair, while Sunset Beach was delighted to have an organization like the Pilots do something for the town when most groups come asking for something.

"I think when people find out about it, one probably won't be enough," said Fluegel. "But it's great to have this one. It's going to be a wonderful thing."

Face To Face With Wildlife

BY BILL FAVER

One of the interesting characteristics of wildlife is how birds and animals can sense you are observing them.

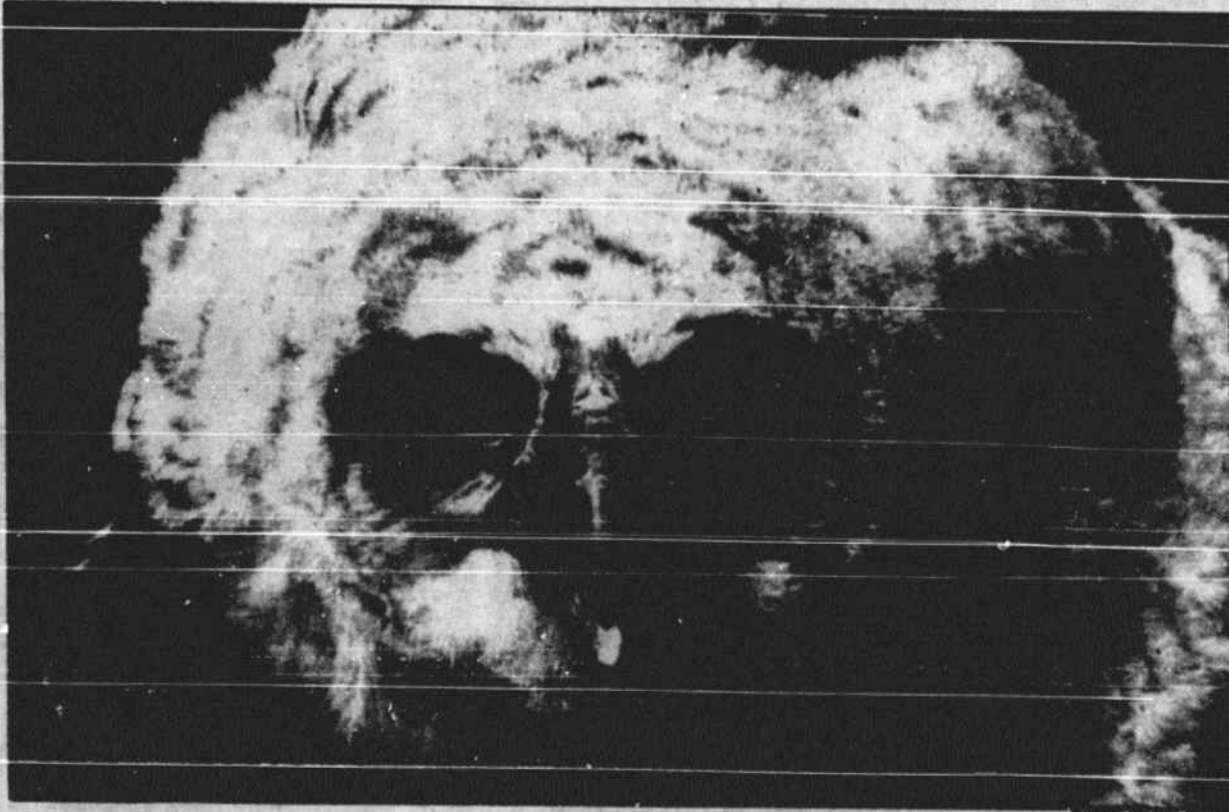
One good example happens frequently on the beach while I am fishing. The small sandpipers and ruddy turnstones come almost to my feet as they feed, seeming to be oblivious to my presence. But let me put away the fishing pole and get the camera, and they become skittish when they know I am watching them.

It seems when we come "face to face," both the bird and I become nervous and uncertain about what to expect.

Loren Eiseley, the late anthropologist and author, often wrote about such encounters. He tells of coming face to face with a deer along a wooded path: "He was the most alive of anything I have ever met in a wood...This is the nearest I have ever stood to the wild."

Another time Dr. Eiseley writes of kneeling at a spring for a drink and finding himself face-to-face with a rattler, coiled and ready to strike. His whole live moved before him and he was intensely aware of the sounds of birds and insects and the bubbling spring. He writes:

The reflex strike was poised as I drew away... Slowly the mountains danced in the heat haze, slowly I knew that I might garner my age, but only by mercy gained



THIS BABY great horned owl offered a good opportunity to become face-to-face with wildlife.

from the universe and granted to me through the slit in a serpent's eye.

Bailey White, the National Public Radio commentator from Georgia, relates a story about approaching what she thought was a buzzard as she drove along a rural road. The buzzard would not move and she slowed to see it was a bald eagle. The eagle glared at her as it

slowly wheeled away into the sky.

She ponders: *I thought about that glare he had given me: What are YOU doing here? it had said. When I got started again, I drove slower and felt smaller. I think it does us all good to get looked at like that now and then by a wild animal. Our beaches and woodlands are*

great places to come face to face with wildlife.

Take time this spring and summer to look a pelican in the eye, or to watch the sandpipers and willets and gulls along the shore. Perhaps you can "stare down" an owl or a hawk, or catch the eye of a cardinal or chickadee.

Just keep your distance from the coiled rattlers!

Past National President To Speak Memorial Day

Billy R. Cameron, past president of the National Veterans of Foreign Wars, will be the keynote speaker at the Holden Beach VFW Post 8866 Memorial Day program.

The public is invited to attend the service Monday, May 30, at 11 a.m. at the VFW Post, located at 573 Sabbath Home Road.

A native of Sanford, Cameron was elected Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States in 1984.

He was the first Vietnam veteran to be selected for the top national office in the two-million member organization, and now serves as a national consultant on issues of concern to the military.

Cameron served with the U.S. Marine Corps in the Southeast Asia war zone from August 1967 to March 1968 in the DaNang area of Vietnam.

While a member of the First Marine Division, he received two meritorious combat promotions and became a squad leader. He earned the Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster for wounds suffered in combat.

A graduate of Oak Hill Academy High School in Mouth of Wilson, Va., Cameron attended Wingate College and N.C. State University following his war-time military service.

Cameron has been a member of Sanford VFW Post 5631 since 1968. He earned the distinction of North Carolina Disabled Veteran of the Year in 1972.

He was honored as an All American Department of North Carolina

Commander in 1975 and was elected to the National Council of Administration in 1977.

In 1976, Gov. James E. Holhouser Jr. appointed Cameron to the N.C. Veterans Commission for a four-year term. Gov. James B. Hunt Jr. re-appointed him to the commission in 1980.

Cameron also served as chairman of the N.C. Veterans Council from 1976-77. In 1986, he was selected as one of the Ten Outstanding Veterans in America, an award given by Bob Hope.

Cameron was appointed as director of the N.C. Division of Emergency Management in March 1993. He had previously served as emergency management director for Lee County and the City of Sanford since 1971.

As the state emergency management director, Cameron's responsibility involves directing North Carolina's response to disasters, all planning and training, education, and preparedness for natural and man-made hazards.

He also coordinates activities of the State Emergency Response Team (SERT), which is made up of members of all state agencies and several volunteer organizations involved with emergency response.

Cameron is a member of several other fraternal and civic organizations including the Masons, American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Optimist Club, Elks and Moose.

He is married to the former Jeanette Gilliam of Sanford. They have a son, Edward, and daughter, Leah.