

Beach – The Place To Be

Editors Note: This is another in the series focused on town employees.

For Pine Knoll Shores' town clerk Janet Thomas, the popular fan response in a Jimmy Buffet song says a lot about what she likes and where she likes to be. "Salt! Salt! Salt!" describes the area in which she likes to live, the kinds of snacks that are her favorites and, yes, what she expects to find on the rim of a margarita.

Although known to her fellow employees at town hall as the "cake queen" – Janet can be counted on to bake up everyone's favorite cake delight for birthdays and other special occasions – the petite blonde is really much more partial to potato chips, tortilla chips (and hot salsa), and salted almonds in her own weaker moments.

But salt also describes her preference for the best places to make her professional contribution – at the beach. Janet previously made a major mark in public service as the

town clerk in another beach community, Surf City, for 19 years. Her contributions in Surf City earned her accolades from numerous public officials who were quick to sing her praises when she decided to apply for the town clerk's job in PKS after returning to North Carolina from a five-year residency in Texas. Area public officials such as Emerald Isle town manager Frank Rush (a former Surf City manager), former Surf City mayor Vance Kee, current Surf City mayor Zander Guy, incoming Onslow County manager Jeff Hudson (a former Holly Ridge manager) and other area officials made sure that PKS town manager Brian Kramer knew he had a shot at getting a gem.

Janet's status as a "go to" person during her career in Surf City is underscored by the fact that she served as interim town manager there on multiple occasions – and for a total of over three years. Her interim

management responsibilities were not an easy ride either. She helped guide Surf City through the tough times of recovery from direct hurricane hits from Bertha and Fran.

When she isn't helping the Board of Commissioners or Town Manager Kramer in service to the residents of PKS, she loves to travel with her husband Pat and to spend time with her two pre-school grandchildren, Joshua and Ariana. For Janet and Pat, local government service is "all in the family." He is the town manager in Swansboro.

Her five-year "break" from municipal service while she and her husband lived in Texas gave Janet a chance to indulge another great love, working with children. Previously the longtime co-leader of the youth fellowship at Blake's Chapel Advent Christian Church in Hampstead, Janet found new rewards in working

with children in education. She had the opportunity to work with special needs children in the Lindale, Texas, public schools and with children who needed help with reading in Terrell, Texas. "The little ones have a very special place in my heart", said the PKS town clerk, who has also had the opportunity to help children outside the United States, on multiple church mission trips to Honduras.

"Working with the other dedicated public servants on our town staff has been a delight," Janet says about her first year working in PKS. "We're like a family, and my co-workers have made it very easy to make new friendships," said the veteran town clerk.

"Janet is the consummate town clerk. Her professional skills are excellent and her social skills have helped her fit right into the town hall community," said Mayor Joan Lamson.

Iron Steamer Pier Retrospective

By Phyllis Makuck

After a conversation about beach access sites in Pine Knoll Shores, I was looking at a 1960's vintage photograph of the Iron Steamer Pier and suddenly became nostalgic for day trips to the beach. Throughout the 70's and 80's, our family and friends who also lived inland at the time routinely made day trips to Bogue Banks. Without a beach cottage or connections to someone with one, we would head directly to the Iron Steamer.

The pier was perfect for day-trippers. We would arrive mid-morning and park our cars for free in front of the pier house. Those in our group who wanted to lounge on the beach would carry chairs, coolers, and swim boards into the pier house and head out the side screen door and down steps leading to the beach. Others, with fishing poles, tackle boxes, buckets, and coolers went directly to the counter and purchased an all-day pier pass, which was then stapled to their caps.

I was among the beachgoers and liked the Iron Steamer because the pier provided

shade so we could enjoy periodic respites from afternoon sun. It had a tackle shop with odds and ends like suntan lotion. It provided a bathroom and sold food, soft



The Iron Steamer pictured as it once was.

drinks, and frozen treats.

It also offered a view of the fishing action. Action, preceded and followed by lulls, was common at the Iron Steamer. During lulls, people-watching was great entertainment since the pier attracted young and old from all over the world – all sizes, shapes, and complexions.

Fishing was tiered on the pier. Experienced anglers, whose gear often included sleeping bags, were on the far end. Using float rigs and live bait, they fished primarily for King Mackerel. The

next tier, for those who liked to be as far out as they could get without going to the end section, were usually bottom fishing with shrimp. However, early in the morning and before sunset, they would often cast and reel in slowly, jerking the lure to catch Spanish mackerel and other fish feeding close to the surface.

Then there were those who stayed near cleaning tables or fished by remnants of the ironclad Civil War vessel for which the pier was named. The sunken ship served as an artificial reef attracting a wide variety of fish – desirable food fish like flounder, spot, pompano, sea mullet, blue fish, drum, sea bass, and sea trout as well as less desirable species like pin, hog, toad, and lizard fish, among others.

Beachgoers periodically checked out the pier, walking its length to see what was happening. On my visits, I would stop, ask people what they were catching, lean over the pier and appreciate the view from above. Sometimes I would be lucky and see a large stingray swim by, barely getting itself between the pilings. A sea

turtle might surface or dolphins put on a show.

Anglers in our group always took time out from pier fishing to enjoy a swim and lounge on the beach. They might even try to change their luck by surf fishing for a while.

Kids divided their time between the beach and pier, often spending their pier time trying to catch crabs with a baited box trap attached to a rope. The trap opened flat on the bottom and closed as they pulled it up, an activity frequently accompanied by shouts of glee as blue crabs appeared.

In those days, the Iron Steamer Pier was among eight Bogue Banks' piers, and I'm not sure why we chose it over the other seven, but doing so gave us a special appreciation for Pine Knoll Shores. In the 1990's, we built a home about a mile from the Iron Steamer Pier, which closed forever in 2004.

The Civil War vessel, the SS Pevensey, is still there beneath about 15 feet of water. The town put up a plaque marking it. There is also a new beach access with parking, a wooden walkway, and bathroom facilities so locals and visitors can still enjoy a day at the beach near the Iron Steamer.