

# Preston resident reminisces about childhood years spent on Alcatraz

Continued from page 1A

cal instructor at the training center in Raleigh, he has been with Nortel (Northern Telecom) for the past 12 years and over the years has provided slide programs as insights into what life was like at the so-called Rock.

"There was no access to stores or shops, except by boat to the mainland," he says. "But we made the move from our home in Petersburg, Va., because it meant a promotion, extra pay and an opportunity for my father to advance his career."

So in 1955 the family packed its furnishings into a moving van and themselves into a new 1955 pink and blue Dodge ("I felt great because Elvis had a pink and blue car at the time," he says) and headed for Alcatraz. The trip took a week.

Bowden recalls reaching the island. "As we crossed the Oakland Bridge, someone pointed to the island and said, 'There it is - there's Alcatraz - our new home!'"

Home turned out to be a building called "Old 64," an apartment which housed about 40 families at one end of the island. It was separated from the prison units by a craggy, high embankment. "It was ugly and old, with 10-foot ceilings, and units with two bedrooms, a living room and kitchen," Bowden recalls. "The rent was \$35 a month.

All of the apartments were the same, except for one called the Cow Palace, a place for a family with six or eight kids which had four or five bedrooms."

A sort of pecking order existed for apartments. After about six months, his family moved into upgraded facilities for an additional \$5 a month in rent.

Bowden and one of his sisters, Delores, and brother, Dan, were among about 65 children on the island. (Another sister, Dorothy, was married and stayed in the East.) "The kids on the island ranged from kindergarten to 12th grade, and because there were too many grade levels to have a school, we had to take a boat to class every day," he says. The school boat was a cabin cruiser called the Warden Johnston and the trip took 13 minutes each way.

"We had a concrete playground on Alcatraz, a two-lane bowling alley, ping-pong tables and a snack bar in the social hall," Bowden adds, noting that his favorite pastime was fishing. "You didn't have a license and there was no limit. The striped bass were great - the best fish in the world!"

There was a small beach for residents, but Bowden notes "girls in bathing suits were allowed only on weekends. The reason was that dur-

ing the week, two inmates worked in the area on garbage detail, and five others on the docks. So the girls weren't allowed there on weekends."

"One of the things that struck home was being an instant celebrity the minute you said where you lived," he says. But his friends at school never wanted to come onto the island, he adds, figuring it was kind of a scary place to be.

There was a downside, however. One negative was that the mailing address was U.S. Penitentiary, Alcatraz, Calif. "You also had to take the boat to go grocery shopping and then carry the packages a long distance from the boat to the apartment," says Bowden.

Bowden says the inmates on Alcatraz were tough types who couldn't be managed at other federal facilities. It wasn't necessarily the crime they committed, but rather the disruptive attitude displayed or the security risk they posed at another institution. "About 48 of 'the best behaved' inmates at Alcatraz earned their way back to another prison every three months, replaced by 48 of the worst to be found in other facilities," he explains. "In effect, you 'earned' your way out and others 'earned' their way into Alcatraz."

Bowden spent his eighth, ninth and tenth grades in what at the time was referred to as "the island of the living dead." Despite that nickname, it was considered a safe place for the families living there, though. Doors weren't even locked at night. One of the daughters in another family later wrote about the advantages of life on the island, saying: "Children were safely tucked away from busy streets in a neighborhood where everyone knew everyone else."

Vivid in Bowden's mind even today is the attempted escape tried by two inmates during the first week he and his family arrived at the Rock. "It wasn't the sharks or other hazards in the bay that were feared, but rather drowning because of the cold temperature of the water, somewhere about 56 degrees," he says.

The two who attempted the escape had fashioned crude plastic water wings made from plastic bags and had even tied wooden slats to their feet to act as flippers. "But in the end it was the cold water that did them in," he says.

"One of the inmates couldn't stand the cold and came back almost immediately and was found hiding in a brush area within 15 minutes. The other couldn't be found despite an intense search of

the bay. But nine days later a guard saw a body floating face down. It was the second inmate. When the body was dragged ashore, it was found that crabs had eaten off most of his back from the neck to waist. It was horrible."

Bowden recalls the guards initially wanted to walk the inmate's body down the center of the cell block (called Broadway) to impress inmates who might be thinking of an escape to think again. He said the plan was dropped as too cruel, even for Alcatraz.

Bowden today is an active member of the Alcatraz Alumni Association and once a year volunteers for the National Park Service and returns for a Former Residents Day in August. He'll be there again this August for the 62nd anniversary of the opening of the U.S. Penitentiary Alcatraz (1934-1963). Former resi-

dents and inmates gather there each year for a series of talks and stories of life on the island. He's scheduled to provide a slide show on how residents lived in those days. He's just finished similar presentations to local Rotary and Kiwanis clubs.

Alcatraz is now part of the National Park Service and is visited annually by an estimated one million people.

When Alcatraz opened for public tours in 1973 there were up to 30 park rangers on duty to assist visitors through the tunnels under the exercise yard, through the prison hospital and cellblocks, and into the gun galleries.

Bowden says the tours are now mostly self-guided. The setting, however, is the same: a notorious prison that once sat beside a Norman Rockwell community of families.

## Board approves site plan for gas, convenience store

Continued from page 1A

built. "There was a whole lot of lobbying to prevent it," he pointed out, adding that "nobody likes competition, but they have to deal with it. We [the commissioners] have to look for what's best for the town and within the law. We want growth and good growth. Seventy percent of the town is undeveloped. We need growth."

But Sauls feels priorities have to be established. "We need more business-type growth...what I call good quality growth," he added.

Mayor Margaret Broadwell said she felt some concerns were legitimate, but said policy needs to be followed. "Trying to change policy, however, after someone has gone through the required policy steps, is not right," she said. "We need workshops to establish our policies. Truck terminals and similar operations abutting residential zones are examples of the need to have policies in force. But policy-

making is so far-reaching we have to be careful how we develop it. Once rules are made, we have to adhere to them until the policy is changed."

The mayor added: "I'm pleased with the business community we now have. It's quite a variety for a small town."

Questioned about the time delay cited by the owners, Commissioner C.T. Moore, who had noted serious concerns about traffic flow and had met with engineers for the store, said board members have an obligation to do their best for the citizens. "We don't have a lot of land acres to play with," he said.

The store's construction is contingent on eight conditions. A portion of the property not within the town limits must be petitioned to be annexed prior to receiving water and sewer service. There will be no drive-through, and the developer is to provide a turn lane for traffic


traveling east on N.C. 54.

There is to be no indoor seating or outdoor picnic tables for eating food, and the dumpster enclosure must be constructed of the same building materials as the building. Two proposed parking spaces on the northern-most side of the entrance onto Airport Boulevard will be eliminated and two parking spaces will be added parallel to the building at each building corner. Sewer capacity must also be sufficient to serve the site.

Commissioner Mark Silver-Smith

at previous meetings had urged Mashburn be given some sort of information for the delay. He said he generally approves any project that has gone through the town's process of application and meets all of the criteria the town has established.

"I have complete confidence in the planning department, in the inspections department, in the fire chief who has great input, other staff involved, and also the planning board which is appointed by the town board," he said.



**SPACE STATION SELF STORAGE • 319-6446**  
3301 NC Highway 55 (1 Mile North of High House Rd.)

**FEATURING**

- ON SITE MANAGEMENT
- STATE-OF-THE-ART SECURITY
- WITH INDIVIDUAL DOOR ALARMS

**OFFICE HOURS:** 10 am - 6 pm MON.-SAT  
1 pm - 3 pm SUN.

**GATE HOURS:** 7 am - 9 pm DAILY

SERVING THE CARY, MORRISVILLE, APEX AREA

Advertise in the only paper that provides total market coverage to the Morrisville and Preston Communities.

Call  
**The Morrisville and Preston Progress**  
to place your ad today!!  
**362-8356**

**Fax us your news!**  
**552-7564**

**MATCH POINT**

When putting out a campfire, drown the fire, stir it, and drown it again.

**REMEMBER, ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT FOREST FIRES.**

A Public Service of the USDA Forest Service and Your State Forester


Love where you live; Bloom where you're planted!




**CONSERVE**

Wake Soil & Water Conservation District

**The ultimate Realtor has two heads, four eyes, eight limbs, and a split personality.**



**Billie Lemon**  
(h) 469-1555  
(vm) 501-2765




**Melea L. Lemon**  
(h) 319-1033  
(vm) 501-2766

**AN INCREDIBLE REAL ESTATE BARGAIN.**  
When you work with Billie Lemon and Melea Lemon you're already getting the best deal in town: two great Realtors for the price of one.

Don't miss this incredible real estate bargain, call them today to set up an appointment.

**Champion Real Estate**  
MacGregor Village  
107 Edinburgh South #106  
Cary, NC 27511  
(919) 462-0093



Expect the best!

©1991 Coldwell Banker Corporation. An Equal Opportunity Company. All Equal Housing Opportunity Notices, Open Houses, and Advertisements by Coldwell Banker, a Division of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, are Equal Opportunity Notices.

**Story Idea for The Progress? Call 552-5675.**

**1 WEEK ONLY!!!**

**BOAT SHOW AND SALE!!!**

**Volume Buys Mean Volume Prices!!**

**NORTH CAROLINA'S LARGEST STOCK OF SUNBURD BOATS AT THE YEAR'S BEST PRICES!**

- Sweetwater & Aqua Patio Pontoon
- Hurricane Deck Boats
- Monterey, Sunbird & Maxum Ski Boats
- Sprint & Hydrasport Bass Boats
- Neptune Saltwater Boats

**OVER 100 BOATS IN STOCK!**



<b>18 Ft. SPRINT</b> Dual Console Baseboat, Touring Equip., Tri-Motor/150 hp Evinrude Inboard, drive-on trailer, reg. price \$18,495 <b>NOW \$16,895</b>	<b>17 Ft. HYDRASPORT</b> Bass Boat, Touring Equip., 130 hp Evinrude Motor, Tri-Motor, Drive-On Trailer, reg. price \$16,490 (one only) <b>NOW \$14,295</b>	<b>17 Ft. SUNBIRD</b> Fish & Ski, Dual Awned Live Well, Tri-Motor, Cool. Top, Roof & Ski Storage, 60 hp Evinrude, Gal. Tr. reg. price \$12,430 <b>NOW \$10,795</b>	<b>17 Ft. MAXUM</b> Open Bow, AM-FM Cass., Cool. Top, Drive-On Trailer, reg. price \$13,495 <b>NOW \$10,995</b>
<b>23 Ft. NEPTUNE</b> "Waterworld" Saboteur Fishing Boat, Live Well, Salt Baiting, Stimpert Burner, 200 hp Evinrude Outboard, Alum. Trailer, reg. price \$27,795 <b>NOW \$25,495</b>	<b>15 Ft. SEA HUNT</b> Center Console, 48 hp Evinrude, Gal. Trailer, reg. price \$18,495 <b>NOW \$16,895</b>	<b>15 Ft. SPRINT</b> Bass boat, Live Well, Rod Storage, Tri-Motor, 48 Evinrude, Drive-On Trailer, reg. price \$9,790 <b>NOW \$8,495</b>	<b>20 Ft. SWEETWATER</b> Pontoon Boat, Fish & Cruise, Loaded, Cabane Enclosure, 48 hp Evinrude, Drive-On Trailer, reg. price \$13,990 <b>NOW \$11,795</b>

**Chatlee Sporting Goods**

US 1 South, Sanford, N.C. • Sales: 775-7259, Parts & Service: 774-7295  
Hours: Monday-Friday 8:30-6:30 (Thurs. 'til 7), Sat. 8:30-1:00 June 24th - July 3rd • Closed July 4th, 5th & 6th