



UNSPOILED NATURAL BEACHES and genuine Southern hospitality are important components that help make tourism Brunswick County's number one industry. PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

Let's Hear It For Tourists: 'You're No. 1!'

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

At this time of year we don't find it hard to believe the recent disclosure that Brunswick County's number one industry is tourism.

Our beaches, piers and highways are full; restaurants and shops proliferate; the ring of cash registers and the pleasant hum of vacationing customers are music to our ears.

Susanne Sartelle, executive director of the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, said revenue from travel and tourism exceeded \$134 million last year. Undoubtedly we'll top that figure in 1988, as graphs have shown a consistent upward climb for this industry, 10.9 percent in 1987. Others, like agriculture and manufacturing, have remained stable or declined.

"Our area offers a nice vacation alternative if you don't want extreme commercialism," Sartelle explained. Her office broadcasts the lure of "wide smiles, wide beaches and wide

fairways" as supreme attractions of the South Brunswick Islands.

While unspoiled natural beaches and genuine southern hospitality are important components, Sartelle believes our numerous first class golf courses have been instrumental in selling the area to visitors.

"Nationwide, the number of golfers has grown by 24 percent in the last two years," she said, "and the number of new golfers is growing at more than three times the rate of new golf course construction. Golf is a \$20 billion a year industry now, but by the year 2000 that figure will double."

There are now 12 different county golf facilities, with one of these, the Pearl near Ocean Isle Beach, having two courses. At least three others are in the planning or construction stage.

This facet of Brunswick County tourism is getting national and international attention. Sartelle said a Scottish writer for the magazine "Executive Golf" was recently

hosted by an Ocean Isle Beach motel owner, and the result was an eight-page illustrated feature in the slick, upscale publication that goes to 29 foreign countries.

Such publicity points out, not only the beauty and challenge of Brunswick golf courses, but the equally beautiful accommodations available to visitors. Motels, villas and rental property ranging from cottages to luxury waterfront mansions, rival any resort on the coast.

Historical attractions are abundant, too, and the brochures and vacationer's guidebooks emanating from the chamber call attention to such sites as Brunswicktown, Fort Caswell, Orton Plantation, and, in neighboring New Hanover County, the U.S.S. North Carolina Battleship and Fort Fisher Museum.

If all this has helped make Brunswick County number 12 in tourism among North Carolina's 100 counties, there is still the need for

constant promotion. That's where chambers of commerce shine.

The South Brunswick Islands and Southport-Oak Island chambers often work in collaboration, as in preparation of brochures and the expensive magazine advertising, Sartelle said.

However, the South Brunswick Islands office is in the unique position of serving as a welcome center to North Carolina. Positioned just 20 miles from the South Carolina line, it is the only place on this side of that line where travelers on U.S. 17 can (See LET'S HEAR IT, Page 20)

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