

Holden Beach Manager Enjoys Challenges Of New Job

BY DOUG RUTTER

Gary Parker enjoys a good challenge—whether it be on the job or away from the office on a golf course or other field of play.

As the new town manager of Holden Beach, Parker is likely to face many challenges in the weeks and months and years to come.

With the town looking to improve its recycling program, form a water rescue team and develop a septic tank management program in the near future, Parker has his hands full and wouldn't have it any other way.

"The challenge is probably the thing I like about it most," he said in a recent interview. "It stretches you as a person and a professional."

Parker, who took over as town manager two months ago, said the work so far has been stimulating and never boring. "The variety of work you have as a town manager keeps me interested."

Among his favorite duties as manager are budgeting and working with different types of people—from developers and engineers to staff and elected officials.

Parker started working at Holden Beach Aug. 5 and said he hasn't been around long enough to discuss long-term goals. But he said Holden Beach has difficult issues to deal with, just like every other town.

If there's a down side to being a town manager, Parker said it's the stress that comes from many people pulling you in different directions and the lack of job security.

Parker, hired from a field of about 100 applicants following a six-month search process, is Holden Beach's third town manager since January 1989.

The first manager, Gus Ulrich, worked about 20 months before resigning for personal reasons. Blake Proctor served as manager six months before resigning under pressure from the town board.

Parker said insecurity is part of the profession no matter where you go. "Any of us would be lying if we said it doesn't remain in the back of our mind," he said.

But in most cases, Parker said managers can feel some sense of security. "If you treat people fairly and with respect and you do your management job well, you don't have to worry about the security aspect."

Although he was born in Massachusetts, Parker considers Florida his home state. His family moved to Fort Lauderdale when he was in the fifth grade, and he graduated from Florida State University in 1970.

After a few years in the social work field, Parker entered the graduate program at N.C. State University in Raleigh, where he received a master's degree in public administration.

Parker said intensive study of city government and management at N.C. State redirected his interest away from social work and into the local government field.

His first related job was program analyst in the city manager's office in Raleigh. He took his first job as a town manager in Franklinton in 1981. Parker also has worked as assistant manager in Newington, Conn., and most recently as town manager in Erwin.

Parker said he's not a workaholic, but takes his job seriously when he's at the office. "I think it's important to have a balance," he said.

Away from the office, Parker enjoys concerts and plays and looks forward to visiting Thalian Hall in



GARY PARKER, pictured at the end of Holden Beach Fishing Pier, says he enjoys the challenges he faces as town manager.

STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

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—Gary Parker

the farthest thing from work," he said. A stress fracture in his left foot kept him from running at Holden Beach until mid-September.

Parker said Holden Beach's flat terrain makes it a good place to jog. "Between jogging and biking I ought to see a good bit of the town up close," he said.

Parker considers himself a novice golfer, but hasn't had an opportunity to play any of the growing number of local courses.

He says driving is the weakest part of his game. "I've sworn I have so much trouble with my woods I'm

going to try to play an entire 18 holes with irons," he said. "I haven't had a chance to try it yet."

Since moving to the beach, Parker has been living in an apartment above the police department, just a few hundred feet from his office at town hall.

"Commuting has definitely been cut down," he says with a smile. "I can just walk out of here and into my house, and I feel safe."

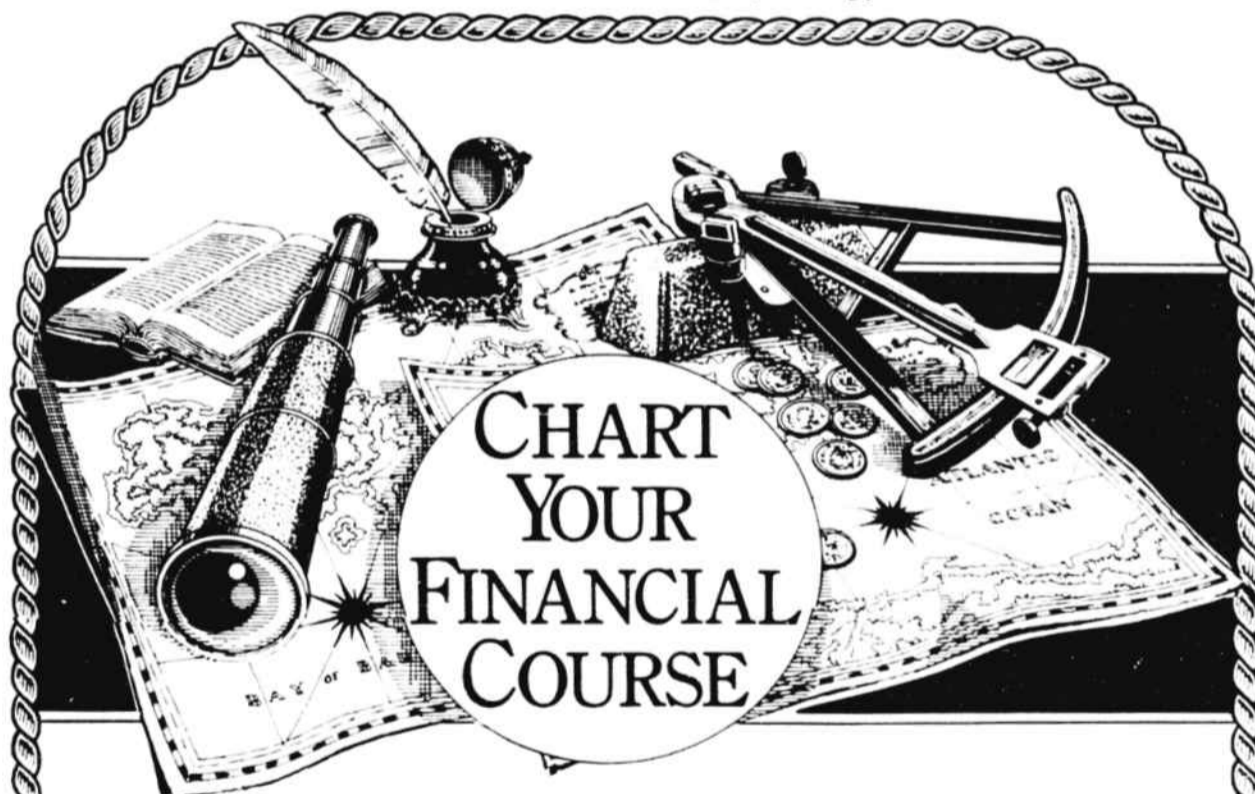
Parker said his wife, Wendy, plans to move to Holden Beach in October when she completes a computer programming job.

Wilmington. Most of the reading he does is work-related.

The athletic 44-year-old also likes participating in all types of sports and outdoor activities.

Although he hasn't had much time for exercise since moving to the beach, the self-proclaimed "sports nut" enjoys tennis, basketball, football, biking, hiking and golf.

"I'm also one of those people who think running is



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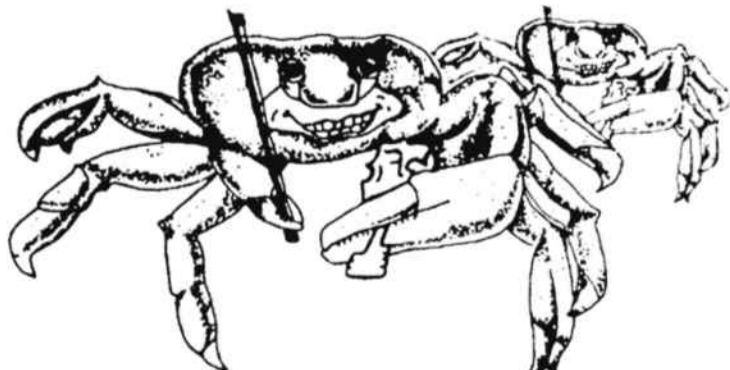
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