

COASTAL OBSERVER

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50 cents

Town wants county to pay for access upkeep

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County needs to take more responsibility for maintaining the parking lot and beach access on the south end of Pawleys Island, town officials say, even if that means charging for parking to cover the cost. With 80 parking spaces, the county-owned lot is the largest free beach access in the county.

"We could say to Georgetown County: It's your parking lot, we're done,"

Mayor Jimmy Braswell told Town Council this week.

The town provides a part-time police officer to manage traffic at the south end on weekends from Memorial Day through Labor Day. It has also repaired walkways and dunes damaged by storms. Braswell said the south end represents at \$20,000 annual cost to the town at a time when it is looking at a projected \$110,000 annual deficit in its operating budget.

Pawleys Island has never had a municipal property tax. A committee of

town officials and residents is looking at the town's finances for ways to balance the operating budget and provide funds for ongoing beach renourishment. The town plans to start pumping offshore sand onto over 2.5 miles of beach this fall. About half that work, on the south end, will receive funding through the Army Corps of Engineers. Those federal funds are available to the town because of the public beach access at the south end.

Braswell wants Georgetown County
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The south end lot is the county's largest free beach access point.



You've gotta have heart

Leesa Meador's art class at Waccamaw Elementary completes Valentine's Day cards. Abby Retej, left, planned to give hers to her grandmother. Lucas Bost, right, colored newspaper, then cut out a heart to go on his card.

Photos by
Tanya Ackerman/
Coastal Observer



PAWLEYS ISLAND

Nostalgia flavors plans for former Town Hall

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

George Raftelis remembers King's Funland. "It was a gathering place for folks."

Elizabeth McNeil remembers Howdy's store where he brother worked in the summers. "It was a really a gathering spot."

Besty Altman remembers the Mikee's Ice Cream truck, "which I loved, but they stopped that because of commercialism. That was sad."

Pawleys Island may get a taste of the old days when there were businesses as well as homes on the island as the town looks for new uses for its old Town Hall.

"We kind of lack a gather place," said Joe Miller, a member of a committee studying the town's options. His wife suggested an ice cream shop.

Other ideas include using the 600-square-foot building for historical displays, environmental education and a meeting space. The building was flooded by Hurricane Matthew in 2016. A new Town Hall opened last month just across the North Causeway from the old one, on a lot that was once home to the Wagon Wheel restaurant and bar.

"We could do ice cream and displays, too," said Altman, owner of Pawleys Island Realty. The building that became the core of the old Town Hall in 1988 was once used as an office for business renting beach houses that eventually became Pawleys Island Realty.

The town doesn't have any commercial zoning. Two inns on the island are grandfathered. The town does sell T-shirts for the Fourth of July parade, however.

Raftelis, a CPA whose firm specializes in public sector finance, chairs the committee. His parents built a house on the
SEE "HALL," PAGE 3

OPIOID CRISIS | East Coast Awareness Walk

Deaths and addiction propel WHS grad's journey

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Jessie Grieb and Mike Plante share several bonds. They have both struggled with addiction and lost brothers to overdoses.

They are now sharing the road as part of the East Coast Overdose Awareness Walk from Fort Kent, Maine, on the Canadian border, to Key West, Fla.

Grieb, 26, a New Jersey native and 2010 Waccamaw High School graduate, lost her brother, Brian Grieb, and her boyfriend, Christian Heckman, to overdoses.

"It's been hard trying to process a lot over years and I still struggle with it on this walk," Grieb said. "It's probably been the best thing for me and I've had a lot of healing. But when I go into those depressions it's hard."

She was inspired to walk after meeting Brett Bramble last March. He was walking from Key West to Fort Kent in honor of his sister who died of an overdose and stayed with the Grieb family while passing through Pawleys Island. A few months later Grieb was visiting Maine and joined Bramble for the last 300 miles of his walk. At the time she had just gone through detox.

"In the beginning I was in such a bad place, I was struggling



Mike Plante and Jessie Grieb were photographed by a friend as they crossed the Waccamaw River on their way to Key West last week.

so, so much. When I joined Brett it was the hardest thing I'd ever done in my life," Grieb said. "The first three days we did 60 miles. During that time we both talked about me turning around and going back to Key West. I loved what he was doing and I saw how

much it helped him, especially with dealing with grief and all that. So I really wanted to dedicate my time to it as well."

Grieb started her walk July 23. "I could barely walk down the street to the gas station but when I was in Fort Kent I loved

it, I loved doing the walk," Grieb said. "It was really hard at first. Ninety degree weather and hills and blisters on my feet."

Plante, 27, a native of Charleston, Maine, found out about Grieb's walk on Facebook and
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MURRELLS INLET | Along the Marsh Walk

Restaurant seeks variance to variance for deck

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

A Murrells Inlet restaurant owner will get another chance to change the conditions on a variance that was issued 11 years ago after three hearings by Georgetown County.

The owner of the former Capt. Dave's Docksides wants to be able to build a deck between the restaurant and the Marsh Walk in an area that is currently limited to green space. David Owens closed the restaurant last year, but it is now leased to Catfish Johnny's.

"Everybody has benefited in that boardwalk except Catfish Johnny's," said Robert Cox, the former county building inspector, who now represents Owens.

A variance in November 2006 allowed Owens to build a porch and stairs on his newly-built restaurant. He had torn down the original building that his family had owned since 1975. It was replaced with a modular building. It met the 50-foot setback from Business 17, but the engineer who



located the building didn't account for the steps or a ramp to access the building that needed to be raised to meet flood regulations.

The county Board of Zoning Appeals twice denied Owens' request for a 5.9 foot variance. At the second hearing, 15 people, including the pastor at Belin Methodist and the local fire chief,

spoke in favor of the request. It was denied when the board tied 2-2 on a motion to grant relief.

At a third hearing, the chairman, Lee Hewitt, proposed an amendment that the variance to the front setback be conditioned on Owens leaving the green space at the back of the restaurant undisturbed. It passed 4-3.

"When people are desperate,

A 2006 variance for Capt. Dave's included a provision for green space.

Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

they'll do almost anything to get what they need," Cox told the current appeals board last week. He was building inspector at the time the restaurant was built. "Someone got the dimensions wrong," he said.

Cox said he didn't know why Hewitt offered the amendment, but said it was unfair.

"I remember it was a compromise," Hewitt said this week. It was a way to get the variance approved so Owens wouldn't be forced to reconfigure the building.

The conditions of the variance created a hardship, Cox told the appeals board. "The county has permitted enormous restaurants to build right up to the boardwalk," he said. "You can touch people as you walk by."

But not at Catfish Johnny's.
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