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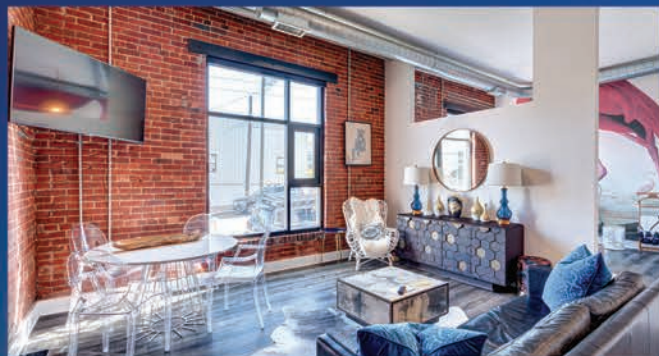


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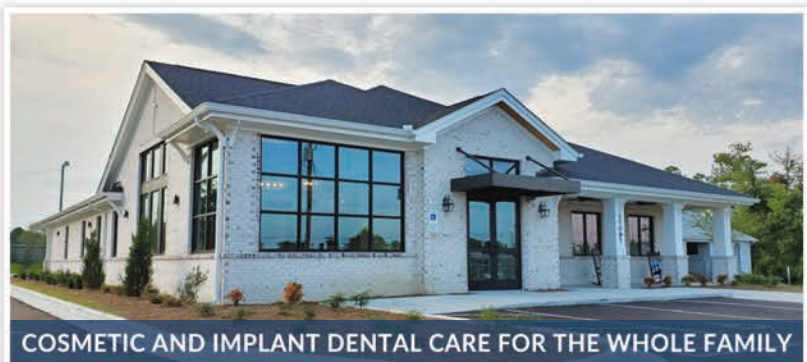
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## FEATURES

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The PubScout discovers the joys of small-town Burgaw and Kevin Kozak's tasty beers at Burgaw Brewing.



PHOTO BY MEGAN DEITZ

### 47 ONE INCREDIBLE COOKIE

Topsail resident Cookie Tilghman has been working and volunteering to better the community for 50 years — and she's not done yet.

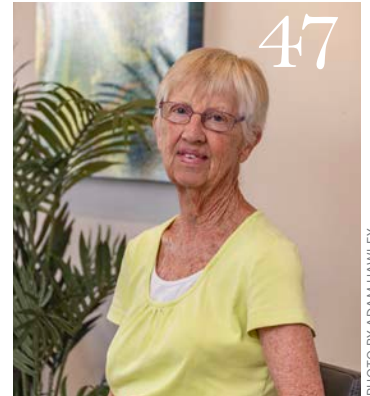


PHOTO BY ADAM HAWLEY

### 53 RING BEARER

FedEx driver Joe Engel gets his 15 minutes of fame for being good at his job and going above and beyond to make sure one couple's big day was complete.



PHOTO BY AMY FOWLER SHORES

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With the help of Sundial Coffee and Tea, Sneads Ferry residents Sadie and Christopher Bush find Topsail-area homes for the Costa Rican street dogs they met on their honeymoon.



PHOTO BY VICKY OLIVER



PHOTO BY AMY FOWLER SHORES

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By recycling retired instruments, Second Beat Studios ensures there is not a day the music dies.

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Jenna and Pete Skenteris' Santorini brings the flavors of Greece and Italy to Surf City.

### 81 PEEK INSIDE

Amy and Glenn Newbury-Smith's charming Rutland Cottage is an Airbnb treasure in the woods.

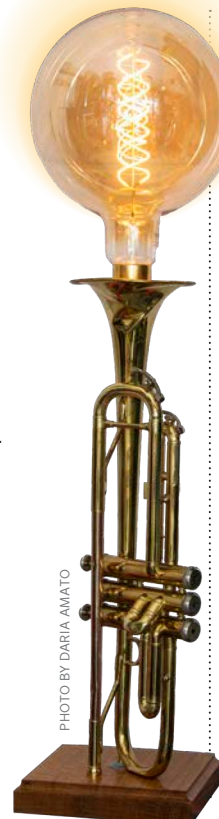


PHOTO BY DARIA AMATO

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PHOTO BY MATT MCGRAW





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## About the cover:

Ian Fowler Photography captured our cover image at the 2023 Surf City Live NC concert headlined by Scotty McCreery. The 2024 Surf City Live NC concert on November 2 will feature headliner Clint Black with show openers Easton Corbin and Kassi Ashton. You'll find more information about the show on page 99.



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## Kurt Epps, a.k.a. The PubScout

CONTRIBUTING WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

I am a retired English teacher, a veteran of 37 years in the high school classroom, and I have also served as an adjunct professor at the college level. I'm a multiple award-winning writer and have won national recognition for my coverage of the craft beer industry, in which I've been immersed since 1996. An expert at beer and food pairing, I emcee dinners, host public and private tutored beer tastings and evaluate and review beer bars, breweries, brewpubs and pubs, as well as restaurants with good beer menus. I encourage the responsible enjoyment of beer, and my favorite quote comes from Jim Koch of the Boston Beer Co.: "All beer is good; some beer is better." My mission as The PubScout's is to locate and write about the "better."

## Mike Johnson

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I am a previous winner of the Piccolo Spoleto Fiction Open, two-time winner of the SC Fiction Project and former editorial director of Men, Ink. I was also a Cape Fear Dad columnist for the *Wilmington Star-News* and have written for *North Brunswick Magazine*. I live in Hampstead with my wife and two children.



## Amy Shores

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

I spent 28 years working in the field of education and loved the relationships that I built with students and families. Serving the community has always been a passion of mine. I fell in love with photography when I moved to Topsail Island 10 years ago. My mom gifted me my first professional camera right before she passed away in 2017. That camera became an outlet for me as a way to still connect with her. It has been a dream to transform that hobby into a full-time career. My work is displayed at various establishments on the island. I can be found on the beach most evenings, shooting family photos or capturing a beautiful beach wedding. Recently, one of my special wedding shoots went viral and was made into a national FedEx commercial! Photography has provided me the opportunity to meet so many fabulous people.



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# Bye Summer, Hello Fall

Well, I had a heck of a summer, having fun near and far.

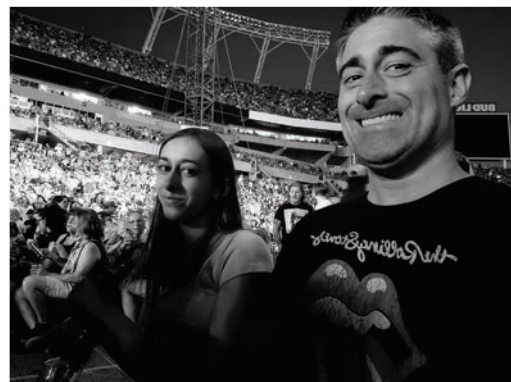
I took full advantage of all the goodness of southeastern North Carolina, from swimming in the ocean to catching sunsets and sunrises with my daughter, Ava. Even when I was working, going along on photoshoots for our magazines and attending events in all our local beach towns, I felt like I was soaking up the best of summer.

We also traveled quite a bit. We visited nearby Charleston, South Carolina; went to see the Rolling Stones in Orlando, Florida; and attempted a Stevie Nicks concert in Hershey, Pennsylvania — only to have it postponed while we were in line.

While the summer was a blast, I am stoked to be getting back on a normal schedule this fall. As the tourist season winds down, I always look

forward to checking back in with each of our advertising clients, hearing about their summers and their goals for the upcoming year. I also look forward to catching up with the locals at all the great fall events like Ocean Fest, Autumn with Topsail and Surf City Live.

Our writers and photographers have been busy preparing stories for this issue, and we are excited to share them with you. On these pages you're going to meet some really cool locals, from a woman who lost her sight but continues to paint and operate an art studio and gallery to a couple who make lamps and furniture from retired musical instruments. You'll take a look behind the scenes at Burgaw Brewing and peek inside a little Airbnb oasis in the woods of



Rocky Point. As always, we tell you about upcoming events and offer some recipes for the fall season.

I hope you soaked up the best of summer too and that your fall is full of even more fun. Thanks for reading *Topsail Magazine*!

*Justin Williams*

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## EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

Topsail High School teacher Miranda Wells is a finalist for NCCAT's CTE Teacher of the Year.

Pender County Schools is proud to announce that Miranda Wells, a teacher at Topsail High School, has been selected as a finalist for the prestigious 2024 Burroughs Wellcome Fund NC Career and Technical Education Teacher of the Year Award by the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT).

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## NEW BUSINESS FOR PET CARE

Woofie's of Greater Jacksonville offers premier pet-care services for dogs, cats, birds, lizards and other animals from Atlantic Beach to Wilmington.

Woofie's of Greater Jacksonville launched its premier pet-care services with a grand-opening celebration and participation in the Kick Off Summer Pawloosa Dog Adoption event in Jacksonville on June 1. They celebrated their official launch at the fourth annual pet adoption event hosted by Adoption First Animal Rescue, a rescue organization that specializes in saving dogs set to be euthanized at local animal shelters and finding homes for them.

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## ONE TO WATCH

Wilmington Chamber of Commerce recognizes Pender County Tourism's Stephanie Key among its 40 Under 40 honorees.

Wilmington Chamber of Commerce's 40 Under 40 celebrates young professionals in the Wilmington area who exhibit outstanding leadership, community involvement and professional excellence.

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## HONORING A BELOVED COACH

Topsail High School renames its gymnasium to honor the legacy of Jamie Rochelle.

To honor the memory of a beloved teacher and coach, Topsail High School has renamed its main gymnasium the Coach Jamie Rochelle Gymnasium.

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## RECOGNITION PEOPLE OF IMPACT

Pender Education Partnership and the Pender County Board of Education induct six new members to the Pender County Wall of Fame.

Pender Education Partnership (PEP), a nonprofit foundation dedicated to enhancing educational opportunities and supporting public school educators, in collaboration with the Pender County Board of Education, proudly inducted six new members into the Pender County Wall of Fame on June 24. The 2024 inductees are Carson Smith, Rev. Dr. Aaron Johnson, Wendy Fletcher-Hardee, Curtis Hardison, Dr. Richard Newkirk and Ricky Biberstein. These individuals have been recognized for their significant contributions as educators or outstanding alumni.

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## A NEW POST HOME

Thanks to a generous donation from one of its members, American Legion Post 167 has broken ground on a new building project on Highway 210 in Hampstead.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

American Legion Post 167 in Hampstead held a ground-breaking ceremony for its new Post home on July 8. The new location of the Post is at 756 Highway 210 West in Hampstead.

| [CONTINUE READING ONLINE](#) ➔ |



# Teams make Dreams come true...





## Mountains to Sea Trail Master Plan Developed for the Holly Shelter Game Land



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail along with local land managers and partners has developed a master plan for extending the Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST) over 4 miles in Holly Shelter Game Land. This MST extension will utilize Holly Shelter's newly acquired 1,600-acre property to connect the existing section of trail in Holly Shelter Game Land to the U.S. Highway 17/N.C. Highway 210 intersection. Unlike the current MST in Holly Shelter, the new section of the trail will be separated from the Game Land's road network and will have a designated trailhead parking facility. This will significantly increase safety, access and awareness of Holly Shelter's incredible natural resources.

## Pender High School Senior Named to NCHSAA Student-Athlete Advisory Council

Pender High School senior Melia Fullwood is one of the newest members of the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) Student-Athlete Advisory Council. Fullwood, a multi-sport athlete participating in cheerleading and varsity volleyball, brings a wealth of leadership experience to the council. She is actively involved in the BETA Club and holds a leadership position in the National Honor Society. Fullwood also contributes to her community by working at summer camps for youth. The NCHSAA Student-Athlete Advisory Council is a link between student-athletes and sports administrators, providing insights to enhance the overall student-athlete experience and promote an inclusive athletic community across North Carolina. Fullwood follows in the footsteps of her brother Josef, who served on the council in 2019-20. The appointment recognizes Fullwood's athletic achievements, academic excellence and commitment to community service, making her an ideal representative for Pender High School and the broader student-athlete community.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## Sweet Delicious Opens in Surf City



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

On May 23 the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Sweet Delicious, Surf City's newest sweet spot. Located at the traffic circle in the former Batson's Gallery, the shop serves ice cream, smoothies, shakes, coffee, pastry and desserts. Its address is 14260 Highway 50 in Surf City.

## Soundside Meadow Day School Opens in Hampstead



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

On May 16 the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of Soundside Meadow Day School in Hampstead. Soundside Meadow Day School is a brand-new preschool in Hampstead Village. The owners and staff were on hand to meet and greet the event attendees.

## Chamber Holds Joint Ribbon Cutting for Coastal Paint & Floor, Finesse Pro Services and The Kitchen & Floor Store



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

On May 29 the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce held a joint ribbon-cutting ceremony to welcome two new businesses to the area — Coastal Paint & Floor and Finesse Pro Services —and to celebrate

the relocation of The Kitchen & Floor Store. Friends, family, vendors and customers enjoyed lunch from Surf City BBQ and 30 percent of all paint.



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## Tod Morgan Welcomed as New Athletic Director, Asst. Principal at Topsail High School

Tod Morgan is Topsail High School's new assistant principal and athletic director. Morgan brings more than 30 years of experience in education and sports and degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Georgia Southern University and East Carolina University. He is also highly certified in coaching and athletic administration. Throughout his career, Morgan has worked in many roles, including teacher, coach and principal, in 11 different high schools. As a basketball coach, he led his teams to many victories and state playoff appearances. He has also coached high school golf and international teams and directed youth sports camps. Morgan has been actively involved with the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA), serving on several committees and earning multiple awards.

## Stephen Harris Named Principal of Penderlea School

Stephen Harris has been appointed principal of Penderlea School for the 2024-25 academic year. Harris most recently served as assistant principal at Rocky Point Elementary and brings a robust background in education to his new role. He completed his undergraduate studies at UNC-Charlotte and earned a master's degree from Wingate University. His career spans various educational levels, including elementary, middle and high school. He and his wife, Heather, and their dog, Briar, live in Wilmington. A passionate supporter of the Carolina Panthers, Harris also has a keen interest in sports and coaching, aligning with Penderlea School's values of teamwork and collaboration. As principal, Harris aims to continue fostering a supportive and dynamic educational environment, ensuring every student at Penderlea School reaches their full potential.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## Kiwanis Club of Topsail Island Names Emily Hendrick as Educator Extraordinaire

Kiwanis Club of Topsail Island has named Emily Hendrick, an eighth-grade language arts teacher at Dixon Middle School

in Onslow County, as an Educator Extraordinaire. In April of this year Hedrick was honored as one of the Dixon Middle School Educators of the Year for Literacy. Each year she organizes, preps and schedules more than 300 eighth-grade students to provide the opportunity for a 1:1 mock interview with a local business owner/manager, entrepreneur or a community member with a wide range of career/workforce knowledge. Hedrick is also very involved in her community, including volunteering as a member of Kiwanis. She supports the Greater Topsail Area Community Garden and is often found planting and harvesting with her girls.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

## Dr. Alan McNaughton Joins Topsail Middle School as Principal

Dr. Alan McNaughton is the new principal at Topsail Middle School. He brings a background in special education and more than a decade of experience in school administration. Before joining Topsail Middle, Dr. McNaughton served as assistant principal at North Brunswick High School in Leland. Prior to that, he was the dean of students at West Brunswick High School in Shallotte. His career began as a special education teacher in Fayetteville, where he developed a strong foundation in student-centered education and inclusive practices. In his new role, Dr. McNaughton's focus will be on fostering a supportive and efficient learning environment where every student can thrive.

## Coastal Home Store Moves to Gateway Plaza



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

On May 22 the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Coastal Home Store's new location in Gateway Plaza in Surf City. Coastal Home Store is a small home goods shop offering top-quality decor and gifts along with decor consultation services for homes and businesses. It's at 13500 Highway 50, Suite 101 in the Gateway Plaza in Surf City.



## Rust & Refined Opens in Surf City



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

On June 12 the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Rust & Refined, a new men's shop that offers suits, shirts, dress shoes and accessories for men, along with items for women and home. Located next door to Coastal Home Store in the Gateway Plaza in Surf City, Rust & Refined hosted a soft opening so that attendees could shop.

## Sea Mist & Grace Opens in Surf City



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

On June 27 the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Sea Mist & Grace, an upscale tanning spa and boutique offering spray tans, traditional UV and hybrid tanning booths, red light therapy, massage, clothing, makeup, accessories and a daiquiri bar. The new spa is located at 100 Charlie Medlin Drive, Unit D, in Surf City.

## Quality Works Fencing ETC. Offering Services in the Greater Topsail Area



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

On June 26 Quality Works Fencing ETC. celebrated its opening with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Greater Topsail Area Chamber office. Based in Sneads Ferry, the veteran-owned and -operated company offers fencing and

repair services for residential and commercial properties throughout Pender and Onslow counties and Jacksonville.

## ServiceMaster Restoration of Wilmington Opens Warehouse in Hampstead



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

On May 30 the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce celebrated with ServiceMaster Restoration of Wilmington as they opened a new warehouse at their Sloop Point Loop Road location in Hampstead. They called it a Pre-Hurricane Party with the hopes that all hurricanes will stay away from our coastline. ServiceMaster Restoration of Wilmington served up an afternoon and evening of music and BBQ.

## Perry's Emporium Opens New Location in Hampstead



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

On July 20 the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony to welcome Perry's Emporium to Hampstead. As part of the Hampstead grand-opening celebration, Perry's Emporium conducted a drawing, and the winner, a Hampstead resident, took home a pair of diamond stud earrings valued at \$3,999. Perry's Emporium, which also has locations in Wilmington and Shallotte, is in the Hampstead Village shops at 195 Merchants Circle.





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CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Surf City Live NC: Clint Black



Surf City Firefighters 5th Annual Boaters Poker Run



Autumn With Topsail

## Coastal Connections

September 19

People do business with people they know, but making connections can be challenging, especially for small business owners. On September 19 from 5:30 to 7:30 pm, the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism will offer its second Coastal Connections, a networking opportunity for the business community. Sea Witch Lounge at 13775 N.C. Highway 50, Suite 103 will host the casual event. Bring business cards and meet business owners from Scotts Hill to Sneads Ferry and beyond.

Information: [topsailchamber.org](http://topsailchamber.org)

## Ocean Fest

September 20 & 21

Celebrate the ocean with surfing, vendors, eco exhibits, beverages, food trucks, oysters and live music. Ocean Fest is a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising funds for organizations that protect and conserve the ocean, so it's all about having fun for a good cause.

Information: [theoceanfest.org](http://theoceanfest.org)

## Sneads Ferry Shrimp Festival

September 27 & 28

Celebrating its 53rd anniversary in 2024, Sneads Ferry Shrimp Festival offers an annual parade, live music, craft vendors, games, children's activities, fireworks and, of course, lots of fresh N.C. shrimp.

Information: [sneadsferryshrimpfestival.org](http://sneadsferryshrimpfestival.org)

## Over-Under Biathlon and 5K

September 28

The Over-Under Biathlon is a 5K SUP paddle under the bridge followed by a 5K run over the bridge. This year's event has five categories including run only, paddle only, biathlon, wild card and relay division. Awards will be given for the top three men and women in each division and the top three relay teams. Registration includes a t-shirt, a pint glass and a post-race party. It all takes place at Sound Side Park in Surf City. The race supports Make a Wish of Eastern NC.

Information: [paddlesignup.com/race/nc/surfcity/overunderbiathlonand5k](http://paddlesignup.com/race/nc/surfcity/overunderbiathlonand5k)

## Surf City Firefighters 5th Annual Boaters Poker Run

September 28

Join the Surf City Fire Department Auxiliary for a family fun day on the water for the 5th Annual Boaters Poker Run. Pick up your poker cards by boat at designated stops along the ICW for a chance to win the grand prize of \$2,500 or a door prize. The grand prize winner will be announced at Sears Landing Grill & Boat Docks at 7 pm.

Information: [surfcityfireaux.org/pokerrun](http://surfcityfireaux.org/pokerrun)

## Autumn With Topsail

October 18 – 20

The Historical Society of Topsail Island hosts the Autumn with Topsail Festival (AWT) over three days in October. Thousands of residents and visitors from throughout the country will converge in Topsail Beach to enjoy regional crafts displayed by more than 100 vendors. Plus there will be cold beer and wine, great food and live music.

Information: [autumnwithtopsail.com](http://autumnwithtopsail.com)

## Burgaw Autumn Fest

October 19

Autumn Fest is a family-friendly event in downtown Burgaw. This hometown festival, hosted by Burgaw Parks, Recreation and Tourism, offers vendors, activities, games, food and more. Kids can wear their Halloween costumes for trick or treating and the costume contest.

Information: [burgawnc.gov/467/autumn-fest](http://burgawnc.gov/467/autumn-fest)

## Surf City Live NC: Clint Black

November 2

Join the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce and Shoreline Events in Soundside Park on November 2 for a live concert experience featuring Clint Black, Easton Corbin and Kassi Ashton. Show time is 4 to 9 pm.

Information: [surfcitylivenc.com](http://surfcitylivenc.com)

## Christmas Market and Flotilla

December 14

The Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce's annual Christmas Market is held every December in conjunction with the Annual Flotilla. Held in beautiful Soundside Park, the market features handmade gifts, food trucks and entertainment. The market opens at noon and ends at 6 pm or later, and the food vendors remain open until 7 pm. The lighting flotilla arrives around 6 pm. This event is free and open to the public.

Information: [topsailchamber.org](http://topsailchamber.org)



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# A Fine Pair

Sweet pears and woody bourbon couple up for a distinctive autumn cocktail.

BY SANDI GRIGG

**M**y family has an annual tradition of going to an orchard in western North Carolina to pick apples, pears and grapes during the autumn months. Our favorite orchard has a covered wagon that will pick you up from the parking area and take you through the various sections of the orchard, allowing you to jump off and collect different fruits. The tour finalizes by taking you to a large barn on the property that has an indoor playground, brewery, bakery and BBQ food truck. This supplies an entire day of fun.

On our last visit, as I sat there with my bucket of pears, I daydreamed about what I could create with them. And that's when the idea of the Rosemary and Pear Bourbon cocktail was born.

This drink combines the sweet notes of a homemade pear and rosemary simple

syrup with the warm, woody undertones of bourbon, and it quickly became one of our seasonal favorites.

...

## PEAR PERFECTION

Pears quickly ripen when left at room temperature, so it's best to eat them as soon as they are picked or keep them in the refrigerator. Because pears ripen from the inside out, the best way to judge their ripeness is to check the neck by applying gentle pressure to the neck or stem end of the pear. If it feels soft, the pear is ripe, sweet and juicy. If it is firm, leave the pear at room temperature and check the neck daily for ripeness. You will want a ripe pear for this recipe to yield the most juice.

I believe the secret to any good cocktail is the homemade simple syrup, and it is certainly evident in this drink. The rosemary couples beautifully with the pear.

## ROSEMARY AND PEAR BOURBON

*Makes 4 drinks*

### INGREDIENTS

1/3 cup pear juice  
 Sprigs of rosemary  
 1/3 cup sugar  
 1/3 cup water  
 1 medium pear (½ chopped, ½ sliced for garnish)  
 4 ounces Woodford Reserve Bourbon  
 2 ounces lemon juice  
 Peach-Pear La Croix  
 Ice

### METHOD

In a small saucepan combine the pear juice, 2 sprigs of rosemary, sugar, water and the chopped pear.

Bring to a boil then reduce heat and simmer for 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat and strain.

Set in the refrigerator to cool.

In a small pitcher mix the pear and rosemary syrup, lemon juice and bourbon.

Pour into 4 separate glasses with ice, top with Peach-Pear La Croix and garnish with pear slices and rosemary sprigs.





# Heaven on the Half Shell

Here are three different toppings to take local oysters to the next level.

BY SANDI GRIGG  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES STEFIUK

You can have your pumpkin season, I am ready for oyster season! As we ease into the cooler months, most of the United States is getting ready to rake leaves wearing their flannels and sipping pumpkin spice lattes. Meanwhile, around here we are getting ready to rake oysters wearing waders and slurping the briny morsels in one gulp.

Oyster season is one of my favorite seasons. Traditionally, on the East Coast, September to April is prime wild oyster harvesting months — though now that we

have oyster farms, we can get oysters all year round. But I'm a traditionalist and like eating oysters in the cooler seasons.

North Carolina's Stump Sound, a muddy, 7-mile body of water stretching from Sneads Ferry to North Topsail Beach, offers some of the area's best oysters. I prefer to use Stump Sound oysters for this recipe because they taste and smell exactly like the briny ocean. These oysters get their saltiness from their habitat and the conditions in North Carolina's diverse waters. The salinity is influenced by the tidal exchanges of two inlets and



runoff from the land. Oysters eat by swallowing and filtering their surroundings, so each one literally soaks up and reflects its environment.

My friends and I took a trip to Provincetown, Massachusetts, a few years ago, and while I was excited to go whale watching and visit the historical sites, I was most excited to eat the food. Much like our area's seafood offerings, oysters were high on my list of things I wanted to try. Not only did I want to taste the difference in flavors between theirs and ours, but I also wanted to learn new ways to serve them.

We stepped into a seaside restaurant right off the harbor that was promoting its raw oysters, which were offered with a variety of different toppings. I am all too familiar with the cocktail sauce and lemon wedge, but the toppings offered at this restaurant were elevated to a whole new level. The

recipes I am offering today were born from that experience.

My absolute favorite topping was crème fraîche and caviar. The combination of smooth cream and salty pops of caviar paired with the briny oyster was delectable. I felt so fancy!

My second favorite combination was a spicy bacon jam. I created my own Southern version of the spicy bacon jam using jalapenos. The cold, wet oyster and the warm, spicy bacon jam is a match made in heaven.

My third favorite accompaniment was a Champagne mignonette. There is a seafood restaurant in Downtown Wilmington that offers something very similar, and I did my best at recreating this simple, delicate topper.

No matter how you choose to eat your local oysters, I am sure they will be outstanding, but if you want to try something out-of-the-box, give these recipes a try.

## 3 Ways to Enhance Oysters

### Champagne Mignonette Topping

(for 12 raw oysters)

#### INGREDIENTS

¼ cup Brut Champagne  
1 shallot, minced  
1½ teaspoons white wine vinegar  
¼ teaspoon fresh ground white pepper



#### METHOD

In a small jar, combine the Champagne, shallots, vinegar and pepper.

Spoon on top of oysters.

### Spicy Bacon Jam Topping

(for 12 raw oysters)

#### INGREDIENTS

½ lb. bacon, cut into small pieces  
1 sweet onion, finely chopped – I prefer Vidalia onions  
1 jalapeno, finely chopped (remove seeds)  
1 garlic clove, minced  
¼ c white balsamic vinegar  
2 tablespoons brown sugar  
Bundle of fresh thyme, rosemary and parsley



#### METHOD

Cook the bacon pieces in a pan over medium/high heat.

Toss in the herb bundle, chopped onion, jalapeno and garlic when the bacon is about halfway done.

Add the vinegar and sugar once the bacon is done and bring to a boil.

Boil for about 3 minutes and remove the herb bundle.

Scoop the warm bacon jam into a small jar.

Spoon on top of oysters.

### Million Dollar Topping

(for 12 raw oysters)



#### INGREDIENTS

4 ounces heavy cream  
1½ teaspoons buttermilk  
Yellow caviar  
Fresh chopped green onion

#### METHOD

In a small jar, combine the heavy cream and buttermilk and store in the refrigerator overnight to make crème fraîche.

Spoon a dollop of the crème fraîche onto the oyster. Then add a small spoonful of caviar on top and sprinkle with green onion.





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# Please Don't Stop the Music

By recycling retired instruments, Second Beat Studios ensures there is not a day the music dies.

BY ANNA BETH ADCOCK | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARIA AMATO

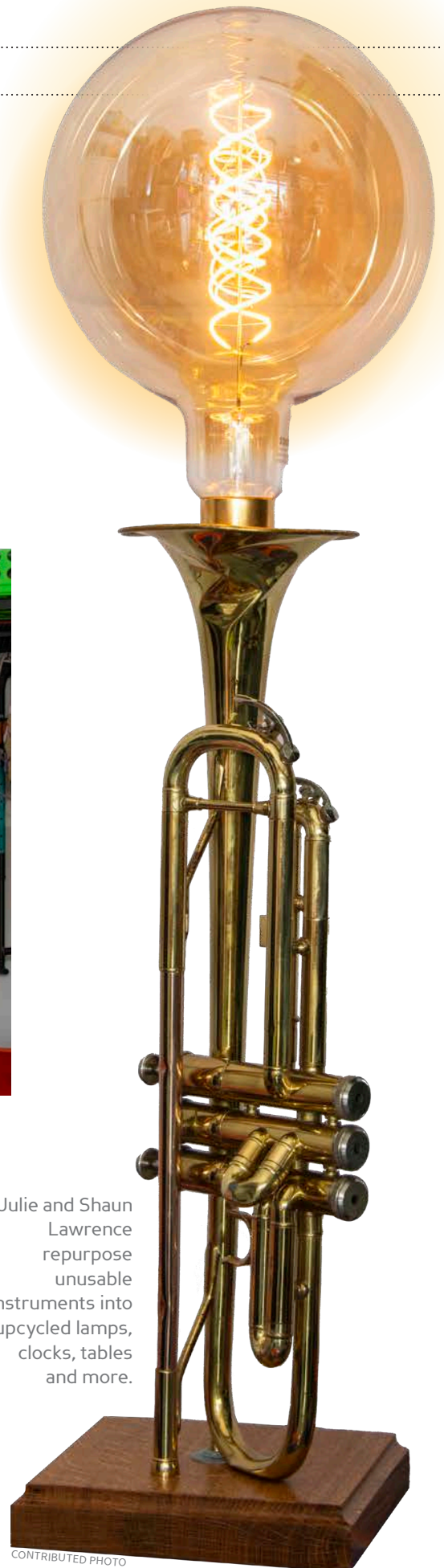


Ever wonder what happens to an instrument when its playing days are over? If husband-and-wife duo Julie and Shaun Lawrence of Second Beat Studios have anything to do with it, that retired instrument might reincarnate as a lamp, a clock, a table or even a guitar string bracelet.

The duo, who have a desire to help local music programs such as the one their daughter was involved in at Topsail High School, made a name for themselves by acquiring instruments that were cost-prohibitive to repair and granting them new lives through upcycling.

Keeping the good tunes going, and in an effort to pass it forward, the musically inclined makers set up the Lawrence Low

Julie and Shaun Lawrence repurpose unusable instruments into upcycled lamps, clocks, tables and more.



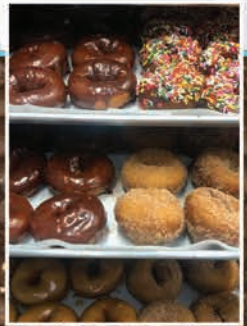
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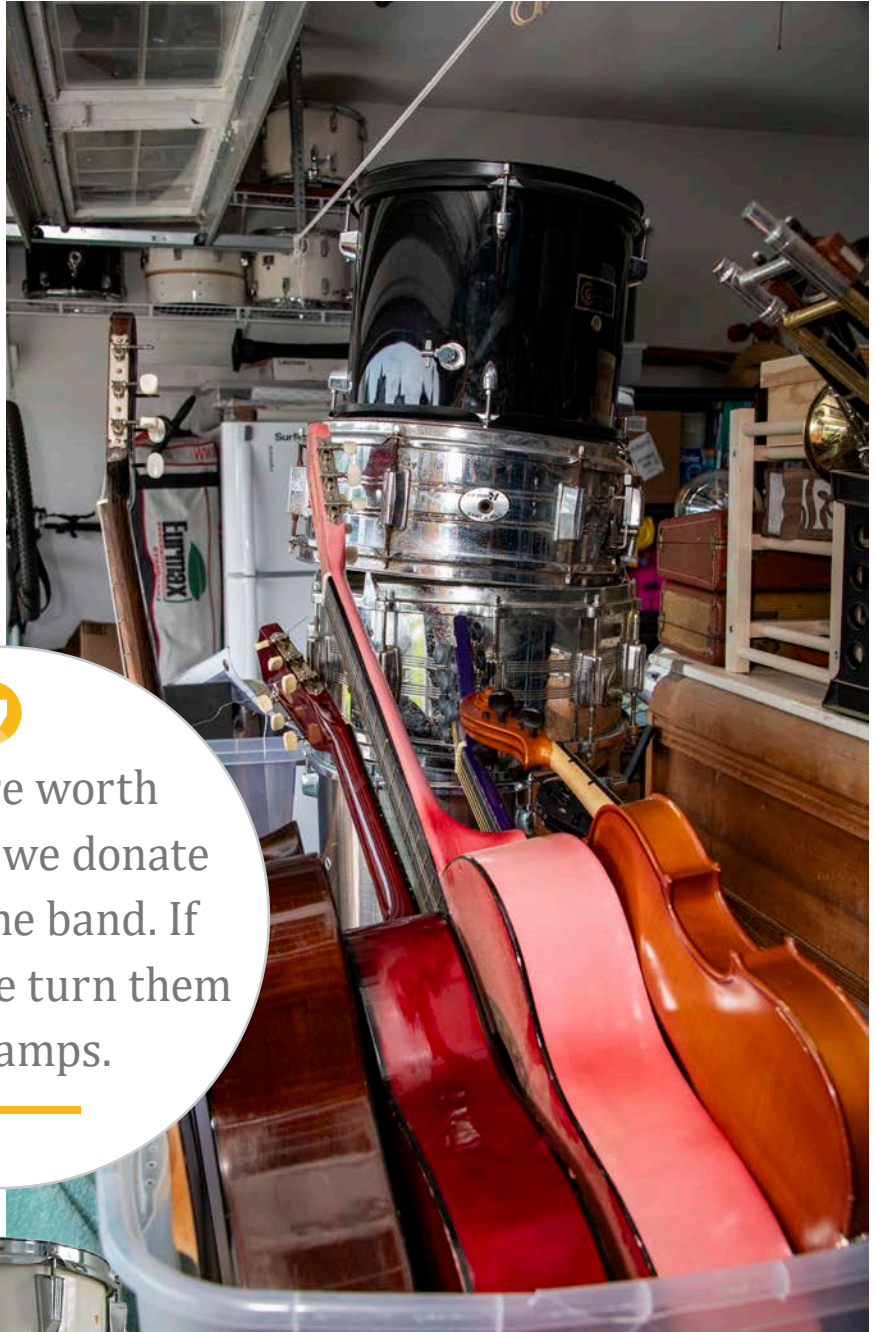


Brass Scholarship with proceeds from the sales to support young and aspiring local musicians.

Now, even though their daughter, Mia, has hung up her Topsail High School Marching Pirate uniform, she continues her musical journey at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte while the Lawrences' continue their work to give instruments new lives, feeling that work is a way to stay connected to her musical endeavors.

To boot, the couple donates lamps for the high school's annual Pirate Classic, a competition that features around 20 high school marching bands each October.

Other than working with Topsail High School to rehome instruments and repurpose defunct



If they're worth repairing, we donate them to the band. If not, then we turn them into lamps.



ones, the couple stays tuned in with a repair technician who makes a bi-annual donation of instruments. Shaun points out that a recent gift, a banjo whose neck was broken in three pieces, has since been glued back together and reborn as a lamp.

"We also purchase items on Facebook Marketplace," Shaun says. "But if we think they might be playable, I take them to the director of bands. If they're worth repairing, we donate them to the band. If not, then we turn them into lamps. Our intent is not to take a playable instrument





and turn it into a lamp.”

Second Beat Studios can be found around town setting up shop at local markets such as Ocean City Jazz Fest and other pop-ups and craft fairs.

While the one-of-a-kind instruments-turned-furniture are available to custom order, purchase online or pick up around town, the

Lawrences envision a combination of a storefront-slash-makerspace in the future. “That would be ideal,” Shaun says. “[A place] where we could repurpose the items on-site and also have a storefront.”

Always challenged to compose creativity, the Lawrences lean into a mixture of inspiration and the resources they have on hand to complete their creations.

“The basis is to try to upcycle everything we get,” Julie says. “It’s looking around, checking the Internet and getting ideas when you go places of what you can do. We try to use as much as possible — the basis is complete



upcycling and keeping as much out of the landfill as possible.”

Beyond their self-made sustainable enterprise, Julie is in the midst of getting yet another bespoke small business off the ground, and the couple enjoys exploring new restaurants and hitting the beach. ■



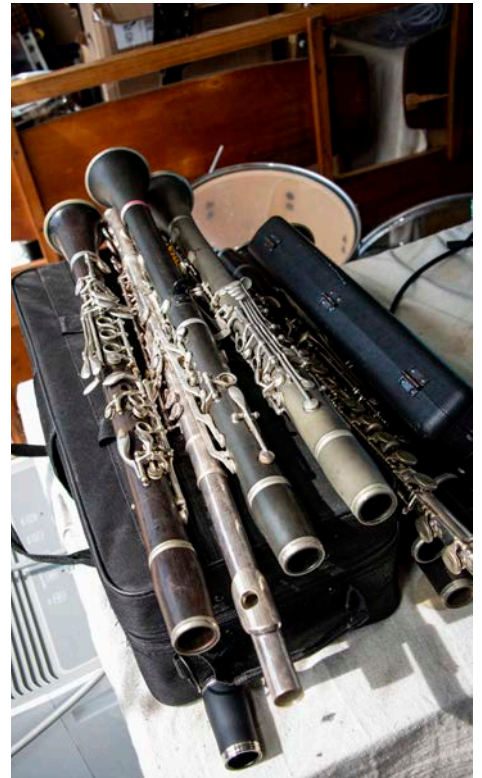
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# FROM ILM TO *Mayberry*





The PubScout discovers the joys of small-town Burgaw and Kevin Kozak's tasty beers at Burgaw Brewing.

BY KURT EPPS, THE PUBSCOUT | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEGAN DEITZ

Back when I was making my writer's bones in 1996 and 1997, I penned my first review of Wilmington's Front Street Brewery. At that time, it was pretty much the only brewpub game in town. Of course, things have changed dramatically on the Wilmington brew scene, as a new beer-centric business making darned good beer seems to open up every other week. And Wilmington has earned a well-deserved reputation as a beer-centric city.

Front Street Brewery has seen brewers come and go since 1997, and one of them who helped elevate the Wilmington brew scene, Kevin Kozak, began making his

Burgaw Brewing occupies a 4,000-square-foot downtown building and houses a 10-barrel brewing system. Opposite left: Owners Emmaline and Kevin Kozak





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bones at the business in 2006. In the 10 years he was there, Front Street Brewery earned a great reputation as a place to drink good beer and enjoy good food.

Kevin and I chatted beer often during my visits from up north to the Port City, and then, as is sometimes the case, we lost track of each other. Until recently. My publisher (bless his heart) asked me if I would make the trek from OIB to Burgaw to scope out a budding brewery business there called (appropriately) Burgaw Brewing. When I saw who the brewer was — Kevin Kozak — I quickly agreed.

I had always wanted to visit Burgaw, especially when its famous Blueberry Festival is underway, but the trip never materialized. I contacted Kevin via email, we arranged for a visit, and I made the 70-mile drive ...

To Mayberry. Burgaw is quite simply a throwback town. It reminded me of old-time America with diagonal parking spaces in front of the downtown storefronts — and NO parking meters. I half expected to see Andy and Barney walking the sidewalks, and you better believe when I passed the old-fashioned barber shop next to the brewery, I peeked in to see if I could find Floyd plying his trade.

But duty called. My buddy Father Dave and I entered Burgaw Brewing. I found Kevin, we reminisced quickly and found a seat at the long — and pretty crowded — bar. The whole place was packed with customers who were enjoying the fruits of Kevin's labors and the food of Chef Mark Relyea.

So busy was it, that by 1 pm there was a line out the door waiting to get in. Customers were also seated outside on the Mayberry sidewalk, and many



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more were in the Beer Garden outside. In sum, the place was hopping — no pun intended.

When I asked if this was normal, Kevin allowed that the location was just across the street from the courthouse, and the lunch business was typical. That there was a murder trial underway there may or may not have had an impact, but business was indeed brisk.

It was not always so. Kevin signed on to the project some years ago — just a week before COVID decimated the small business landscape.



“I worked at other places tending bar to keep the home fires burning until it was time to bring this project into the light,” he says.

Helping him with those home fires was his new bride Emmaline, whom he had met at the Front Street Brewery bar back in 2016. One look at her, and I told him he definitely “married up,” a sentiment to which he quickly agreed. All guys who “marry up” are pretty quick to admit it, myself included.



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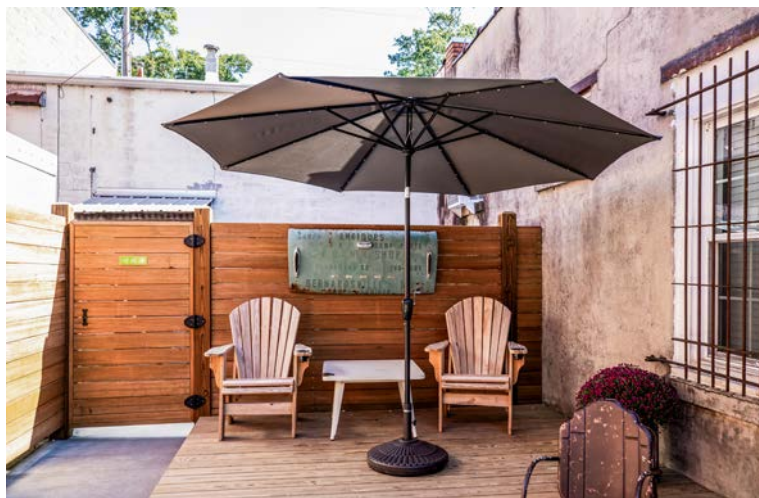
Together they have watched the business grow into what seems to be “the” place in Burgaw to quaff and dine. I queried a few locals about their choice of watering hole, and they all said they love it here. A guy named Fred said, “They’ve come a long way. They’re getting better every day, and we stop in regularly when we want good food and beer.”

At my visit, Kevin had five beers of his own on tap, along with beers from other N.C. breweries. All five were, in my opinion and that of Father Dave, quite good. Not that I was surprised, though.

One was a Helles called 103 Lager, registering a 5.1%. Kevin also serves a great transitional beer that is easily sessionable. With a maltier backbone than many, it was a great way to start.

A second was Pender County Famous, a wheat beer infused with blueberry juice. (How surprising is that, considering why so many come to Burgaw in the first place?) Light and also sessionable, Budmillercoors drinkers would probably be easily converted to this one.

Next came two IPAs. William the Pleaser was a lighter West



Burgaw Brewing’s backyard, with plentiful seating and yard games, is a popular gathering spot.







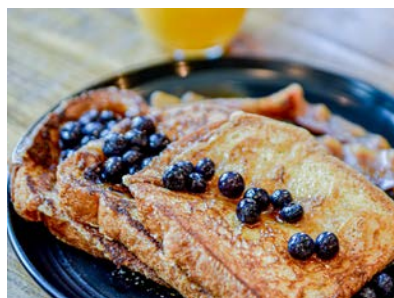
and cheese. It was absolutely delicious, and both of us recommend it highly.

Our server, Chelsea, was friendly, efficient and delightful, as were all the staff with whom we came in contact. It was not hard to see why folks packed the place, murder trial or not.

But Kevin did give us a bit of advice.

“The Blueberry Festival is the big one, but the time to really enjoy the town is during the Autumn Festival and the Christmas season. It’s really

Chef Mike Relyea’s bar snacks, salads, sandwiches, burgers and elevated pub classics compliment brewer Kevin Kozak’s beers.



Coast-style quencher that clocked in at 6.1%, and my personal favorite was Switchblade Posse, a 6.9% West Coast style brewed with Eureka, Comet and Cashmere hops.

The final beer was a Munich Dunkel deep amber lager called All That Jazz. 5.3% and dead on style, the beer could make most anyone a jazz fan.

We paired these brews with two Smoked Chicken Philly sandwiches, that were probably a foot long and chock full of tender smoked chicken, onions, peppers



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[burgawbrewing.com](http://burgawbrewing.com)

[burgawbrewing](https://www.instagram.com/burgawbrewing)

a cozy, friendly little place.”

So it could have been Bedford Falls as well as Mayberry, without Mr. Potter or Otis.

As a side note, have you ever noticed that none of the characters in Mayberry are married except for Otis? And he’s the town drunk, often in the hoosegow. There must be a message in there somewhere. Maybe he didn’t “marry up?”

But the message here is enjoy yourself in Burgaw and especially at Burgaw Brewing. ■





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# ONE INCREDIBLE *Cookie*

Topsail resident Cookie Tilghman has  
been working and volunteering to better  
the community for 50 years

— *and she's not  
done yet.*

BY ASHLEY DANIELS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM HAWLEY





At 82 years old, Cookie Tilghman is a force to be reckoned with.

"I'm very active and take care of the house, cooking and yard," she says. "I'm just too blessed to be stressed."

But that's just one simple layer of Tilghman's impressive activity over the 50 years she's lived in Topsail Island.

Tilghman first moved here from Chapel Hill in 1974 with her husband, Hunter, who passed away in 2005, and three children, then ages 8, 9 and 12. The move was made not only because Tilghman fell in love with Topsail when she was in high school visiting with her parents, but also for Hunter to work as the manager for the Red & White Grocery in Surf City. The Red & White (now the IGA) was the only grocery store on the island at the time.

When asked about her crowning accomplishments on Topsail Island over the years, Tilghman laughs and says, "Picture an umbrella with several things under it."

That's one way to analogize the uber-involvement of this longtime resident. Tilghman began her civic commitments by volunteering at the Topsail Island Chamber of Commerce. On top



From top: Cookie is a certified natural health professional; Cookie and her husband, Hunter "Mr. T" Tilghman with their first grandchild, Garret; Mr. T loved Christmas.





of that, she became a certified EMT and was extremely active with the Topsail Beach Rescue Squad.

"It was all volunteers back then," she says. "I didn't do it full time, but as needed when we got calls. I stayed with the rescue squad a good while, which was very rewarding."

In February 1980, when the Tilghmans moved into the new home they built in Topsail, they also ramped up their community work, including Caroling at Christmas, the Kiwanis and Key Clubs, Christmas with Santa, Flag Day Ceremony, the Pirate Jubilee and the Miss Topsail Island Pageant. Hunter was also known for rescuing cats and dogs abandoned at the grocery store.

"My husband started the first Christmas with the Kiwanis with



the children," Tilghman says. "And he was such a patriotic person, so he started Flag Day ceremonies through the town. Five or six years ago, he was recognized with the first bench of recognition in Southside Park in Surf City."

In 1985 the Tilghmans were sparked by the entrepreneurial spirit and opened three businesses in what would become Tilghman Square 2 miles from the heart of Surf City: Tilghman's Supermarket,

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them about how  
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functions and  
what we can eat  
and not eat to have  
optimal health.

a gift shop called Cookie’s Treasure Chest, and Shenanigans Beach Club.

“Shenanigans was really an entertainment center with the focus on family, a place where single women could come and be safe — very much a family atmosphere,” Tilghman says.

She shares that the beach club was a booming business until Hurricane Fran wreaked havoc in 1996. After that, Tilghman says things changed and she chose to pivot after learning about herbal medicine through a friend. After her 50th birthday, she went back to school to Trinity College of Natural Health and became a certified naturopath. She opened Sonshine Wellness Center, complete with massage therapists, chiropractors and doctors of acupuncture. Tilghman still operates Sonshine Wellness Center, which can be found on Facebook.

“I’ve been seeing clients and working

Scenes from Tilghman’s 50 years of happy life on Topsail Island, including the logo from Shenanigans Beach Club, a parade float from 1988 and celebrating New Year’s Eve at Shenanigans.

with people for 32 years now to educate them about how our amazing body functions and what we can eat and not eat to have optimal health,” she says. “And that’s been super, super rewarding. ... I learned, when I was a wellness counselor at Realo Drugs in Surf City for five and a half years, that for every prescription behind the counter, there is an herb, a plant, with the same medicine — and no side effects.”

Known as the Herb Lady, she meets with clients two to three times a week and conducts wellness assessments to teach folks about making better choices.

“There’s a time and place for prescriptions, but there are some other choices,” she says.

In addition, Tilghman volunteers at the Greater Topsail Area Chamber of Commerce office every Monday so the full-time secretary can have the day off. She also a member of the local shag club. “I’ve got to have some social life!” she says.

Tilghman is close to her three grown children, Wes, Jay and Missy, and three grandchildren. Although they are scattered across the country — from Alaska and Colorado to Garner, North Carolina, and right here in Topsail — they travel as much as they can. After she and her daughter, Missy, decided to move out of their separate campers, they moved in together last October at their current home sweet home in Surf City.

“It’s been absolutely wonderful. We make a good team!” Tilghman says. “She works during the day, I work part-time during the day, and then we visit at suppertime.”

Tilghman inspires people of all ages — especially those of us who, though we are decades younger, sometimes feel we don’t have enough energy to get through the day. ■



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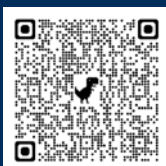
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FedEx driver Joe Engel gets his 15 minutes of fame for being good at his job and going above and beyond to make sure one couple's big day was complete.

# RingBearer

BY ANNESOPHIA RICHARDS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMY FOWLER SHORES



# W

hen FedEx driver Joe Engel raced across the beach in Surf City to deliver a couple's wedding rings during the early days of the pandemic, news of his heartwarming act spread through local and national media outlets. Four years later, the story has come to life once again, this time in

the form of a superhero-style television commercial as part of FedEx's newest ad campaign.

For Engel, what started out as just another day on the job turned into what will surely be one of the most memorable days of his life.

Originally from Michigan, Engel moved to Wilmington in 2018 after enduring a particularly brutal winter.





"I'd been working for FedEx for several years, and everything was just covered in ice," Engel remembers. "I kept thinking that I didn't know if I could do this anymore, driving around just white knuckled all the time."

Although he'd never visited the Port City, Engel decided on a whim to apply for an open position in Wilmington. When the pandemic changed life for everyone 18 months later, Engel's career took on a new level of significance. For bride and groom Savannah and Dylan Perkins, it even helped save their wedding day.

"There was nothing out of the ordinary about my route that afternoon, but when I pulled up to this house just over the Surf City Bridge, I could see a note on the door and had a feeling it was for me," Engel says. "It said, 'We had to get our rings ordered overnight and we're having our wedding ceremony on the beach,' and in big bold letters at the bottom, 'You have the rings.'"

With no sign of anyone at the house, Engel began walking down the street searching for a way onto the sand since most of beach accesses were closed due to COVID. When he noticed a nearby neighbor

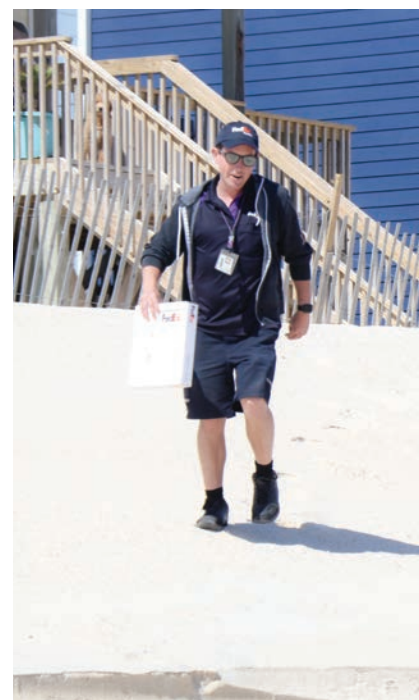
standing on her balcony looking out towards the water, he realized she might be able to help.

"I yelled over to her and asked if there was a wedding going on down there, and she kind of shushed me at first," Engel remembers. "So I said, 'I'm sorry, but I actually have their rings,' and she was like, 'Oh, my goodness!'"

The neighbor quickly directed Engel to use her private beach access, and he quickly spotted the bride and groom standing down the beach surrounded by a small group of people. When one of the guests noticed him and alerted the others of his presence, Engel says the bride turned around and started running towards him.

"I thought, 'OK, I guess I'm doing this, and then we're both just running towards each other in this cheesy movie kind of way,'" he says. "We met somewhere in the middle, and she thanks me, and we had a little moment where we just talked to each other for a second. I congratulated her and told her to go back to her wedding, and then I just turned around, waved to her and left."

News and photos of the unique



***"I thought, 'OK, I guess I'm doing this, and then we're both just running towards each other in this cheesy movie kind of way."***

***"We met somewhere in the middle..."***





delivery quickly made the rounds on social media, and before long Engel was identified and started receiving calls for interviews from across the country. Everyone from Engel's friends, family his FedEx coworkers and the community loved the story, but for Engel it was all about just doing what he could to make someone else's day better.

"I always think of what if I was in that situation, and obviously I'd want someone to do everything they could to help me out," Engel says. "It's not how most people are anymore, so I don't think anyone really expects anything, but I have no problem going the extra mile from time to time. I think the world is so divided now, and

we just need to do as much as we can to help each other out."

Over the next three years, excitement over the story eventually calmed down and life

went on as normal for Engel, until FedEx surprised him with a phone call in the fall of 2023. The company was planning their new ad campaign called "Tall Tales of True Deliveries" and wanted to highlight Engel's story in one of its commercials. After several phone conversations Engel happily accepted the opportunity, and FedEx flew him to New York City to film the television spot in December.

"We shot it in a few days, and it was incredible," he says. "I'd never been to New York before, and I'm going there to shoot a commercial and getting all this VIP treatment. It was so surreal."

Although Engel says the company described the general gist of the commercial to him while filming, it wasn't until receiving a video right before it began airing that he saw how creatively they brought his story to life. From the likeness of him as a cartoon superhero to the clever use of his voice in the narration to his last-minute real-life cameo ending, Engel couldn't



---

FedEx driver Joe Engel saved the day with an emergency delivery of the wedding rings at Savannah and Dylan Perkins' wedding on Topsail Island.







*“...happiness  
is more  
important  
than money.”*

believe how well it all turned out.

“I have a two-year-old son, and when the commercial actually came on one day he ran to the TV and just stared at it,” Engel says. “It was like he knew it was me, and I just thought, wow, that is so cool.”

As the commercial continues to air and more people in the community are re-introduced to his story, Engel has noticed an increase in the number of notes he finds left out by customers.

Although he’ll occasionally come across a request he cannot accommodate due to distance or timing, he still tries his best to fulfill as many as possible. Engel’s passion for his job remains as strong as ever, and he hopes to continue delivering for FedEx for as long as they need him.

“This is the perfect job for me because I’m a talker, I’m a driver, I love the beach and I get to work on the beach every day,” he says. “It’s obviously not the kind of job I’m going to get rich from, but I think happiness is more important than money. I’m definitely committed to the company, and I hope whatever changes they might make in the future, they’d always have a spot for me.” ■

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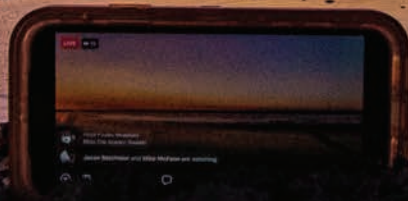
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# A Brighter Future

Losing sight in both eyes has not stopped Surf City author and painter Nancy McCurtin from pursuing her passions and opening a new art gallery.

BY MELISSA SLAVEN WARREN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMY FOWLER SHORES





Learning how to paint had always been on Surf City resident Nancy McCurtin's bucket list. So, at the age of 69, she decided to take art classes with an artist she'd met at church. For three years, she enjoyed bringing life to animals, nature and other subjects through her painting.

Then, in 2000, the unimaginable happened for the budding artist. She suffered a central retinal vein occlusion and lost sight in her left eye.

"Basically, I had a stroke in my eye," McCurtin says. "It blocked the circulation, everything erupted, and the eye was ruined."

For the next 16 years, she managed just fine with vision in one

---

McCurtin, who enjoys painting with acrylics, has a home studio and gallery which she shares with other local artists.





eye. She stayed active in her church, with her family and with painting. Until her worst fear came to life.

In 2016 McCurtin suffered another central retinal vein occlusion in her right eye. She could no longer see. Everything she'd taken for granted in life was now a challenge.

"I was in shock for a long time," she says. "I sank into a deep depression. I started thinking of all the things I couldn't do. I couldn't jump in the car and drive anywhere. I couldn't babysit my grandkids. I couldn't do my church activities. Everything was couldn't, couldn't, couldn't. And then after about six months, I said to myself, well, what can you do?"

That's when McCurtin, a former elementary school teacher, decided to write a book about coping with her blindness and learning how to live her new life. The

book, titled *The Complete Story of Topsey the Blind Sea Turtle*, is told through the lens of Topsey and his other sea creature friends, who each have their own handicaps.

"I started writing this story as an allegory to my own circumstance," she says. "Topsey is a teacher who loses his sight overnight. He now has to depend on his friends to help him with his daily activities. In the fall, when his students come back to class, they discover

Topsey is blind, and his students jump in to help him. It's not meant to be just a children's story, but one for all ages. It's a story of courage and encouragement that everyone can relate to."

McCurtin put a lot of time and effort into writing and publishing her book. But there was one thing she really "missed horribly." Painting.

McCurtin took some more lessons and learned how to paint without sight. Acrylic is her favorite medium, but now she incorporates tactile materials like string that are raised on the canvas so she can feel it. She also uses sand for beach scenes. She sticks straight pins into her canvas to create shapes of her subject and help her mark where she wants her subjects to go. She then



I was in shock for a long time ... Everything was couldn't, couldn't, couldn't. And then after about six months, I said to myself, well, what can you do?

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paints inside of the pins.

Her favorite subjects to paint are “animals and fun stuff.” She recently finished a painting of a giant mushroom with a little frog sitting on top with water running in the background.

“I call that one *Singing in the Rain*,” McCurtin says. “I sold that one. And I sold one recently of a hot air balloon. I put string around the outside of the balloon and used string to divide up the stripes and painted within the lines.”

McCurtin says it’s all about imagination.

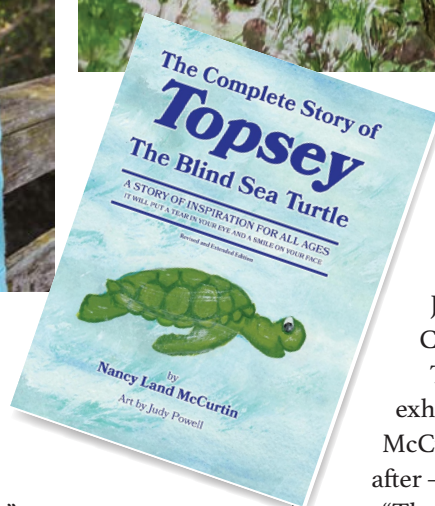
“They say art is something that



comes from your imagination,” she says. “It’s not copying a picture onto a canvas. And since I can’t see anything anyway, it all has to come from my imagination.”

McCurtin was not content to sit by herself and paint. She wanted to be around other painters. In 2023 she moved to a new house that had a spacious dining room at the front.

“I certainly wasn’t going to be throwing any big dinner



parties, so I thought, I’ll make an art studio out of this,” she says.

She didn’t want the studio just for herself; she wanted other artists to use it as well. In fact, she turned the entire downstairs into a studio and in June 2024 had the grand opening of Trellis Art Center.

Trellis Art Center in Hampstead hosts classes, exhibitions and visiting artists. The center features McCurtin’s works — both before losing her sight and after — and other local and regional artists.

“The purpose of creating this studio is to encourage artists and give them a place to show their art,” McCurtin says. “It’s not a big, fancy, expensive studio. It’s very small, but I have lots of wall space for hanging art. We want to encourage artists, especially struggling artists who want to





## READ THE BOOK

For more information on Nancy McCurtin's book, *The Complete Story of Topsey the Blind Sea Turtle*, visit her website at [nancylandmccurtin.com](http://nancylandmccurtin.com).

## VISIT THE GALLERY

To learn more about **Trellis Art Center** or to schedule an appointment, visit [trellisartcenter.com](http://trellisartcenter.com).

display their work to come and see us.”

Topsail Beach resident Tom Bradford is Trellis Art Center's co-director. With a master's degree in fine art and a career in the arts and education, Bradford serves as curator, reviewing works to see if they will make a good showing. Trellis Art Center accepts paintings, sculpture, pottery, photography, jewelry and literary arts.

While losing her sight has not entirely affected her artistic passions, it is frustrating to McCurtin that she can't physically see what she has created.

“That's mostly because I want it to be good, and I'm not sure if it is,” she says. “I guess the blessing is that I had my sight for 69 years and I can remember what things look like so I can try to make it look like that object — or at least try to. But it is fun trying.” ■



Nancy McCurtin and Tom Bradford at the grand opening of Trellis Art Center.



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# A Taste of the Mediterranean

Jenna and Pete Skenteris' Santorini brings the flavors of Greece and Italy to Surf City.

STORY & PHOTOS BY PAT FONTANA



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Jenna Skenteris always knew she wanted to be a chef. At a very young age, she learned how to cook from her grandparents and her mother. Pete Skenteris grew up in a family of restaurant owners. Last year, Jenna and Pete bought a restaurant in Surf City and transformed it into Santorini Greek & Italian Bistro, which features Jenna's unique, authentic recipes and has become a thriving family-run business on Topsail Island.

After graduating from Fayetteville Technical Community College's Culinary Arts program, Jenna

officially became a chef but realized she "didn't know how to run a restaurant," which was another lifelong dream for her. She then enrolled in Fayetteville Technical Community College's business program and met her future husband on her second day of school.

"Pete's family had owned restaurants for generations," Jenna says.

With a business mind, Pete now takes care of the operational aspect of the restaurant while also teaching as an adjunct instructor at Fayetteville Technical



Community College (FTCC). Jenna previously taught in the FTCC culinary program and, in fact, was still commuting every morning as she and Pete were launching Santorini.

Jenna says her experience teaching, combined with bartending and working as a chef, prepared her well for owning a restaurant.

“Teaching culinary school taught me how to



Below: A sampling of the fare at Santorini: Loaded Greek Fries, Santorini Pizza & Chicken Marsala over Linguine.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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deal with people,” she says, noting that there is a certain amount of empathy needed for staff and for customers. She adds that her teaching experience taught her “how to train people better, how to handle any situation thrown at you in the restaurant business.”

Jenna was determined to own her own restaurant, and they tried to pursue several different opportunities. After researching different options, she says, “We felt like it would be smart to purchase an existing, turnkey

restaurant.” Although she and Pete both grew up in Fayetteville, Jenna says her uncle would bring her to the Topsail area on occasion and she has always loved the beach.

When a restaurant in Surf City was listed for sale, Jenna says they ignored it for a while, but then the timing just seemed right.

“Everything pointed to it,” she says.

They appreciated the small-town feel of the area and



## FOOD & DRINK

realized it was the right time for the family-run business. In fact, Jenna says, “We saw an opportunity to make it better.”

After operating the existing restaurant for a while, they both decided it was time for a rebrand. They expanded the Italian offerings to include Greek dishes. Jenna says she learned Greek cooking from Pete’s family. She credits Pete, her family, their staff, their customers and the community for the success they have seen since rebranding and becoming Santorini Greek & Italian Bistro.

Acknowledging that some of the menu changes and some of the recipes had to be changed to improve the food options available to their customers, Jenna says that “constructive criticism really got us here.” She adds that they have an incredible staff as well as “certain regular customers during the week. We’ve created our own community here.”

Everything at Santorini is authentic to the family’s roots. As the main cook, Jenna makes all the sauces from scratch, including pastitsio, a customer favorite that



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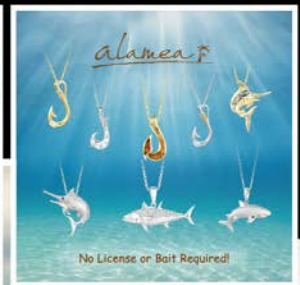
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is popularly known as Greek lasagna and requires a lengthy preparation.

For the Greek dishes, such as spanakopita, Jenna says, “We deal with a lot of phyllo dough.” Another popular item and “definitely the most delicious pizza we have,” Pete and Jenna agree, is the Santorini Pizza, which they describe as “like a Gyro on a pizza.”

“It has all my favorite aspects of a gyro,” Jenna says.

Part of Santorini’s rebranding included securing a liquor license and stocking the bar with Greek and Italian wines and beer. New offerings include Mythos Hellenic Lager, a European Pale Lager style beer, and Peroni, one of the best Italian beers and certainly one of the most popular. Lyrarakis wine, such as the well-loved Dafni, hails from a family vineyard in Crete that features indigenous varieties, including three they saved from extinction.

Jenna says that rebranding and establishing a strong name in Italian and Greek cuisine has been a learning experience.

“It takes a team, and I have a pretty solid one,” she says.

She explains that she has brought on an all-new staff since rebranding and that the kitchen staff has remained with the restaurant since day one of the Santorini name and experience.

Jenna’s brother, Jesse, has worked for Santorini since the beginning and is also a cook. They have a staff of about 15, including pizza workers, prep workers and wait staff. Jenna

emphasizes that she and Pete treat their employees well.

Pete and Jenna also focus on treating their customers well.

“We put some love into it,” Jenna says. “We try to make sure there’s a dish on the menu for everyone. We want it to feel as comfortable as possible with a positive atmosphere.”

As part of developing that more positive atmosphere, Pete and Jenna have also completed a lot of

cosmetic work on the restaurant. They repainted, redecorated, expanded the bar area and added restaurant seating. The interior is bright and welcoming. Out back, they add, “We have the best view of the sunset.”

For the menu of authentic dishes and customer favorites, Jenna re-emphasizes

that they bring their family’s recipes to the table.

“I couldn’t do it without my husband,” Jenna says. “My entire family has been supportive of me following my dreams. They were honest. I’m blessed to have a good family.”

Santorini is open for dinner Tuesday through Saturday from 4 to 9 pm all year round.

Jenna and Pete are excited about the future of Santorini. As to the leap of faith in purchasing the restaurant, rebranding and moving to the Topsail area, Jenna says, “I set a target and did everything in my power to do it.” The result is an amazing blend of authentic Greek and Italian dishes, prepared with fresh ingredients and love. ■



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# To the Rescue

BY EDWARD WILLS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY VICKY OLIVER



With the help of Sundial Coffee and Tea, Sneads Ferry residents Sadie and Christopher Bush find Topsail-area homes for the Costa Rican street dogs they met on their honeymoon.





While on their honeymoon in Costa Rica in the spring of 2024, Sadie and Christopher Bush were stopped in their tracks by the sight of some very tiny animals in the road they were traveling.

At first they thought the animals were birds or rodents because they were so small, but closer inspection revealed something else: six crying, thirsty and hungry puppies.

“It was just a natural reaction to get out and help them,” Chris says.

Some puppies were in the roadway. Others were in an overturned crate on the side of the road. No other dogs were around.

“They were so small that four of them fit in my hands,” Sadie recalls. “The puppies barely had teeth and they were covered with fleas.”

The couple named the puppies Sweet Pea, Mango, Corn Tortilla, Chica, Cocoa and Stella.

As fate would have it, the day before finding the puppies they had




---

Chris and Sadie Bush and their dog, Buoy, with the Costa Rican street dogs they brought home from their honeymoon.



eaten lunch at a restaurant where the owners also ran the nearby Costa Rica Dog Rescue. So, they knew just where to take the puppies for care.

But they received heart-breaking news. The shelter was full and could not accept the puppies. If Sadie and Chris did not take them, the puppies would go back to the street.

They were determined not to let that happen. Two of the puppies were adopted by another couple at the rescue facility, and then Sadie and Chris chose the only available option: Bring the remaining dogs home with them at the end of their honeymoon.

Fortunately, the shelter knew exactly what to do to prepare them for the flight to America. The puppies needed shots and other care. DNA testing revealed 28 different varieties in the dogs' lineage. Chris and Sadie also purchased two carriers for the trip to America.

After two flights, the dogs were at their new temporary home. "They joined Buoy, the couple's 90-pound mixed-breed dog. "Buoy was confused by the new hamster-sized playmates at first but opened his heart to them right away," Sadie says.

The Chris and Sadie did not want to adopt any of the puppies, so once they got home, the task became making sure they went to good homes. They started asking all their friends if they were interested in adopting. One of these friends was Bridget Leiviska, who owns popular Sundial Coffee and Tea in Holly Ridge. Bridget adopted Tica (formerly named Sweet Pea). To promote the puppies' adoption, she also held an adoption fair at the coffee shop. On May 19 the public was invited to come in and play with the

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Topsail-area dog lovers came to Sundial Coffee to meet and greet with the puppies.

puppies and possibly adopt one.

Sundial, a dog-friendly coffee haven, has a wall of pictures of patrons' dogs. Each dog customer receives a free pup cup of whipped cream and has his or her picture snapped. The photos are mounted on an ever-growing wall gallery.

"Almost everybody has a dog," Bridget says. "We wanted our shop to be a place where they knew they could bring their dogs along with them."

Quiet Waters Realty Group sponsored the event, and Truly Clear Dog Training of Richlands provided gifts, and community members offered donations.

"We were very careful who the puppies went to





and, unfortunately, we had to turn some people down,” Sadie says. “Some people see a puppy, want a puppy. They make snap decisions not realizing having a puppy is a 15-year commitment.”

One of Chris and Sadie’s adoption requirements was that the owner have the dog spayed or neutered when they were old enough. All the dogs were adopted by Topsail residents, but the Chris and Sadie say they maintain babysitting rights if the dogs’ owners need someone to fill in for them if they go on vacation or in other absences.

“Thanks to the Topsail community coming together, these



Costa Rican street dogs will only experience love and warm snuggles,” Sadie says.

She encourages readers of this article to make donations to the Costa Rica Dog Rescue shelter at [crdogrescue.com](http://crdogrescue.com).

“I hope people will support them,” Sadie says. “They do such great work with almost no money. Any amount will help.” ■

PHOTOS BY LAURA SMITH





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"I have found my happy place" is an interesting



Rutland Cottage is on the property of the 1893 Lucas Farmhouse, and their welcoming sign immediately puts guests at ease.

# A Happy Place

Amy and Glenn Newbury-Smith's charming Rutland Cottage is an Airbnb treasure in the woods.

BY MIKE JOHNSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT MCGRAW



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declaration, suggesting that someone has come to the end of a long quest. Happy places are unique to individuals since we all have different boxes to check for a spot to bring us optimal satisfaction. Some people travel the world to find their happy place, but my wife and I found ours in Rocky Point.

Amy and Glenn Newbury-Smith own and operate Lucas Farmhouse in Rocky Point. They are quite a pair. Vivacious Amy is an amazing photographer (you may be familiar with her former business, 10f 13 Photography), but she is mainly a quirky, artistic, human fairy. Her husband,



A king size bed in the loft feels like a snug little nest, and the sofa is a pull out full-size bed.

Glenn, is a dry-wit Brit and provides a nice balance to Amy's exuberance. They own or co-own a few funky watering holes in Downtown Wilmington (Banter, Duck & Dive),

and it's not surprising that their property would make such a unique destination.

Lucas Farmhouse was built in 1903 and, though not our primary subject,





CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The cottage offers a microwave, toaster, coffee machine and fridge with a few cold beverages for complimentary enjoyment.

is a destination unto itself. Operating as an inn for more than a decade, it has been the location for many photo shoots and community Easter egg hunts and is also where the couple resides. The Newbury-Smiths have stopped booking rooms in the main house, which allows them to focus their attention, and ours, on the amazing Rutland Cottage.

Nailed to a tree by the driveway is a bedazzled wooden arrow with the words "to cottage" written on it. The arrow points toward the woods where a thin trail cuts through the magnolias, maples and sycamores. There are photos on the Airbnb

listing so you know what's back there, but the first time you take that short little stroll through the woods and come upon the cottage, it does make your imagination flutter.

The clearing is just big enough to hold the structure, and the trees surrounding it are very close to the walls, so it hardly looks like anything was cleared at all, like the cottage has been part of the landscape for centuries. A small sign on a baby blue shutter says "Rutland Cottage, Established 2021" in an archaic script, like a marker you would see in a historic district.

Like a proud curator and hostess, Amy loves to share every detail,





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inside and out, and how the cottage came to be.

"After so many years of researching and dreaming about a tiny cottage in the woods, we realized that no plan, kit or shed remake was going to match the vision," she says. "The design came from my imagination and random finds from architectural salvage."

Amy and Glenn solicited the help of Tyler Fiel, craftsman and carpenter extraordinaire, to be adaptable and bring the eccentric tiny house to life.

"Tyler was the obvious choice to spearhead the project and has made so much magic for us in the house," Amy says. "His ability to listen and offer money-saving ideas was unmatched. The siding of the cottage is fencing. The money we saved there allowed us to spend more on authentic cedar shingles for the roof. When I asked if we could repurpose the dog-ear part of fencing for detail around the window at the peak, he did not hesitate."

Features and artistic touches abound inside the cottage, each a testament to ingenuity and creative design.

"The bathroom doors are from France and dictated how we built the interior," Amy says. "Two builders said, 'You don't design a house around doors,' but that's what we did. The floors, stairway and cabinetry are wood from a tobacco barn we stalked for the longest time. The brick floor in the bathroom came from a demolished house's chimney in Sneads Ferry. The 1890s porch columns came from a plantation in South Carolina that was beyond salvage."

Staying in this house, my wife and I sensed a whimsical magic. We looked around and considered every placed screw, each shim, every swipe of paint and appreciated the decisions and choices, like we were dwelling inside a work of art.

There is more to appreciate than



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Take a deep soak in the antique claw foot tub or enjoy a hot outdoor shower tucked out in the trees.

construction oddities, as there is even flair to the small comforts provided. The small retro ice box is stocked with sodas, beers and mocktails. If you did not pack your own, there's a small but intriguing selection of books and board games, diversions that you may not find in your own collections at home. Behind the house is an outdoor shower beneath two towering

sweetgums. I like looking up into the monochromatic canopy like I'm some kind of wood spirit rinsing off in the rain.

The bed in the cottage is in a loft over the kitchen. Climbing a ladder is required to reach the sleeping area, which is basically a king bed underneath a beautiful window that filters the perfect amount of natural



## PEEK INSIDE



light into the space. I love the ladder. It makes me feel like I'm climbing up to a cozy aerie and provides a little upper body workout.

The breakfasts are sumptuous and original: just-baked sandwiches, fresh fruit with honeycomb, juice, chocolates and all sorts of other goodies. The first time we stayed, breakfast was carried out by a sweet young goat named Feargus. There's nothing like looking out your cottage window and seeing a small goat prancing down a forest trail with your breakfast



The Lucas Farmhouse pubshed is always a fabulous surprise for the cottage guests.

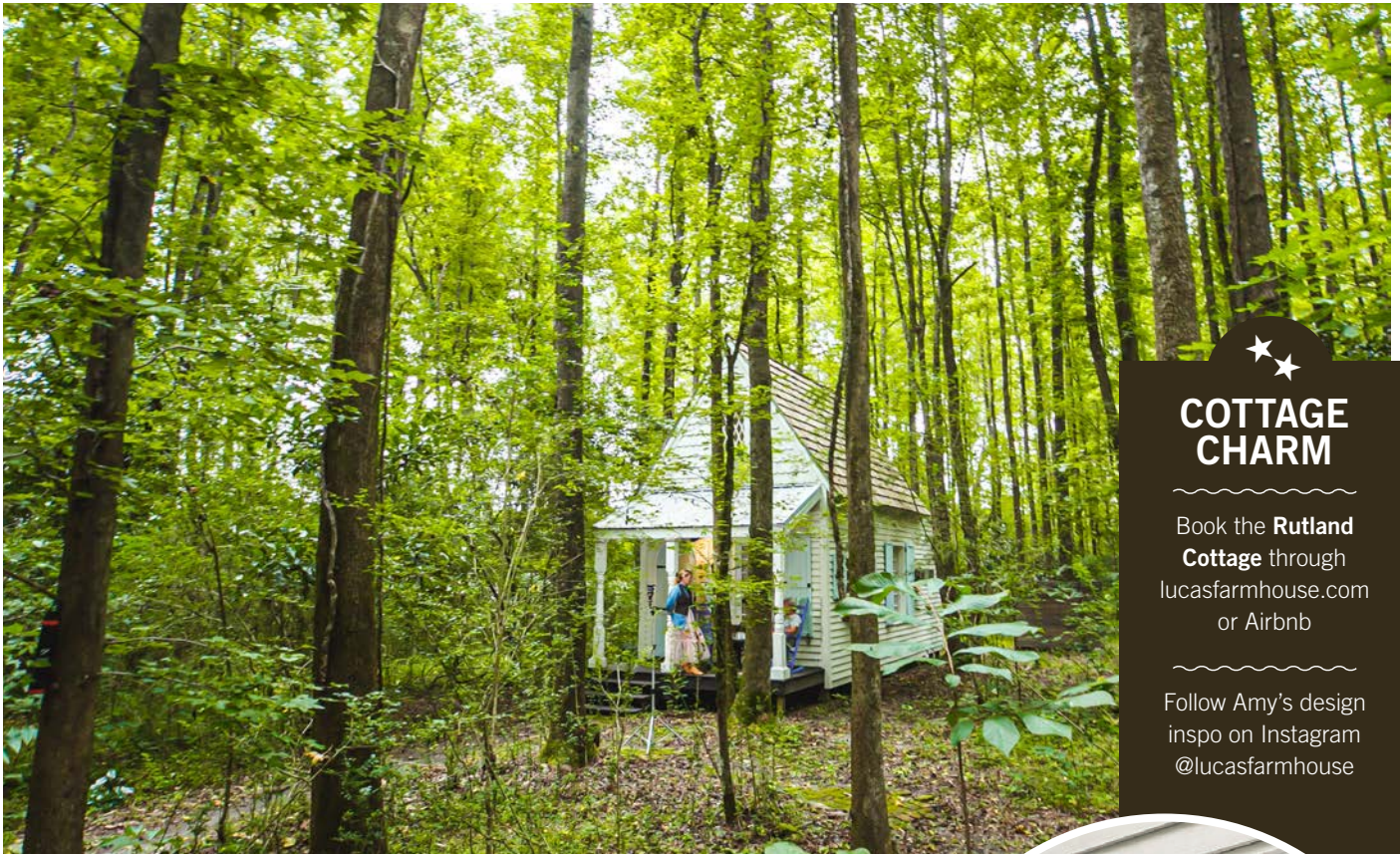


## PEEK INSIDE



renewed. That was the break I needed.' We genuinely believe in sharing the energy the property presents and, as always, that kindness is contagious."

Maybe Rutland Cottage is more than a happy place. Maybe it's a charging station or an alignment shop where a couple relearns how to move in sync, slow their pace and engage. ■



### COTTAGE CHARM

Book the **Rutland Cottage** through [lucasfarmhouse.com](http://lucasfarmhouse.com) or Airbnb

Follow Amy's design inspo on Instagram @lucasfarmhouse

packed on its back. Sadly, the goat has since passed on, but Amy says they will possibly train one of their other goats for that job.

There is no TV at the cottage. If you leave your laptop at home and shut off your smartphone, those screens are gone, too. Without those distractions, you can explore the house, knickknacks, books and games and ultimately tune in to your partner. Your own travel companion starts to emit this new

and curious energy as well, like everyone and everything between the walls is under a spell. Seeing your significant other in that light is much better than anything you could find on Netflix or your phone.

"We love it when people say 'this reminds me of my grandma's house' or 'this cottage is like a fairytale' — those are compliments that keep us inspired to keep doing this," Amy says. "The biggest reward, however, is when someone comments 'I feel





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From its administrative employees and coordinators to dental hygienists and dentists — including Dr. Matthew Parr, Dr. Jordan Bronstein, Dr. Paige Full, Dr. Shayla Stear and Dr. Carli Compton — the Surf City Dental team works hard to ensure it's all smiles for patients every time. Case in point: The dental office has amassed 1,000+ five-star reviews on Google.

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Plus, patients can trust they are getting more than just a quality service — they are receiving a stellar customer service experience.

"Dentistry at Surf City Dental is not just about procedures and techniques," Dr. Parr. "It's about the human touch."

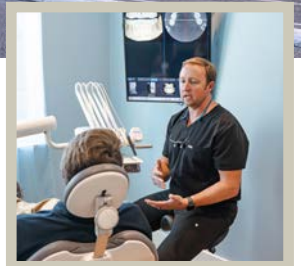
The dental office offers a holistic approach, aiming to not only provide comfortable and comprehensive appointments, but also to see each patient as a whole person beyond their teeth.

When patients opt for a treatment, they can trust the one-of-a-kind approach Surf City Dental brings to the table to remain educated, involved and engaged at every step while keeping in mind current needs and those that could happen down the road.

Surf City Dental is also committed to physical growth. Since its inception 15 years ago, the office has grown from its inaugural space between a pharmacy and a Family Dollar to its now standalone state-of-the-art dental facility.

"Our office allows us to add staff and equipment to address the needs of our growing community," Dr. Parr says. "We not only take care of the community, we employ our community. We are very proud of our track record of long-term staff and patients."

The office exudes a calm essence via spa-like surroundings



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

and calming coastal colors.

"We understand the anxieties many face when it comes to dental visits," Dr. Parr says. "With that in mind, we have created an environment that feels more like a calming retreat than a typical dental office."

Dr. Parr adds: "We live and work in Surf City because of the people. Our staff is fantastic, our patients are fantastic and our community has been a perfect place to build our brand. Surf City is the perfect place to call home. ... We put smiles on faces, and that is a great feeling."

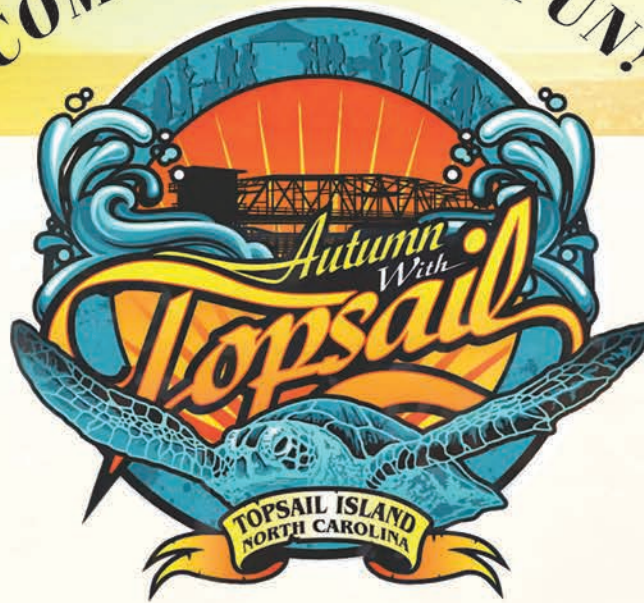
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# Autumn with Topsail Festival

October 18, 19 & 20



PHOTO BY JEFF WENZEL



PHOTO BY STELLA SPERA



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PHOTO BY STELLA SPERA

The Historical Society of Topsail Island's largest annual fundraiser, the Autumn with Topsail Festival has been an island tradition since 1988. It features a juried Artists' and Crafts Court with more than 100 regional artists displaying and selling their work. The three-day event also offers live musical entertainment, amazing food, a beer and wine tent, a silent auction and a bounce house area for children. A free shuttle service is provided from various parking areas in Topsail Beach.

Go to [autumnwithtopsail.com](http://autumnwithtopsail.com) for information.



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PHOTO BY ERIC VITHALANI



PHOTO BY WILTON WESCOTT

# OCEAN FEST 2024

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OCEAN FEST is back! In addition to its popular Retro Surf Contest and Beach Cleanup at Beach Access 19, the award-winning annual festival at Surf City's Soundside Park will offer a new community event called Oysterpalooza and a Benefit Music Festival with six bands.

Attendees will experience Surf City's stunning waterfront views while enjoying live music, food trucks and drinks and exploring captivating eco exhibits and local vendors. After the 2024 event, OCEAN FEST is moving to the first weekend of May in 2025.

Find more information at [theoceanfest.org](http://theoceanfest.org).



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# *Topsail's* **TOP CHOICE AWARDS**

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**VOTING ENDS  
OCTOBER 1**



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# Cast Your Votes for Topsail's Top Choice

BY CAMERON RHINEHARDT

What are you passionate about in your community? Where are you a regular, how do you spend sunny days with your family, when do you unwind? Topsail Insider Podcast wants to know!

Topsail Insider Podcast, hosted and produced by Christa Schroeder, is launching a friendly competition for local businesses, and you can nominate your favorites.

Inspired by the community interest that locals and vacationers share, Schroeder wanted to create a digital scrapbook to provide a one-stop place for local information. She found herself on social media pages that connect locals to tourists, and after noticing how many recommendations people asked for, she decided to make things a bit easier.

"I wanted a way to answer these questions with a simple link to make information very accessible," Schroeder says.

Thus, the Topsail's Top Choice contest was born. The contest runs for about a month and a half, starting with nominations.

## The Timeline

### SEPTEMBER 17

Nominations begin at [topsailstopchoice.com](https://topsailstopchoice.com). Locals can nominate their favorite local businesses, and local business owners can nominate their own businesses.

### SEPTEMBER 24

Voting begins and nominations are still open. During this time, people can visit the website to see real-time voting trends. 1st, 2nd and 3rd places will be shown as well as all other nominated businesses.

### SEPTEMBER 30

The nomination window closes.

### OCTOBER 25

Voting continues, but the results go dark. Voters can no longer see how voting is going. The nomination list is still up, but rankings are no longer visible.

### OCTOBER 31

Voting ends.

### NOVEMBER 15

Results are announced across multiple platforms!



While there are winners, each business nominated is still listed, providing a single comprehensive list of all things local, all while drawing attention to the community's small businesses.

This is a chance to show love and loyalty to your favorite local businesses. According to Schroeder, local businesses are constantly giving back to the community in more ways than one.

"The local businesses sponsor and support locals, the community, nonprofits, etc.," she says. "It's time for us to give back to them!"

The contest is as beneficial to locals and visitors as the businesses. Having one link with categorized businesses makes finding things to do incredibly easy. Whether it's a new favorite restaurant or a much-needed massage, you can find what you're looking for with just one click of a button.

"This is great for the community because it makes us rally behind our small businesses," Schroeder says. "When you have a small business and are giving back with all of your heart, it's your entire life, family and time. Business owners often don't get recognized, so this is a great time to stand behind and show loyalty to our community's local businesses. They're going to feel lifted up and supported by our community."

**TO NOMINATE, VOTE AND VIEW** visit the  
Topsail's Top Choice website at [topsailstopchoice.com](https://topsailstopchoice.com).





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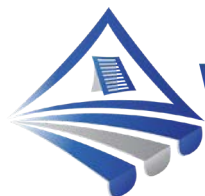
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## Clint Black, Easton Corbin & Kassi Ashton headline Surf City Live NC

November 2 at Soundside Park, 517 Roland Avenue, Surf City

BY ANNA BETH ADCOCK

Calling all country music fans! For a “five-star concert experience like no other,” grab your tix before they sell out for a honky tonk time at the island’s third annual Surf City Live NC. Previously dubbed Surf City Live, the show on November 2 features a slew of performers appealing to all types of country fans.

“The driving force behind this is community-driven,” says Concert Promoter Jeremy Shugarts, who has overseen each of the renditions of the event from conception to completion. “Instead of driving to Wilmington, Raleigh or Charlotte to see big acts, they are coming to your doorstep — all you have to do is come and be part of it.”

From chart-topping feature artist Clint Black to Easton Corbin, aka the No. 1 hit singer of, “A Little More Country Than That” and “Roll with It” to rising country star Kassi Ashton, this year’s rendition of Surf City Live NC is sure to be stacked with classic jams and avant-garde tracks.

“We are trying to do the past,

present and future of country music,” Shugarts says. “Clint Black is a legend; present country is Easton Corbin, who has a page full of No. 1 [songs]; and Kassi Ashton is the future — if you’ve never heard of her, her music is playing all the time [on streaming services and the radio].” Case in point: Ashton’s 1.1 million+ monthly listeners on Spotify.

The event, which is occurring at Soundside Park and is now presented by Shoreline Events, embodies all the aspects avid concertgoers know and love about live music with coastal flair — an alfresco ambiance with the Intracoastal Waterway as a backdrop, a lineup of musical talent and hordes of music lovers united. In essence, good vibes all around.

“The whole goal is to boost the off-season,” Shugarts says. “Around November, things get quiet until March. This gives people something to do — and it impacts Airbnbs, hotels and restaurants.” Another perk, parking is free in town after November 1!



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

When all that singing and dancing undoubtedly works up an appetite, the fest is prepped with 14-plus local food vendors dishing up delish fare — Coastal Cay Fish Tacos, Maine Lobstah Shack, Nautical Bowls, Surf City Sips, The Sea Queen and more.

“There’s everything from seafood and burgers to lemonade,” Shugarts says.

As one of the country music greats, George Strait, says, “I ain’t here for a long time, I’m here for a good time.” And that’s just a peek at the type of time you’ll have at this twangy island fest.

For more info and tickets head to [surfcitylivenc.com](http://surfcitylivenc.com) or [@surfcitylivenc](https://www.instagram.com/surfcitylivenc).



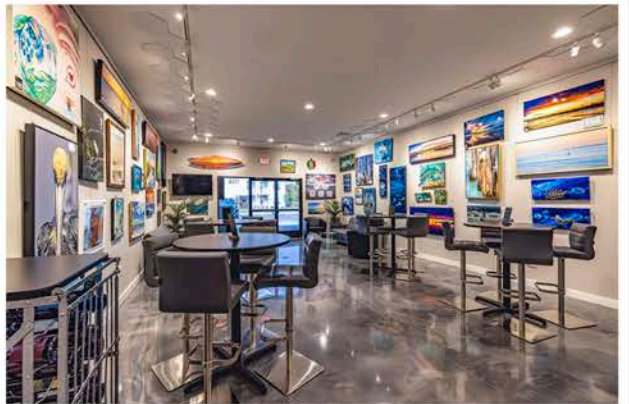
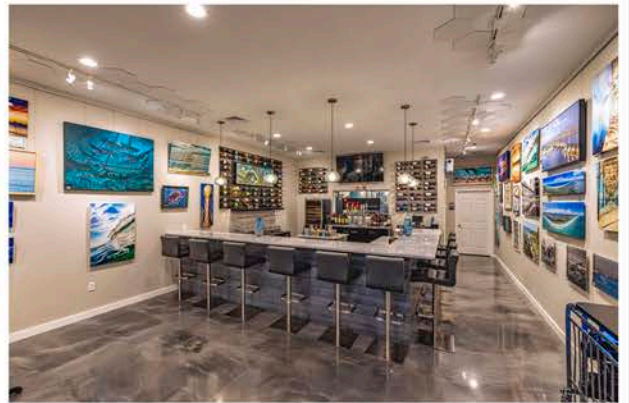
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# 14th Annual Ocean City Jazz Festival

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL RITENOUR

The 2024 Ocean City Jazz Festival took place from July 4 to 6 in the historic Ocean City beach community on Topsail Island. The festival showcased top-tier jazz performances, fostering an appreciation for the genre and uniting artists and attendees. The event also featured a VIP bourbon tasting, a wear-white party and a bus trip to enhance the overall experience. The festival aims to inspire a new generation culturally while contributing to the local economy.





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# Surf City Independence Day Celebration

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
EMMA LAYNE PHOTOGRAPHY

On July 3 the Surf City Independence Day Celebration drew a crowd to Soundside Park. Jim Quick and Coastline's energetic performances and captivating music had the crowd dancing all evening, and 14 food trucks provided everything from savory snacks to sweet treats. At 9 pm the sky lit up with vibrant colors from the spectacular fireworks show. A cherished tradition in Surf City, the event is always free and open to all, making it a fantastic opportunity for families and friends to create lasting memories. Be sure to mark your calendar for the 2025 celebration!



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