

THE FOLKS

Behind the Fishing

By Dave Holton

A fishing marina relies on people – people to manage the dry dock, people to drive the boats and people to clean the fish. But when you ask those people what really makes a marina special, they’ll tell you something else. They’ll tell you that it’s *you*, the people who visit them every year to go out fishing.



Photos: Dave Holton

Todd Cummings Marina Manager and Lift Operator

Todd Cummings speaks with an accent that stands out from the “Hoi Toiders” of Wanchese. He grew up in Long Island, NY, clamming the Great South Bay with two older brothers. Todd first came to the Outer Banks on a family vacation a few decades ago. “Wasn’t much here at that point,” he laughs. Now, he considers himself more at home on the Outer Banks, where he’s raised two children, than in New York. “It’s been five years since I last visited. When I go there, I’m quickly ready to come back home.”

In 1989, Todd started in marina work over at the Salty Dawg in Manteo. When the Salty Dawg shut down, most the boats moved to Outer Banks Marina. “The Salty Dawg closed down in October 2004, and I was here by November.” Thanks to that transition, his relationships with some of the owners who keep boats in the Outer Banks Marina’s dry dock go back 25 years.

“These boats are their babies.”

The marina has a community feel that sits well with Todd. “A lot of the boat captains and the other guys, after the days are over, we go down to the Tiki Bar together,” he says. And he likes the convenience of the marina. “There’s an electronics guy, Joe’s Marine for outboards, and plenty of fiberglass people to call. You have everything you need right here.”

When asked the most important part of his job, Todd laughs. “Making sure people are happy.” But that’s not always easy when it comes to moving boats. “Ninety percent of people are easy, but then there are some that are a bit tougher,” he says. “Some people watch us move their boats around on the lift, and they ask, ‘Are you sure you can do this?’ He laughs again. “But I get it. These boats are their babies.”

He assures customers that he and his colleague, Ed Baldwin, know what they’re doing. “It’s either Ed or me moving the boat, not some kid like you’ll find at other marinas. We won’t lift a boat we can’t lift, even if the owners are persistent.”



Frank Smith Boat Captain

Captain Frank Smith loves when people come aboard the *Wild Card*, his twin diesel-powered, 35-foot Bertram, just to sit and talk. “I’m subject to talk you to death because I love what I’m doing.”

A Coast Guard serviceman turned fisherman, Captain Frank hails from Bath, NC. He remembers his first fishing trip well. When he was just 12, he went fishing for cod from a head boat. “She dipped down, and the water sprayed over me,” he says, “and I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”

Captain Frank appreciates how Outer Banks locals look out for each other. “Back when I didn’t know nothing about nothing, I lost my rudder. Here I was a young guy, broke and stuck. And a local crabber towed me all the way in. Didn’t want money, just helped me out. You just don’t find that other places.”

Now, he tries to impart that same feeling to those who come out fishing with him. “I’ll do whatever it takes. If folks have a good time on the first trip, they’re hooked for life.” He demands the same from his mates, who deal firsthand with the customers.

Captain Frank knows what it takes to keep people happy. “You get some folks who don’t want to fish, like this one little girl, recently. Next thing you know I’ve got her up driving the boat.” He shows off a picture of her at the helm. “Look at the smile on her face. That says it all. And I’m just as excited as they are, every day.”

Even after a lifetime of shrimping and commercial fishing, Captain Frank still doesn’t ever get burned out. “There are days when you are tired, sunburned, then you look over and you see that sunset, or the next morning you see that sunrise, and that’s like the biggest cup of coffee you could ever have.”

Captain Frank Smith grins wide and tips his stainless-steel cup toward the sky to emphasize his last point. “If the good Lord takes me tomorrow, I don’t want no tears, because I have been truly blessed.”



Bucky Mann Fish Cleaner

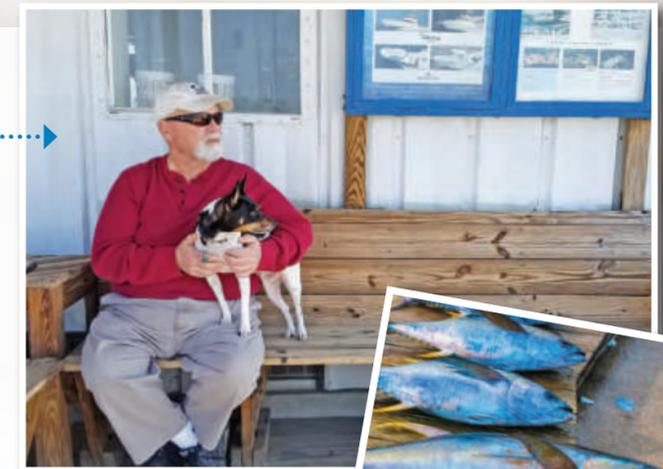
“What better office could you ask for,” says Bucky Mann, fish cleaner. “I look out over these boats every morning, and I wonder how people do anything else.”

A true Wanchese – “born and raised here, across the creek” – Bucky Mann was 8 when he first went out on a fishing boat. “Been at the marina for a long time.” He says. “Went to school with Wayne [Umphlett, owner of Outer Banks Marina]. When I talked to him about a job, he hired me on the spot.”

For two decades, Bucky’s office has been a shack that’s just a short walk from the Ship’s Store.

It’s an open-air operation, something Bucky fought for because it allows people to watch his employees work. “I think people want to see that the fish they get after its cleaned is the fish they caught. Other places take your fish into some back room and give you a vacuum-sealed bag. We don’t do that.”

In the summer that means hard work in the heat. “But it’s like a show. Most people seen nothing like it before,” he says. “Our main objective is to do as good a job as possible and do as quick a job as possible so people can get home and enjoy their catch. My guys can clean a 40-pound tuna



Bucky loves to sit with his dog Maggie, who he’s trained to keep the birds away from the fish.

in under two minutes. I’ve cleaned 4-ounce croakers in the morning and 350-pound tuna in the afternoon, and people are just as excited by both.”

And if you’re wondering how to fix your catch, Bucky knows a thing or two. “Many people’s first question is ‘How do I cook this?’ so I made up a cookbook with a few of my old family recipes.”

Bucky loves to sit with his dog Maggie, who he’s trained to keep the birds away from the fish. “I’ve looked over the bows of these boats a thousand times and seen the sun come up,” he says. “There’s nothing like it in the world.”

But most of all, Bucky Mann loves meeting people. “They come from all over, and some people we see again year after year. I just enjoy talking to them.”



It’s about time to make a few new fishing buddies, wouldn’t you say?

Folks like Todd Cummings, Captain Frank Smith and Bucky Mann are the lifeblood of the marina, but they can’t wait to meet you, the other half of the equation. So head on over to Outer Banks Marina. They’ll be there, waiting to welcome you in and get you out on the water.



BROAD CREEK • WANCHESE, NORTH CAROLINA

708 Harbor Drive, Wanchese • (252) 473-5344 • obxmarina.com

A BUFFET with a Mother's Heart

By Dave Holton

"I don't take any of it for granted."

t h u m p - t h u m p ...

Liz Dowless runs Jimmy's Seafood Buffet from a room on the second floor of the restaurant, a modest space with a desk, a chair and a computer. On a cold, off-season day she layers up with an extra jacket to keep warm while she works. It's not what anyone would call a life of luxury.

So what is it, then, that Liz doesn't take for granted? It doesn't take long to figure that out.



When the mother of three talks about the journey she's made as the owner of Jimmy's Seafood Buffet – 18 years of labor, love and loss layered in equal measure – she's quick to shift the conversation away from herself to others. Her employees. Her customers. Her community. Her family. "When we started, Jimmy's was a lot smaller, more of a typical buffet. But we set out to be different. We wanted the food to feel homemade, to avoid the canned stuff and to focus on flavor and quality ... and to focus on fun." She pauses, thoughtful, then smiles, again, as she repeats.

"We really wanted to focus on fun."

As she says the words, there's a touch of sadness that lies just a heartbeat behind her smile.

t h u m p - t h u m p ...

But she continues.

"We just added an outside bar area," says Liz. "We are continually renovating and adding on. We also have fun promotions like Wild Wednesdays, where we do a wall of crab legs that includes local soft shells, local blue crabs and crabs from every coast. On top of that, we have all-you-can-eat lobster tail every Monday and Friday until 4 p.m. And if you want delivery or takeout, we have a whole separate kitchen for that. People love the clam bakes – they're especially popular."

And Liz doesn't stop there. Her enthusiasm fills the room as she describes more fun features.

"We have horse rides and a petting zoo. And we have a chalkboard up front where the customers can write messages and take pictures to send home to family and friends." She smiles as she says that last bit, the kind of smile that takes up her whole face. "It's exciting to see what people write, to see how creative people get."

Liz laughs both easily and often, which might lead you to believe that her journey has been easy. It hasn't been.

t h u m p - t h u m p ...



Jimmy, with Jimmy's 14 Years



Liz, Jimmy's Owner



Vickie, Server with Jimmy's 18 Years



Jason, Server & Liz's Son



Matt, Kitchen Manager with Jimmy's 10 Years



In August of 2003, just months after Liz and her husband, Jerry Dowless, purchased the restaurant outright from their other founding partner, Jerry passed away unexpectedly. Liz was left the sole owner with the combined responsibility of running a restaurant and raising three young children alone.

Who would have blamed her for quitting? How could she "focus on fun" after such a tragedy?

But she didn't quit. She kept on, sticking to that original goal that she and her husband had once set to achieve together. And it turns out, she didn't have to go it alone after all. The members of this mother's work family are loyal indeed, a trait not always associated with the restaurant business.

"We have one waitress who has been with us since the beginning and a cook who has been with us for about 14 years. Most of our other employees have stuck with us for at least nine years, and we have students who come back to work with us summer after summer."

t h u m p - t h u m p ...

And as Liz's children grew, they joined the business as well. "One of my sons, Jason, waits tables, and my daughter, Sophia, helps out as a hostess," says Liz. "And my oldest, Shane, well, he lives in Colorado now, but when he can, he comes back in the summers to help out."

Beyond her immediate family, Liz also relies on her extended work family across the Outer Banks community. "Everyone on the beach works together. If I need to borrow crab from Captain George's or Awful Arthur's they're happy to send it over, and I'll always do the same for them. Also, Jim [Douglas]

over at Chilli Peppers was our original business partner. He's where the name Jimmy's comes from. And the owners of Spanky's used to work for me, so we have a great relationship."

Liz does her best to support the local fishing community as well. "I buy whatever I can locally, from tuna to catfish. Whatever I can get is going to be on the buffet." If she can't get it locally – "Alaskan snow crab isn't exactly local to North Carolina," she says with a laugh – Liz makes sure to buy her seafood from the best possible sources, which requires keeping up her education. "I went to Boston last March, to the Boston Seafood Show, where I studied how seafood is sourced. I want to understand where my food comes from. If I won't feed it to myself, I won't feed it to my customers."

t h u m p - t h u m p ...

Like any good mother, Liz wants her family to eat the best food possible. She cares more about providing her regulars with quality seafood than she does about pulling in more price-sensitive patrons through compromises. "The seafood industry is volatile. When they cut crab supply by 40%, the price shoots up. I could go somewhere else to get my crabs, but I don't want to cut quality."

Liz speaks fondly about her customers. "There's this one couple that comes all the way from Hatteras every Saturday and a family from Edenton that makes the trip from there to here and back again two to three times a week," says Liz. "And I get so many emails from people who book their vacations around when we open and close. Some people actually come back three times during just one week of vacation."

She loves getting emails from visitors and regularly responds to reviews on Facebook and TripAdvisor with personal messages. "I look through it all," she says. "It always makes me so happy."

t h u m p - t h u m p ...

Liz still laughs as she remembers the days when some customers thought that Jimmy's Seafood Buffet belonged to a certain island escapist with a penchant for cheeseburgers and margaritas. "Early on, lots of people thought the restaurant was owned by Jimmy Buffett," she says. "People would always ask us why we weren't playing Margaritaville!"

No, Jimmy's Seafood Buffet is no Parrothead chain restaurant. Jimmy's Seafood Buffet is a family.

And behind the flavors and the fun that this family offers up at their buffet on the beach, there steadily beats the brave heart of one proud, yet ever-modest, determined mother of three, who thumped on through adversity and kept on smiling.

t h u m p - t h u m p ...



A Tale of MERMAIDS WILD HORSES AND WINE

By Dave Holton

It's probably not a stretch for you to imagine that you're on the beach right now, slathered in sunscreen, with one eye on your kids playing in the surf and the other on a book. In fact, maybe that's *exactly* where you are, right now ... nice, right?

But maybe you'd like for your vacation to be more than just nice. To be something you can remember when you are back in the day-to-day of managing the rewarding but often overwhelming challenges of life as a parent, or student, or worker or fill-in-the-blank-here.

What could take your Outer Banks vacation from nice to extraordinary and memorable? Maybe it would be an evening sampling of North Carolina's wines and a sunset on the water. A glimpse of a wild stallion and a bald eagle from a boat? It could be a healthy dose of Outer Banks history and lore from a local?

And what about the kids? What will they tell their friends when they get back to school – that they got to swim in the ocean? What if they could say they turned into mermaids? What if *you* could say that? You probably grew up on Disney like everyone else. Admit it, at some point *you* wanted to be Ariel too.

Over the last few years, Kitty Hawk Kites has been hard at work developing two experiences that will let you accomplish all that in one day ... The Mermaid School and the Vineyard Voyage.

Welcome to the Mermaid School

When he started selling "Fin Fun Mermaid Tails" in his stores, Kitty Hawk Kites founder John Harris knew he wanted to offer more than just the product. One of the core values of Kitty Hawk Kites is safety, so John asked, "Wouldn't it be great if we could teach people how to swim in the tails safely?"

"But [the Mermaid School] is not just about swimming around in the tail," says Luke Baer, Recreational Sales Manager. "In line with teaching someone to fly, we wanted to give people a real experience."

Brooke Rowe, who has an eclectic background in communications, lifeguarding, scuba diving, musical theater and production design, signed on as Head Mermaid Instructor, and the team partnered with Sanderling Resort in Duck and Beachwoods Resort in Kitty Hawk. In 2016, the Mermaid School started offering classes two days a week at Sanderling Resort and five days a week at Beachwoods, and they are now working to expand to new places and pools.

According to Brooke, "the students have a fin-tastic time!" as they learn dolphin kicks and other tricks. Group lessons are available for those 7 and older (private lessons are available for those 6 and older), and no one's ever too old to be a mermaid. Says Brooke, "Equal amounts of adults and kids take the class. And we have lots of mermen too." She laughs. "The adults find it more challenging than the kids!"

The class has a theatrical element, and everyone gets involved. "The older students help the younger students," says Brooke, "and

everyone is part of a mermaid pod." The class seems to have a confidence-building effect on the students. "Everyone comes out of their shells," says Brooke with another laugh. After the class, students leave with official certificates and can arrange to have photos and video, should they want more proof of their transformation.

With one instructor to every four students, no one is left to flounder on their own. And safety always comes first. "All instructors are lifeguard, CPR and First Aid certified," says Luke, "and all students must pass a swim test before class."

And as one customer wrote on their instructor feedback form, "They were extremely patient in helping my child who was having trouble picking up the motion. They made sure she had fun!"

For more information, be sure to check out the Mermaid School Instagram page, @KHKMermaid, or website, www.kittyhawk.com/adventures/mermaid-school.

And next up, the Vineyard Voyage

Brian Efland, a captain who worked for nearly 10 years with Sea Grant and N.C. State, first came to Kitty Hawk Kites with an idea to build a special boat to carry groups on eco tours across the Currituck Sound. They pitched him on a destination – Sanctuary Vineyards in Currituck. Together, they now offer the Vineyard Voyage: a boat ride that starts in Duck and ends with a 4x4 drive down the backroads of the vineyard on tour to the tasting room. Once there, customers sample 14 or so different wines.

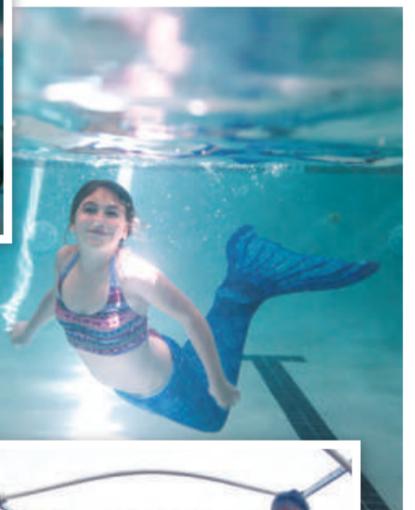
In 2015, Brian worked with Jones Brothers Marine in Morehead City, N.C., to develop the *Backwater*, a one-of-its-kind boat in North Carolina. Certified by the Coast Guard, the *Backwater* now takes up to 23 passengers on a journey across 4 miles of shallow Currituck Sound. "People are amazed to discover the sound is only 5 feet deep," says Brian. "We can do things other boats can't. And if you rent a pontoon or a Jet ski you have to navigate the shoals and avoid crab pots. People can come with me on a journey, avoid stress and just relax."

At first, Brian started the tour carrying only six passengers due to restrictions. But he worked closely with the Coast Guard to pass all certifications and tests required to carry up to 23 people. It was tough, but completing the rigorous qualifications allowed Brian to now offer a truly unique journey.

Starting May 15 and running through late September, the *Backwater* will make three to four trips per day on average from Monday to Friday every week. There are several different cruises to choose from, all offered through Kitty Hawk Kites – the Vineyard Voyage, the Eco Cruise and the Sunset Cruise. And the Thursday night Vineyard Voyage also includes an additional acoustic performance at the Cotton Gin, a sister store to Sanctuary Vineyards, with a beautiful sunset view on the return journey.

The tours pass by the historic Dews Island Hunting Lodge, where a dozen horses were relocated from Corolla. "They are truly wild now," says Brian, "since you need a boat just to see them." And passengers are treated to other wildlife as well. Says

And give Kitty Hawk Kites a call. Then, when you get back home, don't just tell everyone about the nice vacation you had. Tell them about the mermaids you transformed into, the wild horses you witnessed and the delicious wines you sampled with your new friends on the Outer Banks.



one customer, "Viewing Currituck Sound by boat was the highlight of our trip to the Outer Banks. We saw an osprey and its nest, blue herons lifting gracefully from the marsh with giant wings and wild ponies nibbling along the banks. Captain Brian's skills and knowledge of the history of the area make you feel at ease. This trip is a delight for all ages."

Brian says that he loves the diversity of the groups, from bachelorettes to retirees. "By the way back, everyone becomes friends with everyone else," he says. "And I just try to keep people happy, no matter what it takes."

For more information, head to Brian's Instagram page, @outerbanksboattours, or the website, www.kittyhawk.com/adventures/duck-boat-tours.

An All-Day ESCAPE for Vacationers and Locals Alike

By Dave Holton

Life is full of decisions. Decisions at work. Decisions at home. One after another after another. It's no wonder we sometimes feel exhausted and run down. And often, when we finally get to that vacation week or even just that day off, we find our supposed-to-be-free-time filled with more decisions and stress. Have you ever had the experience of declaring, upon your return to your daily life, that you need a vacation after your vacation? Well . . .

No. No more. It's time to end the cycle. It's time to start making decisions that lead to less stress, not more, such as green tea and red wine. Sunrises and sunsets. Yoga, massages and facials.



SANDERLING

Duck, North Carolina



"Making these decisions can feel like a luxury," says Paul Cavazos, spa director at the Sanderling Resort, "but we think the spa can and should be a regular part of people's well-being. These days everyone has a lot of stress in their lives, and a lot of times there's just no way to get it out. Until you come here, of course."

At the Spa at Sanderling located at Sanderling Resort, you can have a day that starts early and ends late and takes all that stress away. This is the vacation within the vacation. Or, if you happen to be local to the Outer Banks, this can be your treat to yourself, your own little staycation.

"We invite all to come," says Ashley Vaught, current director of rooms and former spa director, a 13-year employee of Sanderling Resort who believes that Sanderling is as much a place for locals as it is for visitors. "You don't have to be a guest. All services are open to the public. This is a place for you. We celebrate our locals and offer a 20 percent locals discount year round that extends to the spa and restaurant. If it weren't for the locals, we wouldn't be successful. We appreciate our partnerships with them."

"We are in the service industry too," says Paul, "and we get what many of the locals go through every year taking care of the visitors to the Outer Banks. We all have to take care of ourselves too."

The Spa at Sanderling does more than just offer discounts to give back to the locals. In October of this year, in a tradition that has been ongoing for 10 years now, the Spa at Sanderling will show their Passion for Pink. In partnership with the Outer Banks Hospital's new Cancer Resource Center, the spa will

offer complimentary treatments and services to cancer victims, survivors and caretakers. Says Paul, "The treatments will be specialized for the individuals." Those who come will be treated to one-on-one experiences intended to help the suffering feel relieved and the worn-down feel rejuvenated.

Paul and Ashley both take great pride in the relationships they form with spa and resort guests. They make sure that everyone who visits has an individual experience, one designed to respond directly to all the various stresses and strains that each guest faces in their own day-to-day. "Our services are personalized," says Paul, "to connect and create a memorable experience. We get to know our guests, because many return year after year to celebrate a birthday or anni-

versary or a holiday such as Thanksgiving or Christmas, and it becomes a tradition to visit the spa."

There are many options available for the visitors to the spa, from the indoor pool to the deep tissue massages to the steam rooms, and many guests spend the whole day enjoying their experience. There is a full-service salon, 10 treatment rooms – four of which offer couples treatments – and there is, of course, plenty of great food and beverages available at the Solarium or one of the other restaurants on the property.

When asked about their favorite spa options, Ashley and Paul both respond with the excitement of people who truly love the product they provide. "We have Thai yoga that runs year round and sunrise yoga from Memorial Day to Labor Day," says Ashley. "Thai yoga offers a different yoga experience, one that is all about balance and the well-being of the individual, one that people can take home with them and continue to practice. And, of course, practicing yoga outside as the sun rises is an amazing experience."

"The benefits of the spa experience," says Paul, "extend beyond the spa itself. We focus on educating our guests." In addition to the yoga practices, guests leave with a better understanding of skin maintenance and protection and, for the older guests, treatment of skin problems and sun damage.

Paul has a long background as a massage therapist and esthetician, a fancy word for skin care specialists, so he's well-versed in and a big proponent of

the spa's massage and facial offerings. He raves about the Serenity Ritual, in which two massage therapists deliver, in tandem, a hydro tub massage, a facial massage, a mask and a scalp treatment, a sea salt glow, a sea mud wrap, a Scotch hose massage and a Vichy rain shower. "It's like an intricate dance," he says.

"As an esthetician, of course, I'm partial to the facials," he says. "We have a new facial, the Sea Creations facial, that is 110 minutes long and uses ingredients harvested from the depths of the ocean as well as two different stones to do the massage. When it comes to luxury facials, there is no better."

There are plenty of options for two-person combinations as well, whether they be familial, friendly or romantic couplings. "We cater to a lot of couples, but we aren't limited to romantic dates," says Ashley. "We have plenty of mother-daughter combos who come in and enjoy the backdrop of

the Currituck Sound as they get massages."

The Sanderling Resort occupies a stretch of land that is only 300 yards wide from sound to sea, so you really can enjoy the spa from sunrise to sunset and see them both. Though there are days during the summer season when the spa can see as many as 100 people, both Ashley and Paul want to make sure that people know they are still able to offer the same experiences on busy days during the summer as they do in the middle of winter and vice versa. "Even on busy days," says Ashley, "you can come early and have a lounge to yourself, and the spa is laid out so that everyone feels like they have a private getaway." Another tip from Paul: If you stay through the day or arrive later, ask for one of the spa rooms with a view of the Currituck Sound.

Then kick back with a beverage of your choice and enjoy a sunset unlike any you've seen before. And in addition to the relaxation that the Spa at Sanderling menu will have surely provided, you can feel a little extra bit of satisfaction in the knowledge that you finally solved the age-old conundrum of how to truly escape from the stresses of life.

IF YOU HAPPEN TO
BE LOCAL TO THE
OUTER BANKS, THIS CAN
BE YOUR TREAT TO
YOURSELF, YOUR OWN
LITTLE STAYCATION.
LOCALS RECEIVE
20% OFF
YEAR ROUND.

(855) 412-7866 • 1461 Duck Road, Duck • sanderling-resort.com