

Allures of Bonnet Sh

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boats are moored in the summer. To the north side of Bonnet is the Bonnet Shores Community Center, where many a family has gathered for summer camp activities or a summer celebration.

But more important than the sights is the type of people who make up Bonnet. "It used to be a colony, now it's a neighborhood," said Marcel Fortin, who moved to Bonnet about four years ago and has since become a historian on the area.

Fortin explained that when he first moved in, he found himself stranded at Newport Hospital and had to call one of his new neighbors for a ride home. "I knew about seven or eight names of people who I felt comfortable enough to call," Fortin said. "That's the kind of place this is."

Fortin, who often walks the paths and roads in Bonnet as a member of their walking club or on nightly walks with his wife, Carol, finds that people will take the time to talk to one another and share news of their families and their lives. "My wife calls it 'The Bonnet Walk'," he said. "It's a walking dream. You walk three blocks you're on the bay, a few blocks the other way and you are at the ocean."

Fortin named families that have been coming to the area for years and now have third- or fourth-generation members visiting. He and other residents explained that many current residents were attracted to Bonnet Shores because their families either spent summers here or their children resided here in the winter while attending the University of Rhode Island. Others moved to Bonnet Shores after becoming familiar with the area as members of the Bonnet Shores Beach Club.

In recent years many of the summer homes have been renovated to support year-round living and people have chosen to retire in the area. "There is an older population now, it seems to be heading in the direction of a retirement community," Fortin said.

Cliff Hall and his wife, Lucie, are one of those couples who have retired to Bonnet Shores. The Halls stay at their home in the summer and spend winters in Florida. Cliff Hall was one of the original investors in the Bonnet Shores Beach Club and he has been coming to area for 40

years. "We claim that we were one of the first people to buy a one-story cottage and [later] take the roof off and add a second floor," he said.

Hall said he was drawn to the area because of the beach and the people. "It's a good community made up of good people and there is a lot of camaraderie."

There is also a sense of continuity in life. Hall runs into people he knew as teenagers, who introduce their own teenagers to him.

Because of their love for Bonnet Shores, Hall, Fortin and Listro and other residents formed a historical committee in 1995. Through their research many new and interesting facts about Bonnet Shores have been learned and Fortin is sharing that information and other community news in a regular village column in the Independent.

The committee has gathered documents that show that after the stock market crash in 1929, Bodwell sought financial backing from Frederick S. Peck of Barrington and the Belton Corp. was formed in 1932. A historical document from 1934 shows a map of Bonnet Shores and lists the names of the 65 residents at that time.

The 450-acre area was divided up into thousands of lots, many of which were only 30- by 100-feet, Fortin said. Advertisements and promotions were run to attract people to the area, which was then quite exclusive with a gated entrance.

Since the early days, Bonnet Shores has weathered many changes and storms, including several hurricanes. The 1938 Hurricane wiped out a clubhouse on Bonnet Shores Road, and a new clubhouse was built on the beach where it stands today. Although that clubhouse is now a condominium organization with about 850 members, only a small percentage of residents belong to it, said Ward Barry, the manager of the Bonnet Shores Fire District. At one time the clubhouse was used by residents of Bonnet Shores and Wesquage, who were allowed to buy summer passes.

Perhaps the heyday as a summer community occurred in the 1950s and '60s when the beach club contained a four-lane bowling alley and held summer dances. In 1951, Milo Miller took it upon himself to write "The Bonnet Song," in an attempt at capturing what is so special about