

Surflight in Crisis: Theater's Long Run May Be Ending Soon

\$500,000 Is Needed by End of October

Can anyone imagine Long Beach Island without Surflight Theatre? The trustees of this 61-year-old Beach Haven entertainment institution say that scenario is going to happen if it cannot raise \$500,000 by Oct. 31. The Show Place Ice Cream Parlour would also go by the wayside, according to an appeals letter released by the board this week and published as a full-page ad in this issue.

"This situation has been festering for a while, but it has now gotten to the point where our income can't keep up with our expenses," said Gene Hammond, board president.

Hammond, who said the theater has an annual operating expense budget of approximately \$3 million, said the board can't wait for all of those donations to come in at the 11th hour.

"If some of that money doesn't come in early October, we may have to cancel our concerts," he said. "So far, our other shows are still on."

Currently, the theater is showing "The Melody Lingers On: The Songs of Irving Berlin." The October show lineup includes "Noises Off," Oct. 6-10; "Accomplice," Oct. 13-17; and "The Last of the Red Hot Lovers," Oct. 20-24. Legendary impressionist Rich Little does a tribute to Jimmy Stewart Oct. 31. The Holiday Spectacular runs Dec. 3-19.

The appeal letter stated that if the \$500,000 goal cannot be met, "Surflight will cease to operate." TD Bank would foreclose on the property, it said.

In addition, the letter said, "our valued and supportive" local vendors would be left with unpaid bills. The theater's education programs would no longer be available to hundreds of interns and local students.

"Senior citizens groups will no longer have an affordable source of entertainment," the letter said. "Hundreds of jobs at Surflight Theatre and Show Place, one of the area's largest employers, will disappear along with the opportunity for actors and artisans to learn their craft — many Surflight alumni have gone on to successful careers on Broadway and in film and television."

Hammond said, "With all the people who come to the Island to enjoy Surflight shows, closing the theater would have a severe impact on our local economy. It makes me sick just thinking about the possibility of not having the Surflight here."

He said Roy Miller, who was recently brought in as producer in a management shakeup, has donated his first year's salary.

"After we found our new producer, we discovered that our financial situation was worse than we thought," said Hammond.

A Surflight alumnus, Miller produced the recent Broadway revival of "West Side Story," which was nominated for a Tony for Best Revival

and won a Grammy for Best Cast Album. He also produced more than 80 musicals and plays at Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn.

"We're in a crisis mode," said Miller. "If I had come here a year ago, maybe it would have been a little easier to dig out of this, but now we're in dire need of help."

Miller said he wants to alert the entire theater community to Surflight's financial plight.

"This is going to have a national focus," he said. "We're going to contact theater groups through their web sites. If we can survive this, I'll strive to make this one of the best theaters in the country."

He added, "We would all hate to see this theater go. It would be very sad for the many people who never went to a Surflight show. They'd never know what they missed."

Checks can be made payable to Surflight Theatre and sent to P.O. Box 1155, Beach Haven, N.J. 08008.

Donations also can be made by logging on to www.surflight.org and clicking on the "donate now" button. Donors can also stop by or call the box office at 609-492-9477, extension 1. If calling after hours, leave contact information and someone will call back.

— Eric Englund
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Geotubes Set For Mordecai Next Month

Construction is expected to begin next month on a geotube project to stave off erosion on the southwest corner of Mordecai Island in Beach Haven.

Known as SWMER (Southwest Mordecai Eco-Restoration), the project is one of two erosion protection projects for the island, located in the bay a few hundred feet off the docks at the Little Egg Harbor Yacht Club. The other is a breakwater project on the island's north side, which has yet to begin. Both projects are being sponsored by the Mordecai Land Trust, which was formed nearly 10 years ago in an attempt to save the sedge island.

Jean Runne, land trust president, said the organization recently received approval from the state Department of Environmental Protection for the geotubes. The land trust has hired Pond Recovery Services of Cinnaminson to do the work at a cost of approximately \$150,000.

Runne said the target date to begin work is Monday, Oct. 18.

"We hope it only takes one or two weeks," she said. "A lot is going to depend on the weather. Hopefully, there won't be any storms."

She said geotubes are large, fabric-

Every Square Inch Counts

New Architectural Rendering of Shack Offers Vision of Possible Restoration

Jim Yuhas of Barnegat is hoping a new realistic architectural rendering of what would be a refurbished Shack on Cedar Bonnet Island will add inspiration toward its restoration. "I'm out to save the Shack," he said.

After taking accurate measurements of the Shack, Yuhas enlisted Diane Coppola-Fritz, owner of Island Arts in Ship Bottom, for help with his idea to create an architectural rendering. "His passion for the Shack is overwhelming. I think it's great," said Coppola-Fritz.

Coppola-Fritz contacted business associate and friend Joseph Tarella, a Manhattan-based architect and longtime summer visitor of LBI. He agreed to take measurements and specifications and draw up the rendering for free.

Tarella was previously inspired by the changing contours of LBI and his love of maps, which led him to create an original ink and watercolor rendering titled "A General View of Long Beach Island 2001." Tarella also designed his own home in Barnegat Light that he frequents often.

"I was able to help Jim Yuhas visualize what needed to be done," said Tarella. That visualization takes the Shack back to the two-story Happy Days gunning club it once was. The architectural rendering includes a floor plan and views from the north, south, east and west. An aerial view also reveals a cistern for collecting water and a wooden walkway leading to a garvey that awaits in Barnegat Bay. "It's the last of its kind. It explains a lot, (such as) why they had to develop the garvey," said Yuhas.

Part of the reason for the rendering is to express an agreement on what the Shack should look like among Yuhas and his constituents. He wants to make sure it maintains its olden charm and incorporates pieces from the original structure including storm shutters with quarter moon-shaped openings that he and others have collected.

Currently, landowner Chet Atkins and his lawyers are continuing the process to prove clear title to the land on which the Shack sits, which must be done before any renovations can be made. "We're hoping to have it done by the end of the year," said Atkins.

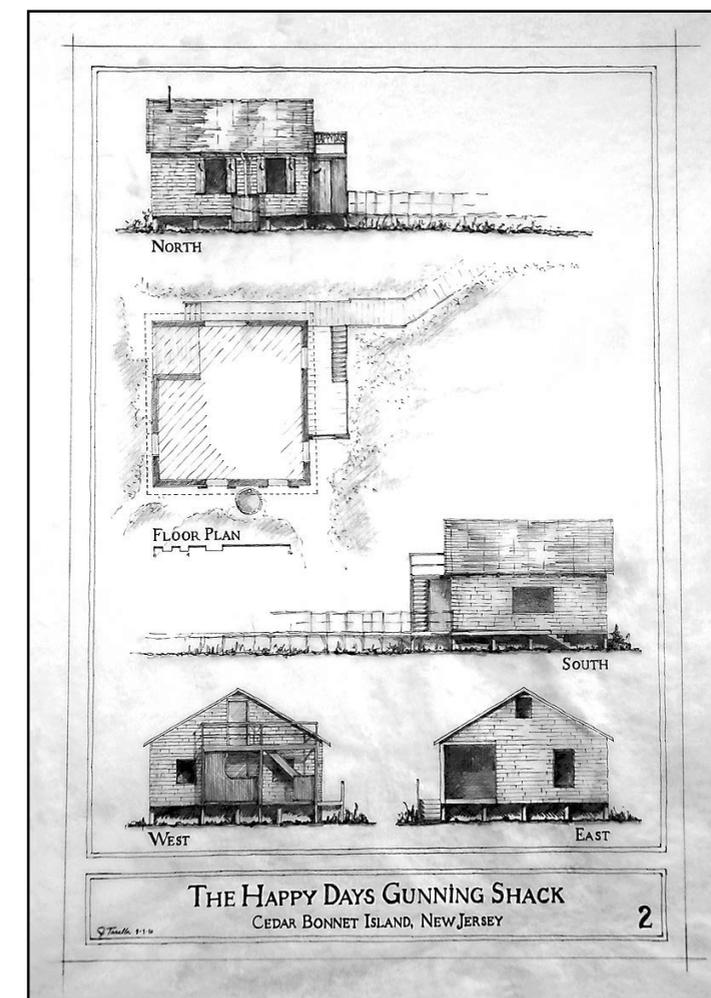
After the title issue is resolved, Atkins may then hold a party this fall to set up a non-profit for repair funds, work with Stafford Township to decide how to preserve the

type bags that are filled with sand and then placed underground to hold the existing sand in place.

Runne said the organization had first tried to combat erosion in 2006 with natural fiber biologs in a project known as SWMER 1.

"The biologs, especially those that were placed on the island's western edge and bore the full brunt of wake, wave and weather action, proved inadequate to stop further erosion," she said. "By comparison, SWMER II primarily involves the installation of 570 linear feet of sand-filled geotubes that are much larger and stronger than the biologs."

Runne said the land trust has been



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SHACK-A-DOODLE-DO: Locals enlisted Manhattan architect Joe Tarella to create a rendition of a possible restoration based on actual measurements and evocative of the Happy Days gun club it once was.

Shack, or hand over the title to Stafford Township outright, though no definitive plans have been made at this time.

Yuhas has shown the rendering to Tim Hart, president of the Stafford Township Historical Society. He hopes Hart will present it to Stafford Administrator Jim Moran once the title issue is settled to possibly help secure a grant for the project if the Historical Society is able to get involved.

The Shack is still widely regarded as the second most recognizable landmark of Long Beach Island, with various artists painting and photographing it throughout the years. "It's a part of the fabric of Long Beach Island, that little pile of sticks," Yuhas said.

Coppola-Fritz will sell copies of the architectural rendering at Island Arts and both she and Yuhas

stressed how much the Shack has especially captivated artists over the years. Many people do not wish to see it simply slip into decay. "Everybody wants to do a little something to preserve it, but are we too late?"

As title issues continue, the coming cold months loom, and the question as to whether the now very much dilapidated Shack can make it through another winter remains. The architectural rendering is the last-ditch effort of Yuhas, who has met with Atkins and continues to send him any information that stresses the importance of restoring the Shack and the love that so many have for it.

"This is pretty much the last thing I can do. I can't do anything else," said Yuhas.

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looking to have a wooden breakwater built 200 feet offshore of the northwest corner of the island, where the erosion is most severe. The structure is similar to a picket fence, which would be held by pilings and rise above the water surface. The trust has raised enough funds to cover its 25 percent of the cost obligation for the \$1.3 million project.

"We are continuing to have discussions with the Army Corps of Engineers regarding possible alternative projects to address the erosion on the northwest portion of Mordecai Island," she said.

According to the land trust's web site, the claw-shaped island currently

covers 41 acres, although at one time it covered more than 70 acres.

"The island protects Beach Haven's western edge from storms and at the same time is a wonderful ecosystem that is a habitat for a variety of species of wildlife that includes migrating birds, shore birds and a number of threatened species," the site says.

Runne said the land trust will hold a casino night benefit on Saturday, Oct. 9, from 6 to 10 p.m. at the Beach Haven Firehouse. Tickets are \$50 per person.

For more information, call the land trust at 609-492-4153.

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