

March 2023

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Welcome to The CURRENT

WELCOME to the MARCH 2023 edition of THE CURRENT. Believe it or not there are some people in this world who actually **enjoy Winter**. Now, we don't mean the holidays, with all of the food, and family, and gifts. No no, just, Winter; that decidedly "unfun-for-the-rest-of-us" stretch of cold, short days in-between New Year's and when we "spring forward" into Daylight Savings Time. While stereotypes may claim it's just "*them folks from up north*" who prefer the wintertime, the truth reveals there are people from all corners who prefer a world shaded in greys, browns, and the occasional snowy white.

But hey, who's to judge? Whether you prefer a white Winter or a wonderfully green Spring, everyone knows the best place for all seasons is right here in Oak Island! While the fair-weather fans certainly hope your wintertime has been

enjoyable, it's just a short while before the bright and sunny days of Spring take over for good. As we've said before though, a little bit of sunshine and expanded color spectrum doesn't change who we are; it just makes what we do a little more enjoyable! From Mardi Gras parades to Spring Fling festivals, the slide from February to March is a seamless and welcome transition. So pin a four-leaf clover on your favorite

life jacket, as we dive into the MARCH 2023 edition of THE CURRENT.



MONTHLY REVIEW

REMINDER: Information on all news items can be found on the Town Website at: www.OakIslandNC.gov/NEWS.

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Council Meeting Recap

The Town Council's regular meeting on **February 13, 2023** began ... and later recessed on the first of three Public Hearings: a quasi-judicial hearing for a Special Use Permit for a hotel. Due to its quasi-judicial nature, and the large number of those in attendance who signed up to speak, the Public Hearing lasted nearly four hours before Town Council agreed to **RECESS** the item, along with the entire meeting itself to a later date.

On Monday, February 20, 2023 at 10:00 AM, Council held a Special Called Meeting, to approve time-sensitive items from the February 13 meeting's Consent Agenda. These items included contracts for repairs to the David Canal Pedestrian Walkover at SE 20th Street, the Bulkhead Repairs at Dutchman Creek / NE 54th, and the Stormwater Project work through Hickman Utilities.

On Monday, March 20, 2023 at 4:00 PM, the Council will

RESUME the remainder of the February 13 meeting.

The **Public Hearing** regarding the Special Use Permit for a hotel is scheduled to resume at **6:00 PM**.

To view the video, agenda, and minutes for any Town Council meeting, just visit the **Meetings Information** page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/MEETINGS, or click the link below.

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Paid Parking: Pre-Season Permit Purchase Options Announced

By this point, most everyone is aware that Oak Island will enforce its first year of a Paid Parking Program from April 1 - September 30, between 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM. As the start date approaches however, there were still some unanswered questions; which the contracted parking vendor, [Otto Connect](#) and Town Council looked to clarify in a special meeting.

On **Thursday, March 2, 2023** the Oak Island Town Council held a Special Meeting to review progress on implementing

the [Paid Parking Program](#). Presentations covered topics such as the number of spaces added for the season, how the program would work, and most notably an announcement of pre-season purchase dates for **Town Parking Permits** and **Seasonal Parking Permits**.

[REMINDER: Town Parking Permits are those available to Town Residents and Property Owners at a cost of \$10 each, Seasonal Parking Permits are those available to purchase by anyone at a cost of \$175.]

Upcoming purchase options for both include:

IN PERSON: On March 15 - 17, 2023, an Otto Connect employee will be staffed in the first-floor lobby of Oak Island Town Hall, located at 4601 E Oak Island Drive. From 9:00 AM - Noon sales of the Seasonal Parking Permits at \$175 per vehicle (open to anyone for purchase) will be available. From 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM sales of Town Parking Permits will be

available at \$10 per vehicle (for Town residents & property owners: up to 3 vehicles)

BY PHONE: On March 20 - 21, 2023, from 9:00 AM – Noon, Seasonal Parking Permits will be available to purchase by calling 910-200-1497.

PLEASE NOTE: Both in-person and phone sales will be limited to 200 permits per day.

Once the Paid Parking Program launches, the Town Parking Permits and regular paid parking will be available through the [SurfCAST by Otto Connect](#) app, or by calling Otto Connect at **910-200-1497**.

As a reminder, a full breakdown of the Paid Parking Program, including its cost, operation, and **information needed to obtain a permit**, is available on the **Paid Parking Information** page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/PaidParking, or by clicking the link below.

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Good Times at Mardi Gras

The most notable thing about celebrations that center around a specific date, is that the date doesn't always fall on a weekend convenient to Town planning.

Even so, the celebratory spirit was in full swing on Saturday, February 25, as the Mardi Gras by the Sea Parade marched - *or rather sauntered* - its way down E Oak Island Drive! Despite the cloudy skies and cool temps, one of the most celebrated happenings in the Town's Events Calendar came out swinging, with even more music, fun, and floats to offer!

A total of 225 people comprising individual 59 floats made for a good show, as crowds of spectators lined E Oak Island Drive to watch. Starting at SE 64th Street, the parade wound its way to SE 46th Street, moving to the soundtrack of traditional Cajun and Dixieland jazz, before turning south to end at the Middleton Park Complex.

Once there however, the party continued with live music, food, games, and a record-breaking 121 artisan and craft vendors.

Despite the dip in temperatures, cloudy skies and even a brief threat of rain, the turnout from participants and attendees showed that nothing stops the fun in Oak Island! "Laissez les bons temps rouler!"

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Dancin' in the Park

The live music and packed market at the Mardi Gras Festival also gave an opportunity to show off some of the Middleton Park Complex's newest features.

DANCE PAD: Festival attendees enjoying the live music were greeted with an opportunity to let their **FEET** show some appreciation, with a brand new **concrete dance pad** in front of the amphitheater stage! Only a few days prior to the festival, the Public Works Department put the finishing touches on the 30' x 40' concrete pad. The pad is a project completely initiated by Town staff, after the Town Manager noticed some younger (and "young at heart") dance enthusiasts during the **2022 Live & Local: Market + Music** series.

SIDEWALK: You may have noticed in the "**IN THIS ISSUE**" contents above, that this month's **TOWN FEATURE** is the Kevin Bell Skatepark. Well after over two-years of funding,

planning, and rebuilding, the park is finally ready to open in March. As part of the greater Middleton Park Complex, the rebuilding project seemed a perfect opportunity to better connect the Skatepark into the rest of the Complex. Once again, Public Works staff were on-point, overseeing the laying of 180ft. of new sidewalk, which connects the southeast corner of the existing walking path to the Skatepark's new parking lot. The connection makes use of a marked pedestrian crosswalk over SE 40th Street, helping to fully unify ALL features of the Middleton Park Complex.

So while "*dancin' in the streets*" may make for a catchy song title, thanks to the quick efforts of the Public Works staff, all the dancing can take place on the dancefloor where it belongs!



Towering Trees Take Root

In addition to the new ***on-ground*** features mentioned above, the Middleton Park Complex is also sporting some new ***in-ground*** features as well. During the last week in February, Stormwater Administration staff worked feverishly to plant a total of 19 new trees in the Concert Field, Skatepark, and Town Hall areas.

LIVE OAKS: In the Concert Field by the Amphitheater, five (5) new live oak trees were planted along the walking path. In addition, three (3) oaks were also planted outside of the Town Hall, along with two (2) at the Skatepark. At planting, these young oaks are already 5 inches round and 25 feet tall, with a weight of between 2-3,000 lbs. including the root ball.

However, they are expected to eventually reach a spread of about 50 feet with an equal 50 foot height. And with an expected 500 year lifespan, they should be providing shade for future concert-goers for many generations to come.

PALMS: Over by the Kevin Bell Skatepark, Stormwater staff added nine (9) new Sabal Palmetto Palms. Already more than 20 feet tall at planting, they should eventually reach heights of up to 40-50 feet. The Sabal Palmetto is a species native to this area, and is well adapted for seaside conditions. The palm

trees were chosen to complement the existing palms already on the Skatepark grounds, are are arranged so as to provide a natural lining of the Skatepark's perimeter.

All of the trees were purchased from a regional nursery in nearby Ash, NC, which the Town has used in previous planting projects, such as the ongoing effort to replace Bradford pears with live oaks. They were able to be purchased at a wholesale rate, which saved the Town well over \$1,000 in the total costs. The holes were mostly dug by hand, with an excavator used to help upright and plant the trees themselves.

Stormwater staff will be working to monitor and water the trees as needed until the roots take hold, ensure they can grow and thrive in their new home.

For more information on this and other ongoing efforts from the Town's Stormwater Department, just visit the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/STORMWATER, or click

on the link below.

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CONTRIBUTIONS

This section features content contributed from various Town Departments, as well as the Town's municipal and non-profit partner organizations. Regular contributing organizations include the [Oak Island Fire Department](#), the [Beach Preservation Society](#), the [Friends of Parks Foundation](#), the [Sea Turtle Protection Program](#), the [Friends of the Library](#), and Oak

[Island Water Rescue](#), among others. For more information, please reach out to the contributing organization directly.

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Fire Department Safety Brief: Severe Weather Awareness & Preparedness

(Contributed by Lee Price) The first full week in March (5-11) is **Severe Weather Preparedness Week** in North Carolina.

Visitors and even newer residents in the Town of Oak Island mainly tend to think only about hurricanes when it comes to dangerous weather. However, as anyone who has lived in the Cape Fear Region for any length of time can tell you, the only thing ***predictable*** about the weather here, is how truly ***unpredictable*** it can be!

Just in the last 2 years, Oak Island has seen impacts from hurricanes, tornados, spontaneous severe storms ... even an ***ice storm***! Being in an area that literally sticks out into the ocean, where air coming in off the Piedmont and Coastal Plains collides with ocean breezes and gulf currents, can truly make for some tricky forecasting.

That's why preparedness is good on a broad scale. ***You can't plan for every possible emergency, but you can plan how you'll respond in any emergency!***

One of the ways we're helping to stay prepared is through our training. In late February, our firefighters joined other local and regional agencies for a **ICS-300** training class hosted by the Town. Part of the national **Emergency Management Institute** curriculum, ICS-300 is an advanced knowledge course, that breaks down the application of the **Incident Command System** (ICS). ICS is a standardized approach to responding to natural or man-made disasters, or "*incidents*". It is used for all kinds of response, from all types of organizations, and at all levels of government. It can be scaled from small incidents to large, very complex ones.

By knowing and using this standard structure, any number of response agencies like police, fire, or search & rescue, can avoid confusion and seamlessly work together to save lives. The same goes for you too as well! But you don't need advanced knowledge of command systems. You just need to

know the basic risks you face each day, and the simple ways you can respond to them to ensure you and your family's safety.

Severe Weather Preparedness Week is a great place to start! So get educated, learn the threats, and how you can develop a response plan of your own. If you need help, you can always reach out to use at 910-278-1000, or check the great resource provided at www.readync.gov, or click the link below.

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Beach Preservation Society: 2023 Scholarships

(Contributed by Cheryl Cook) The Oak Island Beach Preservation Society (BPSI) is pleased to announce a new scholarship program. Two (2) scholarships of \$2000 each will be awarded in 2023. Seniors who attend any Brunswick County high school and meet the minimum criteria set by BPSI are eligible to apply.

BPSI is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) volunteer organization in Brunswick County, NC. The organization is dedicated to education and community engagement to enhance the Oak Island beach experience and leave the beach better for everyone now and in the future.

In keeping with this mission, students who qualify for these scholarships must be interested in and planning to seek further education in field[s] of study related to science and/or education, preferably with emphasis on the ocean/coastal environments and related systems.

Complete information and applications will be available through guidance counselors at all private and public high schools in Brunswick County. Application deadline is May 1, 2023 with award announcements being made by May 21, 2023.

Interested students should contact their local guidance

counselor for more information and scholarship application materials.

For more information about BPSI, please visit www.beachoki.org or click the link below.

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Dosher Memorial Hospital: Operation Medicine Cabinet

(Contributed by Ilene Evans) The 24th semi-annual “**Operation Medicine Cabinet**” drug take back event at Dosher Memorial Hospital is scheduled for **Thursday, April 6**, between the hours of **9:00 AM - 1:00 PM**.

Local residents are invited to drop off unwanted and expired prescription medications at the hospital front entrance, where law enforcement then takes what is collected for safe incineration. One of the conveniences of this event is that it is designed so that you can “drive through and drop off,” without having to leave your car.

At Dosher’s last drug drop in October 2022, over 800 local households discarded more than 15,000 expired or unwanted

narcotic pills and nearly 2,300 milliliters of narcotic liquids. Dosher welcomes the opportunity to provide this service to local residents. For questions about Operation Medicine Cabinet, call the Dosher office of Marketing and Community Relations at **910-457-3900** or email ileneevans@dosher.org.

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Friends of the Library: Meet the Author Event

(Contributed by Julie Paladino) Do you like golf? How about mysteries? Then come to this month's **Meet The Author** program and hear from author Pete Hoyer about both on **March 22 at 11:00 AM** in the Barbee Library.

Registration is currently open and seating is limited!

About the Author: J. Peter (Pete) Hoyer holds a B.A. degree from The Citadel and master's degrees from Webster University and Troy State Univ. He travelled extensively throughout the U.S., Europe and other countries working with the Department of Defense for 40 years. A lifelong avid golfer, Pete resides in Calabash, NC.

ABOUT FOLSOI: The Friends of the Library Southport & Oak Island (FOLSOI) supports the mission and programs of the Margaret & James Harper, Jr. Library in Southport and the G.V. Barbee, Sr Library on Oak Island. FOLSOI is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization. For more information, call **910-278-4283**, visit www.folsoi.org or click the link below.

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE](http://www.folsoi.org)



MEETINGS, NEWS, & NOTICES

Council, Committee, & Board Meetings

REMINDER: Televised public meetings are broadcast live on OKI-TV (Spectrum Cable channel 8), as well as livestreamed on the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/MEETINGS. For a complete schedule of all upcoming Council, Committee and Board meetings, visit www.OakIslandNC.gov/CALENDAR.

TOWN COUNCIL (televised) will hold its regular meeting on **Tuesday, March 14, 2023** at 6:00 PM in the Council Chambers, located on the second floor of Town Hall at 4601 E Oak Island Drive.

RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD (non-televised) will hold its regular meeting on **Monday, March 13, 2023** at 4:00 PM in the Community Center, located at 4701 E Oak Island Drive.

ABC BOARD (non-televised) will hold its regular meeting on **Tuesday, March 14, 2023** at 10:00 AM in the Oak Island ABC Store, located at 5402 E Oak Island Drive.

ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (non-televised) will hold its regular meeting on **Thursday, March 16, 2023** at 8:30 AM in the Police Department Training Room, located on the second floor of the Police Department, adjoining Town Hall at 4621 E Oak Island Drive.

PLANNING BOARD (televised) will hold its regular meeting on **Thursday, March 16, 2023** at 10:30 AM in the Council Chambers, located on the second floor of Town Hall at 4601 E Oak Island Drive.

TOWN COUNCIL (televised) will **RESUME** its recessed February 13 regular meeting on **Monday, March 20, 2023** at 4:00 PM in the Council Chambers, located on the second

floor of Town Hall at 4601 E Oak Island Drive. ***NOTE: The Public Hearing on a Special Use Permit for a Hotel is expected to resume at 6:00 PM**

PAR 3 ADVISORY COMMITTEE (non-televised) will hold its regular meeting on **Friday, April 7, 2023** at **1:00 PM** in the Par 3 Pro Shop, located at 4188 Vanessa Drive.

CLOSURES & HOLIDAYS

GOOD FRIDAY: Administrative Offices for the Town of Oak Island will be CLOSED on Friday, April 7, 2023 in observance of **Good Friday**.

Garbage & Recycling Collection will **NOT** be affected by the Easter Holiday weekend; however, the [Disposal Convenience Site](#) will be **CLOSED** on **Friday, April 7**.

Police, fire, and other emergency services are not affected during any holiday closure, and are always available by **calling 9-1-1**. The **Oak Island Pier** will be open during their seasonal hours. All currently available [Parks, Beach & Water Access Locations](#), and facilities will be open as well. All holiday closure dates can be viewed in the *Holiday Calendar* on the Town Website at: www.OakIslandNC.gov/HOLIDAY.

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Skatepark Grand Reopening

On **Saturday, March 18, 2023**, from **10:00 AM - 4:00 PM**, the Town of Oak Island will host a **Grand Reopening Celebration** event for the **Kevin Bell Skatepark**.

The event comes at the end of a four-month construction effort which started in October 2022; and ultimately concludes the two-year-long journey to rebuild the park, following its complete destruction during Hurricane Isaias in August 2020.

The Reopening Celebration will feature live music, free food, and t-shirt giveaways for early attendees. Activities will also include a full demonstration of the new skatepark's features, as well as a friendly invitational tournament.

The Kevin Bell Skatepark has been a much-enjoyed amenity by residents and visitors alike since it first opened in April of 2000. At the park's 15th Anniversary in April of 2015, it was rededicated in honor of the late Kevin Bell, who worked

tirelessly to help establish the park initially.

In August 2020, the park sustained extensive damage during Hurricane Isaias. As a result, it was deemed "unrepairable" and all park features were demolished. In June 2021, the Oak Island Town Council approved \$300,000 for the Skatepark's reconstruction, and in December of that year, awarded the contract for design, construction and project management to Artisan Concrete Services, Inc., (dba Artisan Skateparks, Inc.). After holding TWO public input sessions, the new design was finalized in the late summer of 2022, with construction beginning in October. Once Pillar Designs completed the concrete work, Public Services staff from the Town took over, upgrading the perimeter landscaping and completely redesigning the parking lot and sidewalk areas. Throughout the project, construction remained on schedule, reaching the goal of a March 2023 opening date.

For more information on the Kevin Bell Skatepark, its history, and the current features it offers, simply visit the dedicated page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/SKATE or click the link below.

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NEW Environmental Advisory Committee Webpage

The Oak Island **Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC)** is dedicated to the preservation and restoration of the Island's unique and fragile coastal environments. The EAC accomplishes this endeavor primarily through the education of Town residents.

While education efforts have traditionally involved live events such as Earth Day, or public lectures and presentations, the EAC has recently launched a new tool for bringing education directly to the reader. During the first week of March, the EAC launched its own dedicated page on the Town Website! This page will provide informative and educational resources for anyone wanting to know how Oak Island is working to

preserve and protect the environment around us.

In addition to providing the **Mission** & **Vision** statements of the EAC, it offers the latest in environmental news, as well as updates on important Town efforts such as Recycling Programs, the **Tree City USA** designation, and the ever popular **Smart Yard** program.

The page also displays the contact information for the Committee members, along with a meeting schedule and archive of past meeting minutes. The EAC welcomes feedback on the new page, which you can do in person. Regular Committee meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month at 8:30 AM in the second-floor training room of the Oak Island Police Department, located adjacent to Town Hall at 4621 E Oak Island Drive. **Meetings are open to the public, and attendance is welcome!**

To view the new EAC page of the town Website, simply visit www.OakIslandNC.gov/EAC or click the link below.

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Spring Cleaning Reminder

The sun comes out, the weather warms up, and the windows open ... all signs that Spring has sprung! With the added light of longer days comes the added waste that is the result of **spring cleaning**.

In seasonal tradition, the Public Works Department takes this opportunity to offer some reminders on how best to properly dispose of your more unconventional items. The Town of Oak Island **DOES NOT** offer curbside removal of brown or white goods, such as furniture or appliances.

However, residents may dispose of these items at the [Disposal Convenience Site](#), located at 4110 Airport Road.

Hours of Operation for the Convenience site are every Wednesday from 1:00 PM - 4:30 PM, Fridays from 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM, and the FIRST Saturday of each month from 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM. (**NOTE:** The Disposal Convenience Site will be **CLOSED** on Friday, April 7, 2023 for Good Friday.)

Household trash, household recycling, brown goods, and white goods can also be disposed of for free at this location. For full details on the Disposal Convenience Site or alternative disposal options, including a full list of items accepted, visit the dedicated page on the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/CONVENIENCE or click the link below.

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Pier Hours Change

One of the most welcome signs of spring is found in the added sunshine afforded by Daylight Saving Time. For many, this means more time to spend outdoors at their favorite locations; and a favorite location for many anglers from all over is the Oak Island Pier.

NOTICE: As of Monday, March 6, the Oak Island Pier & Pier House has transitioned to its ***Spring Schedule***, operating from **7:00 AM - 7:00 PM daily**.

Although it's a couple weeks ahead of the official start of Spring, by the time the clocks "spring forward" on Sunday, March 12, the Pier & Pier House will have been enjoying the expanded hours for almost a full week! The next schedule change will come in April when Pier switches to its Summer Hours of 6:00 AM - 10:00 PM.

In addition to fishing passes, the Pier House is conveniently stocked with frozen bait, fishing tackle, sundries, snacks, ice cream, and drinks for purchase. Shirts, sunglasses and other souvenirs are also available.

For those unable to plan a visit in the near future, remember the Pier can be visited anytime virtually, through the Oak Island Pier Webcam. To view the webcam, along with full details on the Pier or Pier House, simply visit the dedicated page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/PIER.

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COMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

REMINDER: Information on all special events, recreation programs, and educational activities can be found on the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/EVENTS.

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Spring Fling Market & Music

WHEN: Saturday, March 25, 2023 • 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM
(Market) • 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (Concert)
WHERE: Middleton Park Complex • 4610 E Dolphin Drive
COST: FREE to attend (vendor fees vary)
ABOUT: Spring into warmer weather with Oak Island as we say goodbye to winter and hello to Spring at the 2023 Spring Fling Market and Music Festival! This year's event is FREE to attend, and features live music, kids zone, and full farmers and craft artisan market. NOTE: A LIVE concert featuring *Parlay* will be held from 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM.

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2023 Spring Adult Co-Ed Kickball League

WHEN: Season Organizational Meeting: Tuesday March 28, 2023 • 5:00 PM
WHERE: Community Center • 4701 E Oak Island Drive
WHO: Adult co-ed participants 18 years and older
ABOUT: Adult kickball is a great way to stay active and keep those feet moving! Teams will need a minimum of 8 players to play each game. Team Coaches can sign up online at www.OakIslandNC.gov/RecDesk.

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2023 Shell & Fossil Show

WHEN: Sunday, April 2, 2023 • 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM
WHERE: 801 Ocean event Center • 801 Ocean Drive
ATTENDANCE COST: \$3 per person • FREE for ages 5 and under
VENDOR COST: FREE for display-only exhibitors • \$15 for exhibitors who sell their displays
ABOUT: Share your love of shells as Oak Island's Shell & Fossil Show is BACK at the 801 Event Center! Along with the

center's breathtaking ocean views, coastal residents and guests are invited to present creative displays of some of their favorite findings of sea shells and fossils from both the Oak Island coast line and beyond. This year's program will welcome both exhibitors as well as shell vendors of all ages. Exhibitor applications are currently available at the Oak Island Recreation Center, located at 3003 E. Oak Island Drive. For more information, reach out to Program Supervisor, Ryan Gordon, at rgordon@oakislandnc.gov or by calling **910-278-4747**.

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Oak Island Easter Egg Hunt

WHEN: Saturday, April 1, 2023 • 10:00 AM

WHERE: Bill Smith Park • 4410 Fish Factory Road

COST: FREE

ABOUT: Hop on over to Bill Smith Park and find an assortment of colored Easter Eggs our **Furry Friend** has hidden for you this year, along with some great photo opportunities for your family!

PLEASE NOTE: There are **MANY** fun, educational, and exciting events and programs planned for the month ahead (way too many to list here)! For a complete list of upcoming activities, contact the Recreation Department at **910-278-5518**, or visit the **EVENTS & PROGRAMS** page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/EVENTS, or just click the link below.

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TOWN FEATURE: KEVIN BELL SKATEPARK

Gather 'round chil'ren, and let me tell you a tale of a time, long, long ago! It was a bright and sunny time, **mostly because the Ozone still had a hole in it**. Televisions weighed as much as a car, and you had to manually "get on" the internet, passing through the sounds of a robot screaming at you through a phone line. Sure, we lived in fear for the looming apocalypse we just knew our computers would bring at the midnight stroke of "**Y-2-K**" - but 1999 truly was a great time to be alive! As long ago as it now seems, there are somethings that have stayed the same. Fish still swim, birds still fly, and kids still like

to feel the rush of almost breaking every bone possible for the sake of having fun!

You see, even before our years began starting with the number with "two" - four wheels bolted to a plank of wood seemed like a perfectly reasonable way to not only get around, but also get some wicked air. **Skateboarding** was, **and still is**, hugely popular with not only kids but now adults as well. What started as an alternative way for 1950s / 60s surfers to get a fix when the waves were flat, morphed into an alt-punk, anti-establishment lifestyle statement in the 80s; that like everything else, eventually got ramped up with the "extreme" everything craze in the 90s. While the approach may differ with the generations, the basic concept of skateboarding remained: **four wheels on a board, challenges the laws of physics for fun of momentum**. The problem in the late 1990s however, was that there weren't many "legal" places to do it.

While many of the old timers in the "sleepy little fishing villages" of Long Beach and Yaupon Beach probably gave nothing more than cold stares at the kids loitering around on their skateboards. But as time had already proven, it was more than a passing fad, and was probably here to stay. Several savvy business owners took notice, and realized they had a choice. You see, the year 2000 was the dawn of a new

millennium; which also brought on the dawn of an entirely new **TOWN**, as the aforementioned "villages" merged to create the Town of Oak Island. **As they always do, things were changing**. Much like the Town itself, this forward thinking group acted on that change, coming together to offer something new for the youth of the community. From this, the **Oak Island Skatepark** was born.

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PROFILE: Kevin McMillian Bell was born in 1958, long before many on the east coast even knew what a skateboard was. In fact very little, if any, of Kevin Bell's life interacted with skateboarding at all.

Mr. Bell was the founder, owner and operator of Bell's Supply

Inc. He was a member of Ocean View United Methodist Church, a charter member of the Oak Island Elks Lodge, and served on the Town Council for 12 years (including four years as *mayor pro-tem*). While serving on council during the merger of Long Beach and Yaupon Beach, it was Kevin Bell who suggested the name ***Oak Island*** for the new town.

So how did this business owner and local statesman, become the legacy of skateboarding in Oak Island?

The answer was ***delinquent youth***, basically. As a business owner, whose business also had a parking lot, Kevin Bell often found himself "running off local youths" who were using his parking lot to test out their latest tricks. However, it didn't take long before Bell realized the opportunity this presented to invest in the next generation. Bringing together several other local business owners, he led a small coalition which funded, designed, and dedicated skateboard park.

For 14 years since it first opened in April of 2000, Kevin Bell watched that investment pay great dividends in the children and families the skatepark brought to this community. When he passed away on April 6, 2014, it didn't take long for the Town to find the most suitable way to honor his tireless efforts. One year later, at the park's 15th Anniversary in April of 2015, it was rededicated in his honor, where it will bear his name for as long as it stands.

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A LONG GRIND BACK

At the time the Kevin Bell Skatepark originally opened, the wood forms used to construct the park's features were fairly common in small skatepark design. Fast forward to 2020, and two decades worth of use, and salt air exposure had taken its toll. The Town's Public works Department had done much to maintain the upkeep of the park, but Hurricane Isaias proved too powerful, completely destroying the entire park when it struck in August of that year.

With more pressing priorities, such as road recovery and ensuring public safety, the Town didn't have much time to

ensuring public safety, the Town didn't have much time to think, or much less act on the state of the Skatepark. It was deemed a loss, and the constructed features quickly scuttled into the collection piles with other storm debris.

Over the winter and following spring, Town staff worked to identify funding for a total replacement, and in June 2021, the Oak Island Town Council approved \$300,000 for the Skatepark's reconstruction. In December of that year, Council awarded the contract for design, build, and project management to Artisan Skateparks, Inc.

The design phase started immediately with a Public Input Session in January 2022. Town staff and the design team from Artisan took suggestions from the public and skate enthusiasts alike. In June of 2022, a **second** Public Input Session was held, where residents were able to help fine tune the draft concepts. After unveiling the final design, construction began in October. Artisan's crews completed the concrete work in late February 2023, where Public Services staff from the Town took over, upgrading the perimeter landscaping and completely redesigning the parking lot and sidewalk areas. Throughout the project, construction remained on schedule, reaching the goal of a March 2023 opening date.

THAT NEW PARK SMELL. For anyone who hasn't visited in a while, the Kevin Bell Skatepark may look totally

unrecognizable and completely different. There's good reason for that ... **IT IS!** From top to bottom, not a single square inch of the park was left untouched. Newly formed concrete slopes, powder coated grinding rails, new wood perimeter fencing, and even new palm trees all add to this fresh statement piece, that once again puts Oak Island on the "must-do destinations" map.

Skateboarders (**and BMX riders too!**) of all skill levels now have a new, clean, safe atmosphere to practice and hone their skills. The professional aesthetics from the designers, combined with the requested features by local skating enthusiasts, truly combined to make a facility that not only benefits a targeted community, but the entire Town as a

whole. Moving forward, entire families will plan their vacations based solely on the existence of this park. That means that homes will be rented, restaurants will serve food, and businesses will sell merchandise, all as part of the residual benefits of this one Town feature.



PERFECTLY POSITIONED. Much like a skateboard itself, exercise and recreation **moves people**. As good as it is on its own, the Kevin Bell Skatepark also provides a compounded benefit as a feature in the larger Middleton Park Complex. The activities offered by the Skatepark add to the other recreation opportunities from the other features in the Complex. While grandparents take in a concert at the amphitheater, the parents can get in some cardio on the walking trail; and all while in viewing distance of the little kids on the Pirate Ship playground and the teens in the Skatepark. Individually, each feature is an attraction in its own right, but together they effortlessly provide a complete "full family" experience, that is much more than simply "the sum of its parts."

The comeback journey, from destruction and demolition to funding and rebuilding, can be a long and tiring one. It can, and in this case has, be a process that takes years. However, like any good comeback story, when the main character emerges looking stronger and better than ever before, even the staunchest critics are silenced. The damage and work to rebuild the Kevin Bell Skatepark is in its own way, a lesson to all the young skaters to come, who will roll across its surface.

Sometimes you get knocked down, and it hurts, but you'll never

make something better from it until you first get back up.

If you're not much into the skate scene, or have never visited the Kevin Bell skatepark before, you owe it to yourself to explore what others in your community are so excited about. As noted, it's in the southeast corner of the Middleton Park Complex, at the corner of **SE 49th Street & E Dolphin Drive**. You can also learn more about the Skatepark, and view a timeline of its rebuild project on a dedicated page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.gov/SKATE, or click the link below.

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE](#)



PHOTO REVIEW

Provided below are examples of the visuals seen around Town throughout the past month. This section contains officially published AND reader submitted photos. Submissions are donated and not compensated, but are properly credited in the captions below. To contribute a submission, please email the photo along with a description of the date, location, and photographer or business name to: photos@oakislandnc.gov.





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