

Tides of expansion rolling in marina

Its owners plan to make room for more boats and build a condominium.

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BRUNSWICK — The big ships that call on the Port of Brunswick with tons of cargo have long been a boost to the city's economy.

But pleasure vessels, from sail boats to cruisers, moored at Bob Torras' Brunswick Landing Marina have reinvigorated downtown restaurants, shops and stores.

Since the first docks were floated in the 1990s, his facility was perhaps the first in downtown to attract resort tourists. The Brunswick native is gratified to see the transformation it brought.

"When we bought the property in the 1970s, you could look down Newcastle Street in the middle of the day and you wouldn't see a car on it," he said. "When I grew up here, it was a vibrant place. I wanted to do something to bring it back."

There are plenty of cars now, and banks, upscale restaurants, antiques shops and boutiques.

And more is on the way with condominium and other residential developments on the riverfront.

Idea emerges from blight

Torras was somewhat of a trailblazer on an often rough trail. After purchasing the property on Academy Creek, which in-

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cludes his Kut Kwick lawn mower manufacturing operation, he studied ways to develop it.

"We felt to develop our property successfully, we had to produce a draw, and we felt a marina would be that draw," he said.

Brunswick Landing's pull has proved very powerful, but Torras had to jump through 10 years' worth of hoops to get it afloat. That's how long it took to navigate the bureaucratic stream of state and federal permits before he could build.

Amid the doubters, he finally opened the marina in 1994, and it has grown steadily. Its 250 slips remain full, the boat repair yard does steady business and plans for expansion are in place.

"When we started nobody thought a marina in Brunswick could be successful," he said, "and they were very vocal about it."

Now, most locals are delighted by its success and the rising fortunes of downtown Brunswick.

"I would say his vision of creating a marina in Brunswick has generated a lot of revenue for the community," said Woody Woodside, president of the Brunswick-Golden Isles Chamber of Commerce.

"He's very deliberate of what he does, and he takes time to plan. He does have further plans," Woodside said.

Those plans, Torras said, include the relocation of the Kut

Kwick plant within two years to free up 24 acres of usable land for a condominium project with as many as 500 units. He is also considering setting aside space for commercial use and 50 more boat slips.

'Hurricane hole'

Through the years, the marina has built a nice reputation among the boating community, which extends well beyond the coastal waters of Georgia.

About 70 percent of the marina's permanent dockages belong to out-of-towners.

Well up Academy Creek, Brunswick Marina is sheltered from most storms. It is called a "hurricane hole," a safe haven from the seasonal storms that devastate states to the north and south.

Also, there is very little current, which makes docking much easier, a deep channel and a wide turn-around space, Torras said.

In the marina's guest book, a visiting couple blamed their extended stay on "dock glue."

"We do not seem to be able to leave Brunswick," they noted.

Another visitor wrote, "We have discovered Brunswick. We'll be back. The East Coast's most social marina."

Push pins on a world map in the marina's lounge show the geographic diversity of the marina's customers. They come from all the coastal states plus some inland, even Alaska and Hawaii, many European nations, Russia and China.

Carole King is sprucing up her 50-foot, two-masted yawl for an extended cruise. She and her husband, Richard, will set sail within the month for points south. King said she knows why the marina is a success.

"The location is great, the people are friendly and it's convenient for transients," she said. "The people who work here try to accommodate you and do what they can for you. It's a great little place to stop into."

Capt. Bob Torras Jr., who runs the marina and the maintenance yard, said the facility has 12 slips set aside for transient boats.

Most will radio ahead but if they don't and the transient slips are full the marina still tries to find them space.

DeeDee Cate, co-owner of Daddy Cate's Coffees in walking distance of the Brunswick Landing, says marina patrons represent a significant portion of her business. Those who stay longer than a day or two come in about every day, she said.

"They're just really neat people and they love that marina down there ... they become just like family," she said.

Torras said he is gratified to hear about the marina's reputation, but not surprised because he strived to establish a top-grade facility.

Torras said he is also glad the philosophy is spreading through downtown.

