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2 SECTIONS

Town To Contribute To NBI Camps' Preservation Bid

by Alan Pollock

CHATHAM — Selectmen pulled out the checkbook Tuesday and offered some cold, hard support for the effort to preserve camps on North Beach Island.

In their bid to stave off efforts by the Cape Cod National Seashore to evict them and demolish their cottages, five families leasing camps on the island have been advised to hire a cultural historian to help the properties obtain a determination of eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

“Good will and desire to do this well is not going to get this done on its own,” Selectman Sean Summers said. It will cost between \$12,000 and \$15,000 to hire such an expert, the camp lessees reported, and the work needs to begin immediately in order to have a chance of staving off next month’s eviction order.

The board offered \$5,000 toward the effort, using funds from its consulting and engineering account, and advised the camp lessees to seek an additional \$5,000 from the finance committee, which has an account for unforeseen and extraordinary expenses. Only the finance committee can authorize the use of these funds, and they were expected to receive the request this week.

Citing serious erosion around two of the federally-owned camps on the island, Cape Cod National Seashore Superintendent George Price announced in August that it would be ordering tenants to vacate their camps on Sept.

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SMALL FEET, BIG FEAT



Chatham freshman Alex Sequin (left) fires a shot on Cape Tech’s Colleen Walsh and goal keeper Alyssa Garneau. Sequin, making her varsity debut, scored her first goal later in the game to help the Blue Devils defeat the Crusaders 6-0 last Wednesday. For more, see sports page 29. ERIC ADLER PHOTO

Dozens Gather To Celebrate And Remember At Camp Avalon Reunion

by Jennifer Sexton

The name Avalon evokes a magical place in a bygone time which beckons, yet remains just out of reach. For the former campers, counselors and others who loved Chatham’s Camp Avalon, a sailing camp for girls, that magic is strong enough to bring them back together time and time again to reminisce, tell stories, sing camp songs and try to stir up some of the magic that came to an end

when the camp closed in 1988.

On the weekend of Sept. 16 through 18, over 60 Camp Avalon alums gathered from as far away as California and Venezuela at the home of camp owners Betty and George “Laff” Laffy. The home is just down the hill from where the camp once stood, land now occupied by private homes.

Camp Avalon began as an arts and crafts camp, opened at the end of Fox Hill Road by Ruth Gilmore in 1929. Gilmore ran the camp for 20 years, at which time it was taken over by Bill and Gertrude “Wink” Winkler.

“My grandmother was quite a sailor,” says Keith Laffy, grandson of the Winklers. “She was related to the Hammetts, who had Camp Quanset in Orleans. She worked there for a while, and my mother went to that camp for a while, and when Camp Avalon came on the market they bought it and started their own camp.”

The Winklers ran Camp Avalon from 1948 to 1969, at which time their daughter Betty and her husband Laff took over. The Laffys ran the camp until it closed in 1988.

Those who gathered for the reunion attended Camp Avalon in different years and



Campers in the 1980s. PHOTO COURTESY OF BLY BEACH HARTLEY.



Campers in the 1940s. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEILA SMITH.

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Camp Avalon

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different decades, but their love for the place and the people who made it special for so many years forms a bond that transcends age.

“We had 60 women who were at Avalon between 1953 and 1988,” says Camp Avalon alum Bly Beach Hartley. “Unlike high school reunions, being at Avalon at the same time was not critical, as we had the same amazing shared experience no matter what years we were there. The woman from 1953 brought her little wooden sailboat awarded for sailing achievement, and it was almost iden-

tical to the one someone brought from the 1970s. Mine sits on my dresser at home. We sang songs, told stories and repeatedly thanked our parents for providing us with the most amazing opportunity a kid could have in one of the most beautiful places there is. There were more than a few tearful women at our farewell coffee. Betty and Laff were amazing



Campers in the 1930s. PHOTO COURTESY OF BLY BEACH HARTLEY.



Sailing campers in 1934. PHOTO COURTESY OF BLY BEACH HARTLEY.

parents to hundreds of girls from 1970 to 1988, as were Wink and Bill for the 20 years before.”

Laffy feels that the special connection that exists between former campers and counselors at Camp Avalon has less to do with the place itself and more to do with the people who gave it life.

“It was a sailing camp for girls, but it also had swimming and tennis and

archery and trampolines and gymnastics,” Laffy says. “As a teenager, I was there working maintenance, painting cabins and mopping floors, fixing the boats. A lot of people look at their days at Camp Avalon as a fond memory and they want to try to relive that happy time. It wasn’t the camp. It was the people that made the camp special. Camp isn’t really a bunch of buildings and activities. The people make it special. My grandparents and parents interviewed the counselors to find out who would be best for their camp, and I think they did a great job in screening the counselors. The people are what makes the camp memorable for counselors and campers.”

Hartley, who maintains the Camp Avalon website and wrote a book on the subject called “Tide’s In,” agrees.

“I started at camp in 1970 as the lowest of campers,” says Hartley. “I left after I graduated from college and I’d been the head of sailing for three years. My aunt had the same job in 1955, and my uncle was the sailing counselor at Camp Viking. Camp Avalon was the greatest place on the planet run by the two greatest people on the planet. It was a fabulous place to learn how to sail. Fantastic wonderful people, fantastic wonderful food. I spent two months there every summer for my entire life, and would still be there if it hadn’t closed, as would many of the people at the reunion.”

Laffy recites the names of Camp Avalon’s cabins, as adored by alums as old friends.



The Winklers with campers at Camp Avalon in the 1950s. PHOTO COURTESY OF BLY BEACH HARTLEY.

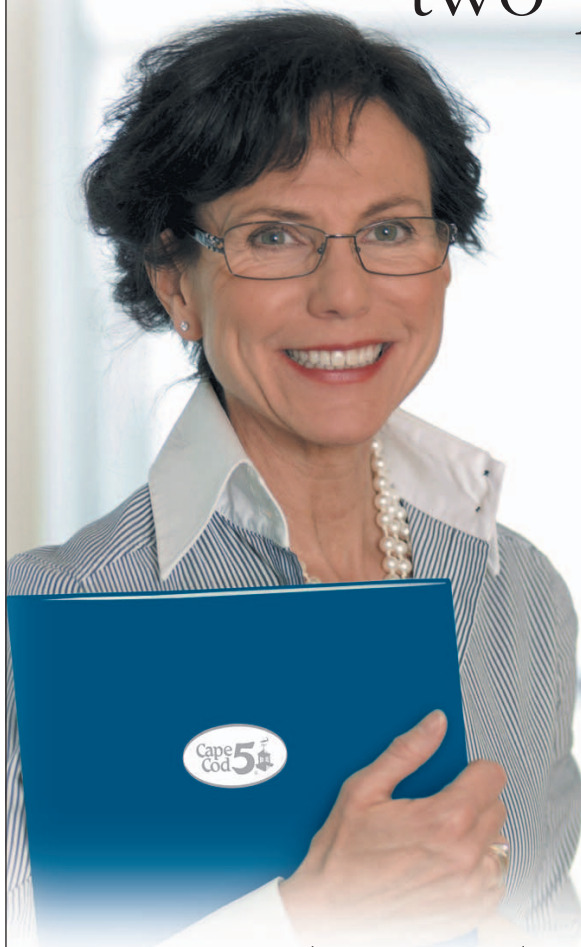
“We had Driftwood, Topsides, Windswept, Porthole, Spinnaker, Mainsail, Barnacle, Mariner, Sou’wester, Starboard and Hard-alee, and the counselors’ cabin was called The Crow’s Nest,” says Laffy. “There was a main dining hall, an office, a drama building or group building called Sleepy Hollow, the infirmary, and a craft shop. At the end we had 17 sailboats: five Bay Birds, seven Cape Cod Mercurys, five Turnabouts. And we had a 30-foot whale boat. I don’t know if it was a schooner or a ketch, but it had two masts and three sails. They would use that for overnights. They would take that out and go to the outer beach and sleep on the beach. There aren’t camps like that anymore. It’s a sad thing when the camps close.”

Bly recalls the first time she went sailing as an adult.

“I’ve been sailing since I was a little kid. Sailing as a college-age adult for the first time by myself in Little Pleasant Bay, I suddenly realized that nobody on the planet knew I was alive or out there sailing. That was the first time in my life that happened, because as a child I always knew if there was ever a problem, no matter what happened, Laff would always be there. He would always be there.”

For more information about Camp Avalon, visit www.campavalon.cc. Bly Beach Hartley’s book “Tide’s In” about Camp Avalon is available to view on the website.

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