

Fire Island Chronicle

Volume III Issue 10

Share Memories, Share Fire Island Chronicle

September 30, 2016

Goodbye Summer 2016!



Photo credit: Bob Lerch

FREE

NPS Warns Boaters to Avoid the Breach

By Nicole Brems

On Sunday September 18th, a boat ran aground and capsized while trying to operate through the breach on eastern Fire Island. Eight passengers were rescued by National Park Service (NPS) Rangers and Town of Brookhaven lifeguards and were transported off Fire Island for medical care.

According to a press release, since the breach, which is closed to boating, opened in 2012, there have been 17 calls for assistance and two rescues, with more reports of assistance coming just this past week.

“This is a dangerous area that is difficult to navigate, which is the primary reason swimming and boating are not permitted in the breach,” said NPS Supervisory Park Ranger Jon Swindle.

The breach was formed in the Otis Pike Fire Island Dune Wilderness area during Hurricane Sandy in October 2012. “Waves and tides influence the shape and position of the flood shoals north of the breach in the Great South Bay, the main channel of the

breach, and the ebb shoals south of the breach. These dynamic features are constantly changing and present a significant safety risk,” according to the press release.

The breach is accessible on foot from the west, heading east from Davis Park or Watch Hill. Visitors can also access the breach from the east heading west from the Wilderness Visitor Center. Wading, swimming, paddling and boating in the breach have been prohibited since it opened to ensure visitor safety and to preserve the primitive character of the federally designated wilderness. Signage is not used in the area due to the dynamic nature of the shoreline.

NPS is currently in the process of making a decision to determine whether or not to close the breach and will release a Draft Fire Island Wilderness Breach Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for public review and comment this fall. The plan will evaluate alternatives for managing the wilderness breach. The desired outcome of the plan is to ensure the continued integrity of the natural and cultural

features at Fire Island National Seashore and the Great South Bay, while protecting human life and managing the risk of economic and physical damage to the surrounding ecosystems.

Letter From the Editor

Hello Fire Islanders!

This issue marks the end of the Chronicle’s 2016 season. It’s hard to believe that another summer has come and gone already. I had a great time this summer attending events and hearing from readers.

I also have to give a big thank you to all of my reporters. I had a really awesome group this year to work with and hope to have many of them return next summer.

I look forward to spending the winter finding ways to make the Chronicle even bigger and better next year. If you have any ideas, please feel free to let me know.

For next year, we are looking to add a salesperson to our team. If you, or someone you know, might be interested please send them my way! As always, I would love to add more reporters, please reach out if you’re interested.

Throughout the offseason we’ll be sure to share updates on our Facebook page, be sure to like Fire Island Chronicle to keep up on the latest there is to know about Fire Island!

I hope you all have an amazing winter! Soon enough, it’ll spring and we can do it all again!

Best, Nicole Brems
Publisher/Editor

Fire Island Chronicle

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Nicole Brems

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Cherry Grove Community Association

Fall Meeting

By Nicole Brems

The Cherry Grove Community Association met for their fall meeting on September 18th to discuss some important topics before most of the community departs for the winter months.

Building Update

There have been some legal issues brought up and who owns the bulkhead in front of the community house. If the Community Association does not own it, it could turn into an issue with the variance that gave them permission to use up to a certain percentage of the land on the property for the building. There should be more information available about this during the winter months as the association investigates it further.

There are also various small fixes around the property that need to be completed, totaling about \$30,000.

Fundraising

This year there were two fundraisers benefitting Save Our Community House. The Belvedere hosted "Carnival in Venice" in July followed by "A Star Is Born" at Blueberry Hill in August. For the year, over \$100,000 has been raised.

There are still many naming opportunities available in the community house for every budget.

Dock

Currently, the property owners' association and Town of Brookhaven are searching to see how far in either direction of the existing dock is actually owned by Town of Brookhaven, as opposed to a private owner. This will help determine the new dock layout and size.

The RFP is currently out and they are pushing to complete the work over the 2017 off-season.

FIMI

The project will reach Cherry Grove in fall/winter 2017. All of the crossovers to the beach will be redone. There needs to be at least one ramp in the community for ADA compliance, the ramp would have to be placed about the middle of the community to meet the compliance. They are also discussing removing the two ramps that the community currently has leading to the beach. But, they are used for fire department access, which is very necessary to keep.

The project will be putting sand on the beach itself, not the dunes. The dunes will not be touched.

EMS

The EMS service will continue next season as it has the last few years. The only change is that now the personnel will be housed in the property next to the firehouse, which is owned by the fire district, as opposed to where they are currently. The service will be run in the same manner as previously.

Arts Project

The Arts Project celebrated their end of season ball on the 25th at Island Breeze. They had a successful season with a variety of shows throughout the summer. They also noticed that shows that included locals brought in bigger audiences. They are discussing how to continue that in the future.

Dunes Fund

The fall planting of dune grass will take place over Co-

lumbus Day weekend, though this is not official yet.

The fund reminds everyone to not dump on the dunes. Dumping on the dunes destroys the grass that the fund works so hard to plant every year. The grass helps the dunes grow and prosper.

Damminex and Mosquitoes

The fall Damminex treatments have been distributed, the money paid over the summer for the treatments pays for this treatment as well as the one in the upcoming spring.

There have been only two cases of Zika virus in Suffolk County, both were travel based. The mosquitoes that we have in the area currently cannot transmit Zika virus.

There have been zero cases of West Nile Virus in Suffolk County. Only seven pools throughout the county tested positive this year for the virus, a huge decrease from past years.

Be sure to check your property for any standing water, this is where mosquitoes will breed.

Garden Club

The Garden Club had a successful season, topped with the annual bake sale over Labor Day weekend. They were able to pay off the planting in front of the Community House. They look forward to another successful season next year.

PAWS

PAWS rescued six kittens this year, including the mother cat that was fixed and returned to Cherry Grove. One kitten has been adopted so far. There was also a large male cat that was caught and had to be put down because

he was so sickly.

PAWS will no longer trap animals and bare the costs associated with trapping an animal and their care afterward. The organization has lacked financial support from the community and can no longer afford to offer the trapping service. However, they will make traps available for anyone who wants to shoulder the cost of catching a stray.

PAWS is still in need of money to help care for the cats that have been caught that they are still caring for.

Post Office

The Post Office closes on October 22nd for the season. Be sure to stop in and support your Post Office by buying some stamps before Betty departs. There will be a new sign above the office in the spring.

Fire Department

There will be a cell tower added to the firehouse over the winter. It will start with Verizon and AT&T, they are hoping to add more companies to it. The phone companies will be paying the fire district to use the tower.

Doctor's House

The sale of the Doctor's House is now definitely happening. There are many details involved with the agreement. There is a document available through the Community Association will all the details.

The Community Association will reconvene with their spring meeting in mid-May. Be sure to check out their website throughout the winter for any updates that may become available.

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Sybil Sez!

SO! WHAT DID WE LEARN THIS YEAR???

Hey there, Loyal & Patient Reader (or person wandering around in the grocery store picking up the remainders of Carr's Crackers and some extra sharp pre-sliced cheddar for tonight's end-of-season dinner!), I'm not posting a letter from you folks this week! Most of you have left Fire Island in various levels of sobriety, melancholy, relief, romance...or NOT, and I feel this may be the time to explore what exactly we might have gathered from the seaside Summer of 2016.

Autumn is definitely the season for harvesting what we have sown, either deliberately or accidentally, and for those of us that are "hunter-gatherers", introspection seems to go beautifully with a slight chill in the air, the turning of the leaves, and a little crackling fire in the fireplace..... We may be wearing a Ralph Lauren Indian blanket coat from the 1989 collection (retail value \$585 plus tax!) but when we're huddled up against the chill, with the flames just beginning to catch at that damp log we dug out of the leaf-pile in the back yard, we all hark right back to the first Neanderthals that served an elk and brie fondue admiring their first cave-painted dining hovel. What do we take away with us? What do we share and reminisce about?.....Speaking as someone who feels she traveled through decades in just the last 365 days, here's my one big "take-away".....

"The only constant and unchanging thing in the Universe is..... CHANGE!". You can stamp your foot! You can kick and scream! You can make all the money in the world, and hoard it! You can stop all the clocks in the house and break all the mirrors! You can even be the Koch brothers, but "change" will march right through your front door! Be prepared as much as possible! ...not to thwart it, but to extend your hand as cheerfully as you can, and offer it a seat and a cup of coffee while you discuss your options. I meticulously closed up my little place on Fire Island in the Fall of

2013 as I always do; applying all my old household remedies and folk-lore about mice, raccoons, mildew, mustiness, rustiness, and the like, and returned in the Spring of 2014 to a severely damaged ceiling that had leaked all Winter, destroying the entire place from carpets, floorboards, insulation, walls, to all the contents. Mr. Mold had taken up residence and consumed everything that was edible.... including the coffee table, the linens, and some of my favorite props, costumes, and stage scenery! We all know the old saying "The best laid plans of mice & men...." (...and apparently actresses doing shows in Cherry Grove as well!)... After replacing walls, tiles, floors, carpeting, insulation, etc., etc., I have much more circumspection about "life's merry little pranks" as my old pal Margo Channing so aptly put it. When I close up the place again this month, I will say the same prayers to the powers-that-be to watch over my sweet little bungalow, but with the added addendum of surrender to their whimsical caprices. I've suggested to you all that you stand your mattresses on end so they can breathe. To draw lightweight curtains over your windows to prevent too much fading of fabrics and to ward off birds from crashing against the glass, and conversely, to avoid boarding up windows and plunging your home into absolute darkness and mildew. I've suggested using bowls of mothballs tucked into corners of rooms, and scattering open newspapers with mothballs on top of them over sofas and upholstered furniture to annoy mice. Mothballs chase everything away, from four-footed friends to bugs, and even mold and mildew (provided your home isn't underwater for 6 months!). And I've told you to leave absolutely NO candles or bars of soap around....mice and raccoons get so hungry in the Winter, they'll eat anything!!..... especially "snacks" you've left around from Caswell Massey and Diptyque! No one likes the mothball smell when you reopen your house in May, but it takes only an

hour or so to air it out, and the damage it can prevent is well worth the temporary feeling that Grandma visited.

Having said that... having said ALL that, my advice now comes with a "waver". Mummie can't be held responsible for your home still standing in 2017. My spoonful-of-sugar-under-your-tongue-for-hiccups cure doesn't guarantee that you won't choke somehow while trying it. My request that you tip your bartender for that free 2-for-1 drink during Happy Hour doesn't guarantee smiling service every time. My recipes for tea sandwiches or brining and marinating meat for the barbecue may not please every palette. My pleading with you to try, just try, nasal rinses for a week or so to see if they clear your hay fever or cold may fall on deaf (and plugged!) ears! My request that you fold your napkin neatly beside your plate when dinner is done, as opposed to plopping it into the remains of gravy, butter, and red-wine-reduction for your hostess or waiter to find as an insult may annoy you and cause you to be even more obstreperous. All these, and a hundred more of my offerings are basically me butting into your lives, and "whistling in the dark" against the vagaries of my own life. When I wrote my first column for the Fire Island Chronicle years ago, I was a safe and secure resident of many years in a beloved apartment in Greenwich Village. Sixty days later and with only sixty days warning, I was out on the street with a 150 other non-stabilized renters (thank you Messrs. Giuliani and Bloomberg!) and wandering up to West End Avenue and 105th Street! There truly are NO guarantees in this world of ours! But, as I started this closing article of the season, I repeat that "change" is inevitable. Just as Summer gives way to the Fall, so too does the Fall to the Winter. Some time after the hub-bub of the holidays, when you have a breather and are reflecting back on 2016, you'll remember it was a hot Summer, after a strangely mild Winter. In the

past, hurricanes like Irene and Sandy have blown through.... (Irene, not much more than a wet fart, and Sandy, considerably more so!)....but we have survived. Perennials in the garden that folks thought wouldn't return, came back triumphantly, and freshly planted annuals sputtered and died. New folks moved next door and invited you to a cook-out, and old friends decided they might move to Florida permanently after all.... And just as the Winter follows the Fall....so too does Spring, charming, frivolous, frilly, silly, and implacable Spring rolls over and finally crushes the Winter. The great cycle moves and rolls on. We're all a part of it, large and small, willing or resisting, it too is implacable. Your wristwatch may stop, but the hands on the "great clock" never even slow... not for anything, or anybody. When you surrender to it, there's something awesomely beautiful and even comforting about it. Be present to every moment, say "thank you" to all of life, cherish and hold all the love and beauty that comes your way! Drink every moment in with your eyes and ears! Put down the cell phone and actually live the life you're so busy texting about..... and I'll see you again in the Spring. Sybil Sez. Xoxoxoxo.....

You too can send your questions and suggestions to Sybil Bruncheon at [Bruncheon@hotmail.com](mailto:SybilBruncheon@hotmail.com). You can also join Sybil on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, and on her websites; SybilBruncheon.com and SybilSez.com. She will be appearing in a new season of weekly shows in NYC. Check her calendar for times and locations.)

On The Wild Side

WINGS ON THE WIND

In his last column for this season, we are pleased to announce that Witek received third place in the newspaper column category at the New York State Outdoor Writers Association's annual awards for his article "The Shark In Your Boat Slip," which appeared in the August 14th issue last summer. We congratulate Witek on his award and hope more are to come.

By Charles A Witek III

As September ages, the southwest breeze that brought cool ocean air to Fire Island, has been replaced by a strong northwest flow that carries something very different to the barrier beach—a stream of migrating hawks.

Most are either swift falcons, which hunt their prey in the sky, or accipiters, which have evolved to pursue birds and small mammals through dense forest growth. Both are willing to cross small stretches of open water over the course of their annual migrations, unlike the larger, broad-winged hawks known as buteos, which generally migrate along land routes that lead them west of Long Island.

A few eagles and turkey vultures will also move south and west along the barrier islands, while ospreys follow schools of fish toward warmer waters, while northern harriers wheel above the yellowing beach grass, hunting the mouse-like voles that they depend on for much of their sustenance.

The migration started slowly, in early September, and will wind down as October wanes. Generally, American kestrels and merlins, are the first hawks to pass through in large numbers, beginning in the second week of September.

Both kestrels and merlins are falcons, with kestrels the smaller of the two.

The male kestrel is a striking bird, with a chestnut back and tail that complements its dark gray head and wings. The female, although larger, is a more subdued chestnut brown overall.

Kestrels are aggressive predators, although their small size limits their prey to insects and, on occasion, small birds. To aid in their hunt, both sexes feature a vertical streak of black feathers beneath their eyes, which serves to cut down glare and make potential prey easier to spot despite harsh sunlight.

Kestrels breed on Long Island, although probably not on Fire Island itself, which generally lacks the stands of large trees needed for nesting. A few remain on Long Island throughout the winter; however, as cold weather either kills off flying insects or forces them into hibernation, most migrate to more productive feeding grounds. Females generally move through first, followed by the males; their migration peaks around the fourth week of September, and by the second week of October, most have flown by.

Merlins are slightly larger and more heavily-built than kestrels, and have a less striking appearance; males tend toward bluish-gray heads, backs and wings, while the females' upper parts are brown. They are aggressive predators that frequently snatch smaller birds out of the air. On Fire Island, merlins frequently attack flocks of shorebirds that feeding on the open beach.

Merlins are northern nesters, and only pass over Fire Island during migration. They appear about the same time that the kestrels do, but their numbers don't peak until the end of September, and don't start to taper off sharply until about a month after that.

Peregrine falcons, which are the largest falcon normally seen during migration, make a later, shorter appearance, with numbers building during

the fourth week in September, peaking in early October and tapering off thereafter, although one or two may remain throughout the winter.

Peregrine falcons are consummate aerial hunters. They are fairly large, about the size of a crow, and probably the fastest animal on earth, capable of reaching speeds of 200 miles per hour during the dive, or "stoop," which is their preferred means of attacking prey. The combination of size and speed makes them deadly predators of birds as large as ducks, which they often knock out of the air by striking with balled talons made lethal by the falcon's extreme speed. However, depending on the circumstances, they will also strike smaller birds with talons extended so that, instead of following them to the ground, they can carry them off to be eaten elsewhere.

Like merlins, peregrines can often be seen harassing shorebird flocks along the barrier beaches. Unlike merlins, they will also try to force swimming ducks into the air, where they become easy targets.

Peregrines don't breed on Fire Island, as they normally nest on high cliffs overlooking open expanses. In recent years, they have also taken up life in large urban centers; a number now nest on skyscrapers and bridges around New York City, where they keep local pigeon flocks under control.

Accipiters move through later than falcons. The two species common on Fire Island, the sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks, appear alike at first glance. Both have gray backs and brown-streaked breasts, and both have the short, rounded wings and long tails that allow them

to maneuver while chasing birds through dense forest.

The Cooper's hawk is larger than the sharp-shinned, but that's not too much help in telling them apart, as a male Cooper's and a female sharp-shinned are about the same size. If the birds are flying overhead, the sharp-shinned will appear to have no neck; it's head won't extend past the knuckle in the wings. The Cooper's' head extends noticeably farther forward.

Sharp-shinned hawks become abundant on Fire Island late in September, and peak about a month later; Cooper's become abundant in early October, peak a couple of weeks later, but remain fairly abundant throughout the month.

Whenever they pass through, falcons and accipiters burn a lot of energy during migration. They must hunt frequently in order to survive. Fortunately, the daytime migration of hawks is matched by a nighttime migration of songbirds—warblers, wrens, thrushes and others—that travel in darkness to avoid predators. When those birds settle down to rest in the brush at dawn, some end up as prey.

Ornithologists often take advantage of hunting hawks by setting up a bird-banding station near the Fire Island lighthouse. Within a ring of fine, barely visible mist nets, the scientists tether three birds—a house sparrow, a starling and a pigeon, all invasive, unprotected species—each encased in a leather vest to help protect it from a hawk's talons.

continued on last page

Island Roots

Tales From Fire Island People

The Flip Flop Killer

By Mackenzie Lowry

When I was 14-years-old, I kidnapped a boy on Fire Island.

Well, sort-of.

My friends, Geri and Theresa, and I befriended a 12-year-old boy, Alex*, down at the park. The park was the meeting place for us: new friends, cute boys, holding court in the gazebo. We wanted to be there every night after ice cream so that we wouldn't miss a thing. On this particular summer, we met a witty blonde boy with a British accent down by the swings and immediately took him in. We showed him around town, took him with us on sandy treks to Cherry Grove, brought him to family dinners, and even dressed him

up like British musicians when we had nothing else to do.

During one family dinner, we brought another friend of ours, Jay*. Jay had never been over before so he had never seen the shoes. Pre-hurricane, the fence at our house was lined with flip-flops that my dad found on the beach and nailed to the wood. When Jay asked why all the shoes were there, Alex and I told him that my dad actually kills people and nails their shoes to the fence. Jay, who was younger than us, was spooked. We told him not to tell anyone, and then we forgot all about it.

A few days went by and one night a bunch of us were sleeping over at my house and Alex decided to join. In

typical 12-year-old fashion, he forgot to tell his mom he was sleeping out. This would have been a minor problem, except that she had a serious kidnapping scare with him a few years before. While everyone in my house slept soundly, the cops and Alex's mother were frantically searching all over for him, even calling out helicopters to look.

We woke up, yawned, and took time eating breakfast before the kids all started to dissipate. When Alex headed home and found out what was going on, he told his mom he'd been over at this house on Evergreen.

When the cops showed up, I was in the backyard with my parents, my brother, and Jay. My dad being an offi-

cer, I was used to cops being around, usually just to say hi, so I wasn't phased when they walked in the yard. Jay, on the other hand, suddenly looked spooked. The cops started to explain that they weren't just stopping by - they were here on a case. Jay couldn't hold it any longer.

"HE KILLS PEOPLE! HE KILLS PEOPLE AND PUTS THEIR SHOES ON THE FENCE!" he exclaimed.

After a moment of silence, the officers all laughed. They filled my dad in on Alex's story and then all was well.

But they never dug up the back yard.

*Names changed for the story

FIMI Project Update

By Nicole Brems

The FIMI project started again earlier this month and will continue through the winter. This phase of the project covers Fair Harbor to Seaview.

The dredge pipe is located on the border of Seaview and Ocean Beach, with the walkways to the beach already being pulled out in Seaview, it was placed on the 16th of this month.

The contractors on the project will be dredging 210,000 yards of sand. The actual work on the dunes is set to start in early October, beginning with Seaview and moving westward. The beach crossovers will be completed after the sand is placed and before next season.

A house in Robbins Rest that is on the beach and in the way of the dune, is in the process of being torn down this week.

The owners of homes set to be demolished in Ocean Bay Park now have 60 days to vacate and demolition will begin January 1st. There are reports that relocation agreements and the engineering for all houses, decks and pools are nearing completion for those effected in phase 3c of the project.

The work should continue through the winter, stop for the next summer season before being picked up again next fall to finish the final phase in the communities east of Seaview.

Readers can check out pictures and updates of the work on our Facebook page throughout the winter.

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**If interested,
please email us at
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Fall Updates from Across the Island

By Nicole Brems

Ocean Beach

There will be work done over the off-season on the Ocean Beach ferry basin.

The wagon park near the ferry terminal is now closed so that the project wastake place. If necessary, you may use the east tennis court until you close your home for the season. At the end of the season, they ask that you bring your wagon back to your house.

The ferry will now be arriving and departing from the dock at Dehnhoff Walk instead of the regular ferry terminal.

Stay up-to-date with any changes in Ocean Beach by visiting their website.

Fire Island Pines

The harbor reconstruction project continues and is hoped to be completed over this offseason. There are some issues with the final design of the freight dock, but the hope is that that will not delay the project. They plan to do the project is three phases, but the more details about that are currently available. They still need to resolve the issue of a temporary location of the ferry dock and freight dock.

The 2016 mobility cart fundraising campaign was very successful. They were able to raise \$46,250. The new cart, which cost \$21,000, has been ordered and is expected to be delivered sometime in December. It costs about \$6,000 a year to maintain all three vehicles. The surplus from this year's fundraising will go to help support the cart service for the next

few years.

There were some concerns over the Pinesfest, which happened over Labor Day weekend. Some people were concerned about the length of the event, the noise associated with it and the fact that beach access was blocked at the area of the event. FIPPOA does not have any kind of approval authority over permits issued for beach events through Town of Brookhaven. But, they will discuss these concerns with the property authorities in the town.

FIPPOA also reminds everyone to please be cautious when disposing of cigarette butts. Fire is a very real problem on Fire Island and everyone needs to do their part to prevent any future fires.

FIPPOA issues periodic newsletters throughout the year on their website. Be sure to

check it out.

Be sure to check our website and Facebook page throughout the winter for updates about all of the communities on Fire Island.



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“On the Wild Side” continued

When the researchers see a hawk approaching, they tug on a string attached to the appropriately-sized bird, which begins to move and flap, and suddenly becomes bait for the winged predator.

Most of the time, the mist net will entrap a hawk before it comes close to its intended prey. However, an incoming peregrine will occasionally dive with such power that it bursts through the mesh, while northern harriers present the opposite problem, gliding in slowly and gently, then landing near the tethered decoy without ever touching the net.

If either of those things happens, the waiting scientists must race out to rescue the tethered bird. But if the net does its job, they carefully untangle the hawk from its embrace, weigh and measure the captured bird, and affix a numbered band on its leg. Should the hawk ever be recaptured or found dead, that band will provide information on both where and when it migrates and on how long it might live.

On rare occasion, such banded birds might be trapped on Fire Island again, as they take part in a migration that stretches back for untold millennia and, hopefully, will continue so long as the island stands at the edge of the sea.