

Pulitzer Prize Winning

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## Local News

### More than a fish tale

Want to learn something about history, economics and island life?

Keep watch on the efforts of the Ocracoke Working Watermen's Association to keep the lone remaining fish house on Ocracoke Island open. The association is working to raise \$447,000 by the summer of 2007. Association members contend the fish house — Ocracoke Seafood Co. — is essential to the island's working waterfront. That's why the association wants to buy the fish house. It would like to take ownership of the structure by June 1.

The seafood company opened this summer in a fish house that closed last winter. The association has until March 2007 to buy the facility.

The association is seeking nonprofit status, which it expects to receive by the end of the year.

Money raised by the watermen's group would be used to pay for improvements to the fish house and buy a new truck.

While many people think of Ocracoke Island as a resort for tourists, many others know the Hyde County barrier island as a place that has a history of providing livelihoods to commercial fishermen.

The retail operation at the front of the fish house is prospering, according to a recent article by The Virginian-Pilot. If the fish house were not on the island, commercial fishermen would have to travel much farther to unload their catches.

A continued loss of waterfront in North Carolina has resulted in the state appointing a committee to study the problem and recommend solutions by April 15, 2007. The Waterfront Access Study Committee, created this summer by the General Assembly, is made up of 21 people.

To help get out the message about the loss of waterfront, the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching is conducting a seminar on fishing and waterfronts later this month. The seminar will be conducted on the island.

The association's effort to save the fish house is a wonderful project in and of itself. As the effort attracts attention — as it should — it's a good bet that people will become more knowledgeable about the island's history of commercial fishing and the role commercial fishing, not to mention recreational fishing, plays in the island's economy.

If a young person wants to learn about being an independent businessman, or businesswoman, talking to a waterman would be a good place to start. The association, by way of a youth center, teaches schoolchildren about fishing as a way to make a living.

The association's effort, in part, is to put money into watermen's pockets. That's called making a living. The effort also is about saving a way of life that's been a part of coastal North Carolina since man first walked the state's coastline. That's called preserving the state's maritime heritage.

Fish houses are much more than a place to buy and sell fish. They are places where generations of watermen and their families have socialized, where seafaring stories — true and exaggerated — are told and where lessons in history, commerce and science

can be learned among the spot, croaker, flounder, crabs and shrimp.

North Carolina's commercial-fishing heritage must be saved. It's an integral part of the fabric that makes up the Old North State. It's as much a part of North Carolina as tobacco and textiles.

Let's hope the Ocracoke Working Watermen's Association nets the money it needs to save the fish house. For in saving the fish house, the association will save something more valuable — a part of North Carolina's heritage.

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