

Tuckerton Seaport Evolution

By TERRY O'LEARY

TUCKERTON— On July 12, before hundreds of celebrants enjoyed the Barnegat Bay Decoy and Baymen's Museum's Annual Seafood Festival in Tip Seaman County Park, many walked across Main Street (Route 9) to what will be the entrance to the Tuckerton Seaport.

There, at 10 am, in front of a billboard that has been used to keep Seaport enthusiasts updated on its progress, museum officials and honored guests held a ceremonial Ground Breaking.

The Tuckerton Seaport, to be built along the Tuckerton Creek, will be the re-creation of an authentic working seaport village. The site was historically used as a ship building center in Tuckerton, which was designated as America's third port of entry by George Washington in 1791.

The Groundbreaking kicks off Stage One of the building project, including nearly a half mile of barrier-free boardwalks and walkways. Stage One is expected to take somewhere from 24 to 30 months and will include 11 buildings at a total cost of approximately \$7.4 million.

According to John Gormley, Executive Director, the organization expects to be able to put out bids for the bulkheading and walkways portion of the project shortly and work should begin soon thereafter.

"And we expect bids to go out this fall for the construction of the building," he said.

When it is completed, Stage One is expected to attract 105,000 visitors a year, bringing hundreds of thousands of tourist dollars to area. The Tuckerton Seaport, when all phases are complete, will contain 28 historic structures and replicas of actual buildings from up and down Barnegat Bay.

The Baymen have already raised \$2.7 million to date through grants, donations, gift shop sales, membership dues, and fund raisers such as the July 12 annual seafood festival.

Among funding approval so far is a \$661,000 reimbursable grant from the Transportation Enhancement Projects Program (ISTEA) of the New Jersey Department of Transportation to pay for the bulkheading and boardwalks. The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority has pledged \$1 million, to be received in three installments for the development of Stage One.

Also received were a \$50,000 Community Development Block Grant for the Feasibility

Study; \$62,500 each from Tuckerton Borough, Little Egg Harbor Township, and Ocean County as partial matches to Green Acres Funding; \$135,000 by the NJ Department of Community Affairs to help defray professional fees, and \$183,000 by the Seaport Founders Club, a fund raising program in which donors purchase "square yards" of Seaport property and receive "commemorative deeds." A percentage of the cost of Baymen's Museum license plates, expected to be available in October, will also benefit the project.

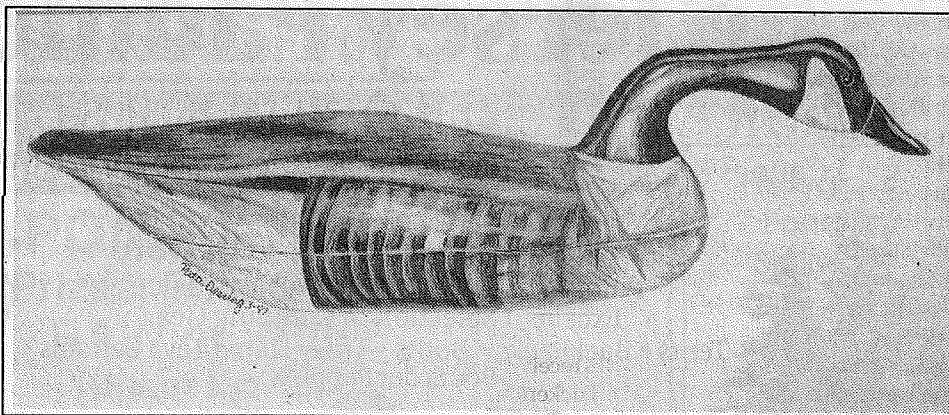
Seaport planners have imagined a regional tourist attraction, complete with working tradesmen's shops, and ecotours of the Maritime Forest Interpretive Trail, waterfront, salt marsh and nearby bays and estuaries.

Along with the Tucker's Island Lighthouse, other historic replicas will include the old Tuckerton Yacht Club; the decoy carving shop of the late Hurley Conklin, in whose name an award is presented each year to people who have lived in the Barnegat Bay tradition. Napoleon Kelly's Oyster House, from which the Seaport Dockmaster will operate; Jay C. Parker's Decoy Carving Shop; Parson's Clam and Oyster House; the Perrine Boat Works; Skeeters, from Tucker's Island, to be used as a Seafood Cafe; Joe Dayton's Sawmill; the Skinner/Donnelly Houseboat, and the Hunting Shanty, (the current Barnegat Bay Decoy and Baymen's Museum) which will be moved to the Seaport site.

Additional Seaport buildings to be built in later stages include the Hester Sedge Gun Club; Heinrichs' Boat Works; the Hotel De

Crab; Leon Headley's Blacksmith Shop; Sandy Island Gun Club and Taylor Johnson's Decoy Carving Shop and Horner's Clam House; Crest Fisheries, depicting the pound fisheries of yesteryear; the Surf City Pavilion, showing the history of whaling off Long Beach Island; Joe Reid's Garvey Shop; the Beach Haven Yacht Club; the Edge Cove Railway Station, Ship Bottom Life Saving Station, and more. Two historic buildings already in existence on the property are the Sea Captain's House, which houses the seaport's administrative offices, and Sunny Brae Saltbox, a former gatehouse, which will hold exhibits, artifacts, tools, and demonstrations of traditional vocations, such as salt haying, eelgrass harvesting, knot tying, cooping (barrel-making), net-mending, and eeling.

Rep. H. James Saxton, R-3rd District, who is working on getting the dredging of Tuckerton Creek put back into next year's congressional budget, was on hand for the July 12 groundbreaking celebration, along with 9th District state legislators Sen. Leonard T. Connors and Assemblymen Jeffrey Moran and Christopher Connors. They have played a primary role in the success of the project. Local mayors, the freeholders, county dignitaries, and others attended among a throng of members and supporters. "We sent out 2,000 invitations," said Tom Gormley, John Gormley's twin. Many "turned out for the seafood festival, too. As part of the celebration, troubadour Merce Ridgway's song *It's A Beautiful Day on Barnegat Bay* was performed by local traditional musicians, Valerie Vaughn and Rich Cortes.



Artist rendering courtesy of Patti Deering.

Harry V. Shourds Crooked Neck Canada Goose Decoy.