

Change is a stranger to beach village

In 6 decades, the only thing different is the home prices

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David Galloway pulls his SUV into the little lot beside a boat basin and begins checking cars for the requisite parking sticker.

A silver sedan doesn't have the decal, and it gets a yellow warning notice tucked under a windshield wiper. There won't be a fine, because Galloway, a security officer in Ocean Beach III in Toms River, is interested only in compliance.



Andrew Mills/The Star-Ledger

A woman and child head up to the beach at Ocean Beach Unit III, one of the last areas of beach cottage communities on the Jersey Shore.

A strict adherence to the rules is one important reason things haven't changed much at this seaside development in 57 years. Life is simple and always has been.

As McMansions or starter castles have gradually changed the landscape of New Jersey's oceanfront, the development's neat rows of modest, single-story cottages have stood defiantly against the towering spectacles of their neighbors.

"A lot of people like the comfort of knowing something is always the same," said John McDonough, a grandson of one of the developers. "It's a throwback to another time, to a simpler time in life."

Keeping the Ocean County development, with its nearly 1,000 homes, practically unchanged since it was built in 1951 is the deed restriction penned by McDonough's grandfather, Frederick Pearl, and Pearl's partner, Edward Patnaude. They envisioned a peaceful and affordable haven for the blue-collar workers and World War II veterans who couldn't afford the stately beach homes under construction at the time.

The restrictions can be a little stifling, some residents admit. They cover everything from what type of fence can be erected to how many cars can be parked in a driveway. Parking on the streets, which are covered with a gravelly sand instead of macadam, is a no-no.

The restriction that most helped preserve the character of the development was the ban on structures taller than one story. No one can block the cooling breezes, sunlight or view down the narrow lanes to the ocean or bay.

There are strict limits, too, on additions. But then again, there's not much room to expand on lots that average 50 by 32 feet.

Jacqui DeLore-Lurker of Staten Island, whose mother has owned one of the cottages for 50 years, treasures her annual two-week vacation there with her husband and two children.

"Some people think it's too strict," she said last week while strolling back from the beach with her friend, Lori Severino of Middletown, and their children. "As a kid I thought it was ridiculous, but as an adult I appreciate it, because it keeps it nice."

Many of the houses have been passed down through the years to family members, but the buildings that change hands are no longer the Utopian deal the developers envisioned.

Originally priced at \$2,045 for a two-bedroom cottage, the Ocean Beach III homes have become popular and much pricier. A 720-square-foot oceanfront bungalow -- on leased land -- can fetch as much as \$750,000. Many homeowners lease their property on an annual basis and pay fees of up to \$12,000.

In addition to the ocean breezes, added amenities have helped swell prices. The original homes were exceedingly bare; naked studs formed the walls, and the kitchens included no cabinets. Buyers who chose not to pay extra for a hot-water heater got a tub on the roof that collected rainwater warmed by the sun. That was all Pearl and Patnaude figured buyers needed for their few summer months at the Shore, McDonough said.

INTIMATE SPACING

The tightly packed houses encourage good behavior, something appreciated by renter Peter McHugh of Stony Point, N.Y.

McHugh, on vacation with his companion, Tara Gavin, and her two daughters, said they spend much of their time outdoors. They count themselves lucky that the people in the house behind them prefer Roy Orbison to hip-hop.

"We don't spend much time in the house at all," McHugh said last week as he sat on the porch, sipping beer. "You usually strike up a friendship with the neighbors. How can you not when you're this close?"

Pearl, a builder who lost his shirt during the Depression, started the first of his Ocean Beach projects in 1946 when he and Patnaude, a fellow laundry truck driver, persuaded Patnaude's brother-in-law to lend them \$10,000, McDonough said. That first development, Ocean Beach I, contained 315 homes, and it was so successful, they went at it again with Ocean Beach II (487 homes), Ocean Beach III, and Ocean Beach Shores, one street of 100 homes.

The neighboring Ocean Beach developments all have separate homeowner associations and were built with less-strict bylaws than Ocean Beach III. Floors have been added to the small houses, and they no longer maintain the original character that the third phase has.

Galloway, the security officer, is still friends with people he met while vacationing in the cottage his father bought in 1953. His sister now has that bungalow, and he bought the one behind it in 1984.

"People who were kids down here still hang out together," said Galloway, a retired television engineer from Michigan.

RESENTMENT AND LOVE

The developments are not idyllic for all. Some homeowners resent the strict regulations and have gone to court to fight them. One case in Ocean Beach Shores, in which a homeowner challenged the height restriction, was settled in an undisclosed agreement.

State regulators occasionally intervene. In 2005, the Department of Environmental Protection cited Ocean Beach III for barring anyone but owners and tenants from the beach. The homeowners association avoided a fine by making beach badges available for sale to the public.

Also, the DEP directed homeowners associations along the narrow spit of sand to change the way they build dunes.

None of this has prevented generations from passing the homes on, or former tenants from buying in.

Joan Savoye met her husband, an Ocean Beach lifeguard, while vacationing there in 1961. After their marriage the next year, they moved into a cottage purchased by her in-laws. They're still there, 46 years later.

"It's just all about family," said Savoye, who works in the community clubhouse. "People love it. They come back year after year."