



Beaufort County:

Waterfront Capital of North Carolina

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT TAYLOR

Although manufacturing has been a mainstay in Beaufort County since Colonial times, it is the beauty of the waterfront communities that is currently attracting retirees and families alike. They are drawn to the area because of its pleasing climate, quaint atmosphere, lower cost of living and reasonable taxation. Plus, there is a surge in shopping and dining opportunities throughout the county.

Beaufort County is considered the “waterfront capital of North Carolina” because of its development opportunities, according to Tommy Thompson, executive director of the Beaufort County Economic Development Commission.

“We’re one of the last frontiers in terms of waterfront property,” says Thompson. “Virginia Beach to the north and South Carolina to Florida is mostly developed as is our Outer Banks.”

Beaufort County is directly in the heart of the Inner Banks. This is a term that was recently coined to describe those towns and communities on waterfront property not on the ocean, but on rivers and sounds instead.

“We have a number of large rivers in Beaufort County,” says Thompson. “Many are considering properties on the water but away from the ocean.



Beaufort County has that. In fact, this county has more linear water feet than any other place in North Carolina. [Beaufort County has a water area of 88,000 acres within a total area of 826 square miles.] And the Pamlico River runs right down the middle of the county.”

Thompson says that currently there are a half-dozen developments under way in the \$50 million and up range in Beaufort County. He expects that over a 10-year period, there will be close to \$1 billion in development.

Just in Belhaven, there is \$100 million worth of new development along the waterfront that was not there last year, says Thompson.

“It’s a changing little town, with the advantage of a deep-water river running right beside the town,” he says. “People are coming into this area and buying the old buildings that have not been occupied in many years and transforming them into retail and residential spaces. It’s essentially an undeveloped waterfront, and you can’t say that about many waterfront sites.”

With a name that means “beautiful harbor,” Belhaven lies along the banks of the Pantego Creek and Pungo River and was, for a long time, a trade center for eastern Beaufort County and Hyde County. It has been called a “secret

jewel” and is accessible by both car and boat.

Thompson adds, “Belhaven, and other areas in Beaufort County, represent a perfect place for people to buy waterfront property they can afford. The prices here are still within reach. There are some extremely high-quality developments in their infancy here.”

One of those is Day Beacon #9, a condominium development within walking distance to Belhaven’s downtown shops and restaurants and with deep-water dockage adjacent to the inland waterway.

Thirty miles away from Belhaven is Washington, which also has “exciting” development projects under way, according to Thompson. Town homes, condominiums and retail shops are being offered right on the water.

Washington was the first city in America to be named for General George Washington. For a long time, the city was a regional ship-

ping center because of its strategic location at the junction of inland and coastal rivers.

“The town of Washington has been experiencing a Renaissance,” says Thompson. “The character of Washington is being transformed from a tobacco town to a tourist town.”

Moss Landing is a \$30 million residential and commercial development on the waterfront side of a lumber mill in Washington that sat unused for many years. It will be complemented with a 60-slip marina.

Some of the new residential developments in Beaufort County also include golf courses.

Seeking these new developments, says Thompson, are primarily “young retirees.” He says, “People in their 50s are buying the house and the boat. This is the most affluent generation ever. They are looking for resort-type living.”

