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South Carolina People & Places™



Hang Ten

In Folly Beach, the surf's up year-round. —page 3



Saluda

PAMPER YOURSELF

Campobello

TENDING ROSES

Lexington

MANNERS FOR MUTTS

Anderson

DINNER IS SERVED



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Beach-bound Evan Tanner totes his board past a surfing-themed mural in downtown Folly Beach. The Tanner family of James Island—(from left) son Evan, mom Terri, daughter Kristin, and dad Glenn—surfs for fun and in competitions. Good surfing draws fans to the waves rolling onto Folly Beach, even during chilly months that warrant wet suits. Kristin Tanner (pictured) enjoys this family activity.



Riding Waves at Folly Beach

When good conditions beckon, which is surprisingly often here, the surfing faithful heed the call.

By **Joe Rada**, photography **Cary Jobe**

A solitary beachcomber walks Folly Beach at dawn, assessing the situation. She notices the wind's direction and speed; the rising tide; and the head-high, foam-topped, smooth-faced waves curling just offshore. Her eyes widen as she recognizes nearly perfect surfing conditions.

Rushing to her van, where a surfboard and a wet suit await, she makes a few quick cell phone calls. Each person contacted alerts a few others who call still more, spreading the news. Before long, dozens of people who have rearranged their plans swarm an area

called The Washout near the north end of Folly Island. Vehicles arrive bristling with finned boards that are quickly unloaded, waxed for traction, and carried into the pounding surf.

Believe it or not, there's good, sometimes great, surfing at this beach near Charleston. There's also a community of avid surfers who will drop everything to hit the waves—anytime of day, anytime of year—on the mere rumor of worthy conditions.

Folly's Surfing Subculture "That must have been one of the Dawn Patrollers, people who go out at first light to see if the

surf is good enough to rethink going to work,” explains Folly Beach resident Nancy Hussey. Perched on a long fishing pier at the heart of the island, overlooking a surfing spot second only to The Washout in popularity, she peers through her camera’s zoom lens and clicks off shots of boarders riding waves. “Around here, surfers are big fans of The Weather Channel,” she says, “but the best source is a firsthand look by a friend who’s out on the beach. When the waves are good, word gets around very fast.”

A mother of five in a family of surfers, Nancy is among a handful of parents who wear the unofficial title surf mom or surf dad. “You’ve heard of soccer moms and Little League dads. Well, around here it’s all about surfing,” she says. “One parent will load a bunch of neighborhood kids and their boards into an SUV, carpool them to the beach after school, and dive in with them.”

Nancy helps organize surfing competitions for all ages, lines up sponsors and judges, gets trophies engraved, and stocks a snack bar on wheels to serve spectators during events. Director of the sport-promoting Southern South Carolina District of the Eastern Surfing Association and a skilled photographer, too, she documents Folly surfing and posts images at www.follywaves.com.

“For the kids, surfing is different from team sports such as soccer, basketball, baseball, and football,” she says. “Surfing is an individual thing, just you and a wave. For adults, too, it’s a whole lot of fun, and you never really outgrow it.”

Hang Ten Career Choices Students at area colleges and high schools hit the beach regularly. Many others find ways to be available when the waves are right.

“People here pick careers that allow them to surf more,” Nancy says. “A few—such as Kai Dilling, who shapes surfboards and gives surfing lessons, and Tim McKevlin, who owns a surf shop in town—actually make a living related to the sport. Doctors, lawyers, real estate agents, self-employed business owners, and others with flexible calendars keep tide charts handy when they set appointments and make time to surf every day. Housepainters and landscapers drop their

paintbrushes and shovels to go surf. At Folly Beach, it’s almost expected. From waiters to the mayor to retirees, people have one priority: Surf when the surfing’s good.”

Brake for Surfers Grand Central for Folly surfing is McKevlin’s Surf Shop, a barn-shaped building that anchors the island’s main intersection near the pier. Locals and out-of-towners, veterans and novices, amateurs and semipro surfers sponsored by equipment manufacturers, those chasing prize money, and those simply reveling in the lifestyle all stop in for supplies as well as tips about surf conditions.

Tim and his sometimes scruffy staff of surfer dudes and dudettes direct them to hot spots, including hangouts such as The Surf Bar around the corner. “The best surfing is usually from an hour before high tide to an hour after,” Tim tells a couple trying on wet suits. “Personally, I prefer morning tides, because you often get smoother waves with less wind.”

Tim’s father opened the area’s first surf shop 43 years ago and promoted what was then considered a fringe lifestyle for deadbeats and hippies. “Business owners used to run surfers off,” Tim says. “Things have changed. Surfing is acceptable now, even a selling point. Some people are surprised we have surfing here at all. Others know it’s some of the best on the East Coast.”

Our Time “I know it is summer when it takes me 10 minutes to back out of my driveway because of the tourist traffic,” says Nancy, who lives a block from the beach. “After Labor Day most vacationers are gone, and we locals can get back to the easy pace of life that drew us here in the first place. Fall, winter, and spring, that’s our time. Yes, you need a wet suit for the cold, but winter storms sometimes make the best waves, and that’s what matters most to us.” ●

For more information about surfing at Folly Beach visit www.follywaves.com, www.mckevlins.com, or www.solsurfers.net. Call McKevlin’s Surf Shop at (843) 588-2247 or hear its recorded surf report at (843) 588-2261. Southern South Carolina District of the Eastern Surfing Association also records a surf report at (843) 588-9856.

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NANCY HUSSEY, EASTERN SURFING ASSOCIATION DISTRICT DIRECTOR AND FOLLY BEACH SURF MOM

