

# PITA NEWS LETTER

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Fall 2018 Issue 3

## PITA-INITIATED MRBA PURSUES PI EROSION SOLUTIONS

by Dirk Messelaar, PITA

About 10 years ago, PITA's Ron Barrett was looking to buy a boat at Chatham's Allen Harbor. He learned that Chatham had created a committee of government and private citizens to work with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to dredge from an off-shore sand bar to help replenish erosion around Allen Harbor and on private property.

Learning about Chatham's committee laid the groundwork for PITA to approach State Senator Bruce Tarr and PITA VP Jerry Kilma to form a similar unofficial, community-based group called the Merrimack River Beach Alliance (MRBA). They did. And MRBA has met almost monthly at PITA Hall since then with Tarr and Klima still as co-chairs. And, in that time, it has completed many important projects, including placing sandbags at Newbury Beach, dredging the Merrimack River, dumping rocks in front of Southern Boulevard, and buying and placing Mobi mats.

One of MRBA's goals is to find both short-term and sustainable solutions to mitigate the recent erosion threatening PI homes, including those along Reservation Terrace and further south in the vicinity of Southern Boulevard. In 2016, MRBA worked with DCR to build a berm for \$150,000 near Reservation Terrace. In 2017, DCR and PI residents continued to maintain the berm with fencing,



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**membership:** Huge Townsend propane discounts, PITA hall rental discounts, and knowing that you supported our island projects.

## PITA Christmas Holiday Fair Saturday Dec. 1 "Calling All Crafters!"

The Holidays are fast approaching, and so is our annual Plum Island Christmas Fair at PITA Hall on Plum Island! Mark your calendars now and plan to join us out on the Island this first Saturday in December for our twenty-fourth annual fair featuring hand-made arts and crafts by local artisans, Christmas Trees, Christmas Wreaths, a Giant Raffle and hot dogs, hamburgers, chowders and deserts. As always, Santa will arrive via Newbury fire truck at 2 PM to sit with the children.

December 1<sup>st</sup>, 8:30 — 3:30 PM, at PITA Hall, 8 Plum Island Blvd., Newbury. Free

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- PI BEAUTIFICATION 7PM 1<sup>ST</sup> TUES
  - Join PITA at [plumislandtaxpayers.org](http://plumislandtaxpayers.org)
  - Rent PITA Hall inexpensively as a Member
  - Find PITA now on FaceBook to contribute photos, comments and listen to @PitaTwita for local up to date happenings.

## THE DUTCHMAN'S CAMP IN THE PI VILLAGE THAT NEVER WAS

by Dirk Messelaar, PITA

"Gré, you won't believe what I've discovered on my Sandy Point walk today. It's almost unbelievable," my father John exclaimed in his thick Dutch accent (having emigrated from Holland a few years earlier) to his wife Greta at their home in Ipswich. "There's a for sale sign from the Ipswich Bay Realty selling parcels of land between Sandy Point and Bar Head."

It was the spring of 1952, and the Messelaar's Plum Island "leap of faith" had just begun. My mother quickly agreed to buying a lot if it was affordable and could serve as a tent site for her family of four boys (Jan, Dirk, Pieter, and Paul) ranging in age from 6 months to 5 years old (with daughter Dieuwke later born in 1956).

## MRBA continued

boardwalks, and beach grass. But, still, the barrier dune washed away.

While MRBA continued to explore funding and project solutions on one track, the state allowed local citizens to fend for themselves after the March 2018 storms. Governor Baker directed relevant state agencies to allow PI residents with property under serious duress to use “hard” (like boulders) or “green” (sand replenishment and beach grass) interventions — as long as the work was completed by April 1, 2018.



Berm at Reservation Terrace Today

Taking advantage of the directive, an ambitious coalition of PI neighbors, local leaders and government agencies constructed a just-in-time temporary solution using \$17,000 in private contributions: a berm (that was 6 feet high and 1,000 feet long) by moving over 1,000 cubic feet of sand and planting thousands of beach grass plugs.

Some of the sand was trucked in, and some sand came from dredging around the Captain's Fishing Parties and Cruises docks. The US Corps of Engineers (USACE) had received funding only for coordination, plans, and specifications for dock studies — not for dredging around the Captain's docks or transporting the dredged sand in front of the Terrace. Baker's emergency directive and residents' initiatives, including

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raising the funds, helped complete the berm project quickly. Using rented Bobcats, Newburyport's DPW moved the sand to state property in front of the Reservation Terrace. DPW was given until April 10 to move the sand given that it needed federal permission to build the berm in a piping plover habitat. The berm was seen as a temporary solution to the Terrace's erosion, as most expect it will not survive for long.

Two other recent developments would empower local communities to dredge. First, the state legislature is considering the Dredge Equipment Feasibility Study. The proposal in committee would give Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute \$40k to study the feasibility of state funding to purchase dredgers for local communities (as Kennebunkport ME has already done). Second, at the request of local leaders, the state legislature is considering instituting a surcharge on the Newburyport-owned parking fee at PI Point's parking lot. These new funds would permit the replenishment of nearby sand dunes.

Beyond these stop-gap measures, the most promising longer-

MRBA continued next page

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## MRBA continued

term solution at this point appears to be dredging sand from one of three different locations and spreading it on Plum Island beaches — especially at Reservation Terrace. The three sites which the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) might dredge: the mouth of the Piscataqua River, the mouth of the Merrimack River, and Newburyport Harbor.



Docks at Captain's Fishing

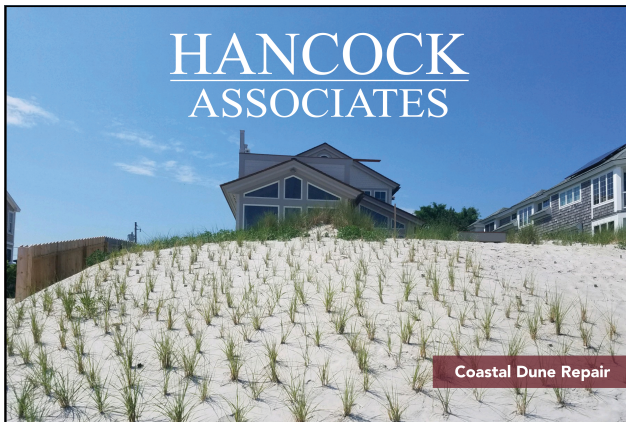
However, all three of these promising dredging and replenishment solutions are still under discussion and await government funding, if approved. (USACE projects typically demand lab work and site surveys, which, by their very nature, take a long time to get results.) The Merrimack River project could be funded first by a \$2 million environmental bond bill. The Piscataqua project could survive if state

officials and the MRBA are awarded a federal pilot program that identifies them as non-federal sponsors. Sites receiving the dredged sand will be identified after further scientific study. The USACE has authorized the Newburyport Harbor dredge; however, it also awaits federal funding in a year or two.

However, even with dredging and replenishment possible, there are significant issues. Some experts contend the Piscataqua dredge would not realize appropriate replenishment sand. The cost of moving Merrimack River dredged sand would require significant local communities' cost-sharing. The Corps of Engineers have made the contentious position that the jetty repairs a few years ago did not cause erosion in front of Reservation Terrace, and that any sand replenishment there would be scrubbed away in the near future.

PI residents at a recent MRBA held at PITA Hall expressed frustration at the snail's pace in beginning meaningful solutions. Sen. Bruce Tarr encouraged the group saying "We need to get on the map. We are close to getting new sand in two areas: the north end of Plum Island and the south end of Salisbury Beach." One Reservation Terrace resident said plainly, "More needs to be done. We've lost 3 properties and 15-20 are threatened on the northern end of Plum Island." He proposed that MRBA invite UMassBoston experts to present their Sea Wall study proposing a sea wall around Boston Harbor.

With no clear permanent resolution in sight, the frustration is palpable on both sides of the issue. Some Plum Island residents insist the island's threatening erosion is man-made and can be reversed. Other residents and experts underscore the inevitable march of nature, which must be respected and planned for. Maybe the only really good news is that the environmental challenges we face on PI are part of a global battle. We're not alone.



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Christmas Holiday Party continued from page 1

Parking. For more information, or to participate as a vender\crafter contact Frank Pierce, PITA Hall Manager at (978) 463-0670.

Once again, we'll be selling premium trees, with free delivery on the Island. Crafters and artists from Plum Island and vicinity will offer handmade gifts, stocking stuffers and holiday decorations.

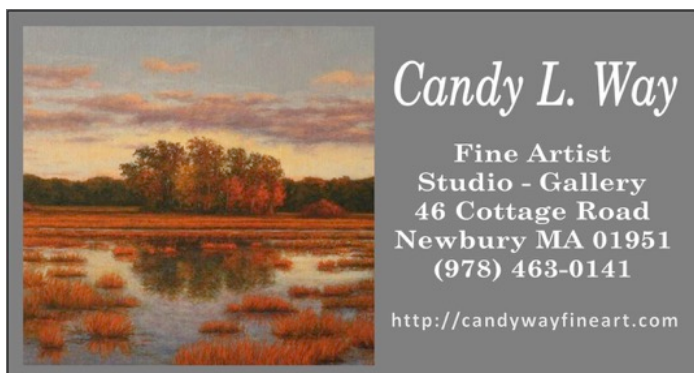
There will also be raffle prizes, refreshments and lunch specials, including hot dogs, hamburgers, homemade haddock chowder and Diane Barrett's famous chili.

The event is one of PITA's major annual fundraisers. All proceeds go to help maintain the Hall as a gathering spot for Island residents and support other PITA efforts, including surveying and marking public rights-of-way. So save the date and come celebrate the season with your Plum Island neighbors. Vendors interested in reserving a table, please see 'Calling all Crafters' below.

### Calling All Crafters!

It's that time of year again! The annual PITA Christmas Fair is scheduled for Saturday, December 2nd, and PITA is reminding all crafters who have participated at previous PITA fairs to be on the lookout for this year's application form.

**If you would like to participate as a vendor** and haven't received an application form yet, please email or call Frank Pierce right away at [fpierce1@comcast.net](mailto:fpierce1@comcast.net), or leave us a message with



[Messages From Above, Oil 48 x 60](#), Candy Way

## SALTBOX GALLERY'S FIRST ARTOBERFEST! OCT 19 - 21, PITA HALL

The member artists of the Saltbox Gallery will celebrate the arrival of Fall by presenting the first-annual ARTOBERFEST celebration at Plum Island Hall, 8 Plum Island Blvd, Plum Island, Friday through Sunday, 19-21 October, 10 AM - 5 PM. In addition to stunning works of art including photography, jewelry and quilts, A Poetry and Pints Reception is scheduled for Friday evening. Renowned Poets David Davis and Susan Edwards Richmond will read their art inspired poems Friday at 5:00 PM followed by a reception 6 PM - 8 PM with samplings of local craft beer from Cape Ann Brewing Company. Reception is sponsored by Plum Island Grille and Vertical Solutions.

The Saltbox Gallery's lifetime artists include: Priscilla Brown, Margie Florini, Debbie Frio, Karyl Hayes, Robert Hahn, Anne Krupsky, Michael Milczarek, Laura Stover, Candy Way, Karen Nastuk, Darcy Scanlon Moulton and Joe Frio.

Free Parking and Handicap accessible.



FISH Offers a 10% discount for PITA members



Dutchman's Camp Continued from page 1



Messelaar Family on Dune (with neighbor on right)

However, the building code would only permit houses, so they opted for that.

My parents John and Greta had been married in The Netherlands in 1946 after the Nazis had tortured and executed Greta's fiancé (an MI-5 British agent behind enemy lines) three months before the end of the war. My father (who served as an NCO in the Canadian army's Princess Irene Brigade and landed at Normandy) had brought my mother her fiancé's belongings. They quickly fell in love and left their small war-ravaged country for a better life in America. Messelaar Bulb Company in Ipswich was born.

After they bought the lot in 1952, my parents spent the next year designing the "camp." They settled on a design common among coastal Dutch strandpaviljoens (beach cafes): a flat roof sloping to the back, large floor-to-ceiling windows in the front and side, and an open great room for seven beds, living room space, and a kitchen.

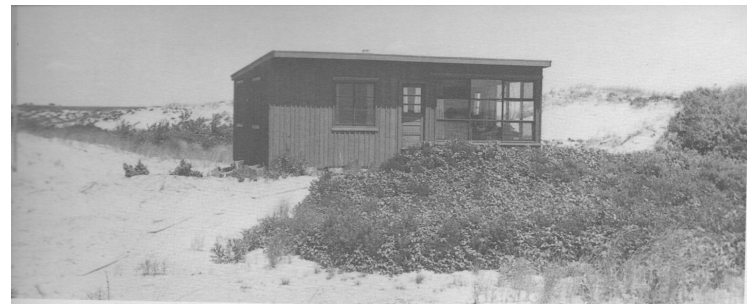
And although the Refuge had completed Plum Island Drive by this time all the way to the Bar Head lot, it was still a crude dirt road, making it difficult to transport building materials. (My recollections of Plum Island Drive in the mid-1950's: dense bushes crowding the dusty, bumpy road; no views;



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and constant sightings of red-winged black birds, snakes, and deer crossing the road. )

My parents hired the same two Essex carpenters, Leon and Eddy, who had built their flower bulb company's warehouse in Ipswich. Given the length and condition of Plum Island Drive, they, my father, and a few Dutch friends opted to float much of the lumber and other materials behind skiffs from the Pavilion Beach.



Messelaar Camp in 1953

To my recollection, there were only about seven older cottages between Sandy Point and the Bluff, and three more from Sandy Point to Bar Head. On the Bluff side were

Dutchman's Camp continued next page

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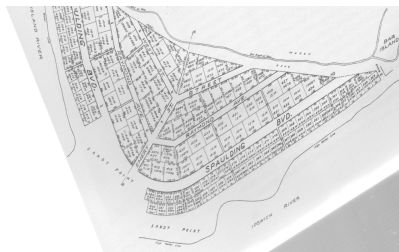
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## Dutchman's Camp Continued

many cottages that had been in the owners' family for years (Lane, Thornton, Thurlough).

While our neighbors closer to Bar Head seemed more recent (Chase, Fryeburg). To my knowledge, our camp was the last camp built there. (Ipswich Bay Realty had plans for a large development of homes with future improvements including a fire station, a store, and a community center — none of which ever materialized.)

As detailed in Nancy Weare's excellent book "Plum Island: The Way It Was," the southern tip of Plum Island experienced a remarkable succession of development attempts. In 1933, Newburyport resident Oscar Thurlow bought the land between Bar Head and Sandy Point to facilitate his plans for a scenic, coastal highway with bridges across the Merrimack River and the Ipswich River. It never happened. In 1942, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service purchased all of the land on the southern tip, except Sandy Point and Bar Head, leaving it for development.



Southern PI Development Plan (credit: Nancy Weare)

In 1950, John Hayes of Ipswich formed the Ipswich Bay Realty Company and sold, I believe, only one lot — the one where our family built its Dutch-inspired summer

camp. Our camp was nestled between a few older camps that had been built years earlier.

Our camp was built in the spring of 1953 in time for us to occupy it that summer — and we vacationed for eight summers until 1960. Our family of seven moved into a comfortable routine dictated by nature. There was no electricity (only Coleman lanterns at night), but there was propane gas for the refrigerator and stove, two well pumps (one for the kitchen and the other for outside sponge baths), and a chemical toilet (with memorable pit disposal).

My father would make tea for everyone on many mornings and deliver it to his waking wife and sons in their beds. My mother would make a large breakfast every morning — often Dutch pancakes with strawberries. On many mornings, the children from the Sandy Point camps joined us for breakfast and played with us boys in the tall dunes next to the camp. During the day, we would clam for sea clams using short poles with nails on the end. My mother learned to make the perfect clam chowder from those clams with just the right amount of butter and paprika floating on top.

Many high sand dunes — all gone today — surrounded the camp and provided the perfect launching pad for runs down the dune on cardboard boxes. Weaving the plentiful beach



**Plum Island Beautification meetings, the 1st Tuesday of the month**

All are welcome to PI Beautification meetings, the 1st Tuesday of the month at PITA hall at 7:00.

Any questions or ideas please email Lynne Petty at [lynneplumisland@gmail.com](mailto:lynneplumisland@gmail.com)

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### Dutchman's Camp Continued

grass into bracelets, necklaces, and crowns never got old. And just before dusk, we would often watch herd of deer swimming across Plum Island Sound from Plum Island to Crane's Beach. Once in bed, the soothing classical concerts from Castle Hill serenaded us to sleep.

My mother washed by hand and loved to hang the clean clothes and linens on the clothes line out back. She usually did this at the same time every day. So, invariably, small planes from the PI airport would fly over at the appointed time and dip the plane's wings in salute. It certainly made laundry days memorable.

My parents had a large cadre of Dutch expats who also had escaped the remnants of WWII and settled on the North Shore. So weekend parties with the Dutch language predominating was routine. Some cold beer mixed with familiar songs from the old country made for a grateful fraternity. Many of my father's friends had also become flower bulb dealers on the North Shore. DeJaeger Bulb Company in Hamilton and Visser Bulb Company in Ipswich engaged Messelaar Bulb Company in friendly competition, although they routinely helped each other.



Dutch Flower Bulb Dealers and Assistants in the Camp

The Dutch love eel, and the waters around Plum Island, (especially the Parker and Ipswich Rivers) were full of them. My father would recruit three or four of his Dutch friends to join him on his skiff to catch eel. I can still see the coolers of beer (and some food), with five fishing poles, and four or five laughing Dutchmen leaving the Ipswich wharf for fishing grounds and then the camp. My mother and her Dutch girlfriends at the camp would cut the eel up into sections, and the little kids present would marvel as the individual sections would squirm in the frying pan's butter.

Some afternoons were spent "sailing" the sailboats my father made for us from wooden shoes. Usually, it was enough to just drag them through the pools at low tide. Other times, my father would help us build a sand "fort" against the incoming tide (a Dutch tradition still apparent on Holland's beaches today). Keeping out the encroaching water was thrilling to us little boys and certainly helped build some family spirit.

Having never experienced hurricanes in the Netherlands, my father was probably a bit too cavalier about riding out the storm with one of "the twins" — and this time the twins were not his two oldest 7-year-old sons who were, indeed, identical twins. Hurricanes Carol and Edna, or "The twins," as they came to be known, would be the state's second worst hurricanes in the 20th century. Carol struck Plum Island on August 31, 1954 as a category 3 hurricane with sustained winds of 80-100 mph. As Carol's landfall was after high tide, it caused heavy flooding along the Massachusetts coast — in some places, rivers rose several feet above flood stage.

My father had boarded up all the camp windows, including the floor to ceiling windows in the front. But when the hurricane hit and we all huddled inside, we could see the windows bending in and out rhythmically until it seemed inevitable they would burst. But they didn't. The coastal flooding also brought ocean water splashing under our camp's cinder block foundation. After about six hours, the hurricane subsided enough so that we could walk quickly to our station wagon parked near Bar Head for the ride home to Ipswich.

Although we weren't at the camp this time, Carol's twin Edna struck on September 11, 1954 with sustained winds of 75 - 95 mph with heavy rainfall of up to 7". Carol's erosion had left Plum Island vulnerable to Edna. And, although she claimed 21 lives in New England, our camp



fares well (as it was still boarded and reinforced from Carol) as did the rest of Plum Island.

My father must have become somewhat gun shy. In August 1955, Hurricanes Connie and Diane hit land at North Carolina and became tropical storms. The hurricane remnants dumped 25" of rain on New England, caused historical flooding, and killed 90 people in New England. We stayed safely at home in Ipswich.

Besides these dramatic acts of nature, we also had some dangerous, self-imposed "camp accidents." One morning all seven of our family members woke up nauseous and with severe head aches. Later, our doctor diagnosed gas poisoning as a result of a leaking propane stove.

Another time, our mother thought it would be efficient if all four sons had short buzz cuts to minimise the number of haircuts needed during the summer. We didn't wear hats, so our heads soon swelled enough for another visit to the family doctor. In addition, my father loved swimming out to his anchored boat at Sandy Point. Except one time he pulled himself up out of the water over the freeboard — breaking his ribs. He wore what his little sons saw as a badge of courage — an Ace bandage — for a month after that.

In 1964, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts decided to reverse all development and have the land revert to a pristine state park. However, these plans were communicated to the land and camp owners in the mid-1950's. At some point, the state would purchase the camps at fair market value and expect owners to vacate. Rather than wait for specifics to crystallize, in 1960, my parents decided to sell the camp to the Coopers from Salem MA. My brothers and I were approaching adolescence, so that predictable competing interests would make entire summer at the Plum Island camp less inviting. In 1975, all residences were abandoned, camps were razed, and local fire departments burned the remains as part of training exercises.

Until her passing in 2010, my mother loved to sit at the Pavilion Beach, looking out at Plum Island, reminiscing fondly of those magical years at "the camp." Every year, my four siblings and I walk between Bar Head and Sandy Point until we find the lead, pump pipes and the scattered cinder blocks that mark the camp's former location. It's a memory that we all treasure.



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