

# CURRENTS

## Shack Restoration Delays Expected, Title Issue Ongoing

Local Artist Adds Analysis

**C**het Atkins, the current owner of the ramshackle hunting shack to the right of Route 72 on Bonnet Island in Stafford Township, said this week that there is no way to tell how long the process of proving ownership and gaining title of the land beneath the shack may take. But he explained that once the process is complete, which he estimates could take up to six months, a deal may be struck with Stafford for him to relinquish ownership in the hopes of restoring the structure.

"It's a tough situation because the property's so old. There's been action on the property since the 1600s," said Atkins. "I don't think August looks very promising. It's several months out, I would say."

Atkins' company, Jersey Outdoor Media, bought Wes Outdoor Advertising Co. more than a year ago, which included the billboard adjacent to the shack. He has since spent a large sum of money working with lawyers to attempt to connect the ownership of the land on which the shack sits to the late former owner and Stafford mayor Wesley K. Bell, from whom he bought the land. "It's an inside job. We really can't disclose anything more about it."

"We really don't want people digging at it," he continued. "We don't want people trying to ruin it, and it's the type of situation where we'd like to just have some peace about it and work on it."

Atkins hopes to continue to play a role in the restoration of the shack even after the title is given to Stafford, by helping to create a fundraising event and getting historical societies involved.

He admitted the entire process of following and linking the history to the present day and the ensuing paper work are new to him. "I've never really done this before. It's like trying to research when the pirates came; it's not easy to do. People used to just land on property and they'd claim it."

Atkins emphasized that the issue is about ownership of the land on

which the shack is perched, not the shack itself, as the history behind the land dates back much farther than the building.

"The shack itself is really not that old. It's just in the last 50 years that people noticed there's a shack there." He said that is especially true for the last 20 to 30 years. "The more it falls apart, the more people notice it."

He hopes that upon restoration, the shack will have a look he described simply as "authentic."

### Local Artist Adds to the Picture

Tony Desiderio of Beach Haven Crest is one of the many artists who have been inspired by the shack. He has been photographing, painting and even constructing models of the shack for years. He described himself as obsessed with it while recalling the Presidents Day blizzard of 2003, when he had to see firsthand what it looked like under the snow.

"I took the pictures and painted the shack and did a real snow scene," he said. "I did the same thing at the lighthouse in Barnegat Light and came up with a series called 'Winter Retreat.'"

He explained how it is not just the shack itself, but also the land on which it sits that adds to its artistic allure. "It's lost on an island all by itself. It's alone."

He referred to the nonprofit Duck Shack Replication Initiative organization, which sprang up recently in the hopes of creating a replica of the shack in a separate location. "That's like me taking your head off your body and putting it on somebody else's body in another part of the country. It's like taking the Statue of Liberty and putting it on Barnegat Lighthouse. It's not going to do it any justice."

A resident of Long Beach Island for 11 years, Desiderio became obsessed with the shack upon his first entering Long Beach Island. In 1999, he took his first photographs of it, which he would use to create oil paintings and prints for merchan-

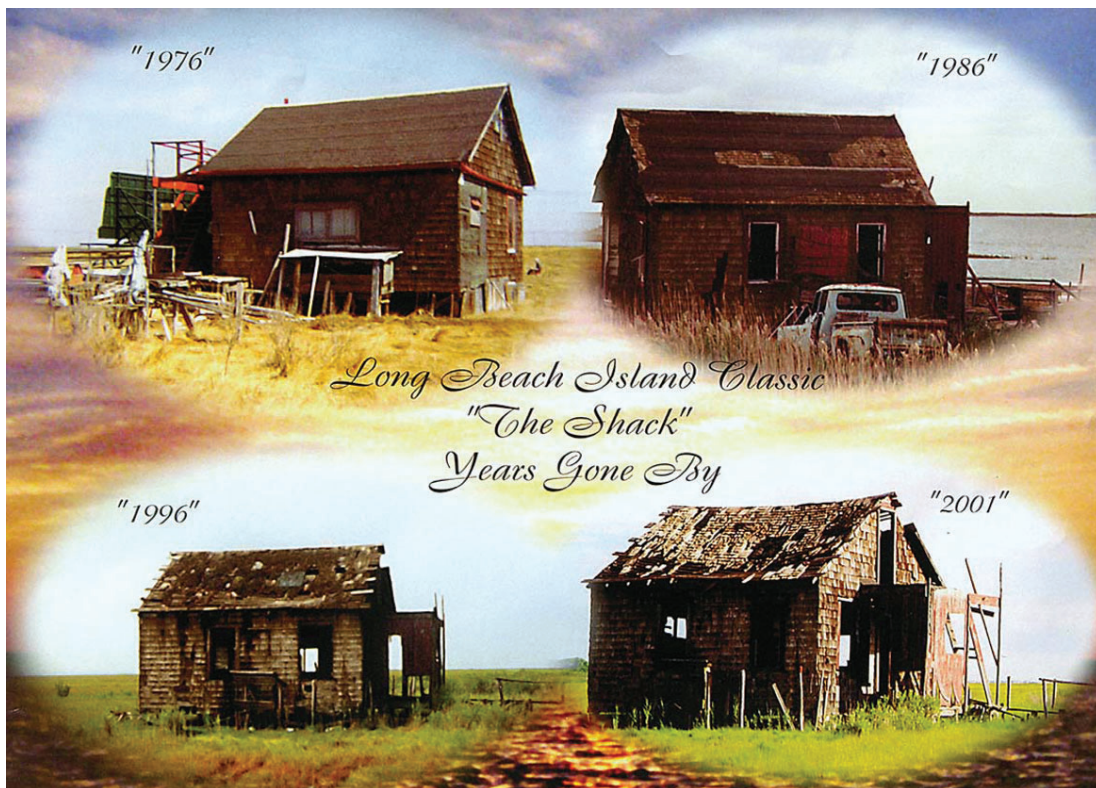


Photo by Tony Desiderio



Image by Tony Desiderio

**THE SHACK OF OUR LIVES:** (Top) A compilation of photos of the shack throughout recent decades became a popular postcard sold by local artist Tony Desiderio. His oil painting (above), based on the 1976 picture, expresses his personal favorite look of the shack over the years and his desire to see it returned to such a visage if restored.

dising. This includes a postcard that combined four pictures of the shack, displaying its delicate decay from

1976 to 1986, 1996 and 2001.

Upon hearing the news that Atkins is attempting to finalize

proof of ownership and work out a deal with Stafford for the historical preservation of the shack, Desiderio, though hopeful, said he was not holding his breath. "I would like to see them restore (it), but I've seen it happen for years; you always hit a dead end."

If the shack is restored, Desiderio warned that perhaps it must not be done completely. He said the character of the shack that has given it its aesthetic merit is dependent upon its years of deterioration and weathered look. "It's like going to see the Roman Colosseum. You go there to see it because it's aged."

As far as his merchandising goes, he said he is unaffected by the possible changes. "I'm not relying on the shack. I just happen to like the shack. Even if the shack was restored, we're letting the old shack rest in peace, and we're coming up with a new one – the birth of a new

## Rules of the Road: Kids and Car Safety Made Easy

**N**ever leave children unattended in a car. The New Jersey Department of Children and Families states that children left alone in a vehicle, even for a short time, are in danger of abduction, injury, dehydration and death. Temperatures inside cars can get dangerously hot in a short period of time even in moderate weather with windows slightly down. Leaving the air conditioning on doesn't make a child safe. A child could put the car in drive, get caught in a closing power window or be abducted.

According to a study by Jan

Null, certified consulting meteorologist for Golden Gate Weather Services, so far in 2010, 24 children have died in the United States of hyperthermia. Circumstances included: child "forgotten" by a caregiver, child playing in an unattended vehicle, and child intentionally left in a vehicle by an adult.

Here are some safety tips from the Department of Children and Families:

- Never leave a child unattended in a car – not even for a minute!
- Always lock your car and

secure the keys so your children can't get them.

- Warn your children about playing in and around cars.
- Install a trunk release mechanism so children can't get trapped inside the trunk.
- Get your children out of the car first, and then worry about unloading the groceries and items from the car.

Additional precautions:

- Have a plan with your child-care provider that he or she will call you if your child does not show up for school.
- Keep a stuffed animal in the

car seat, and when the child is put in the seat, place the animal in the front with the driver.

- Or place your purse or briefcase in the back seat as a reminder that you have your child in the car.
- Make "look before you leave" a routine whenever you get out of the car.
- If a child is missing, always check the car first!
- If you see a child in an unattended hot vehicle, call 911.

This important safety reminder is provided by the Long Beach Island Health Department. ♦





**SEEN HIM?:** Ship Bottom police released a sketch of a suspect who allegedly committed lewd acts on the beach.

## Man Arrested For Lewd Act; Another Sought

Ship Bottom police have arrested an Atlantic County man on lewdness charges, and are also investigating an incident of a man committing lewd acts on the beach.

Sgt. Jim Butler said that on Aug. 8, at 1:30 p.m., police received a tip from a resident that a male was masturbating in his car near the intersection of Central Avenue and Sixth Street. The car left the scene before police arrived, but was located a short time later in Brant Beach, where Irving Lewis, 55, of Linwood, was arrested and charged with one count of lewdness. He was released on his own recognizance and faces a hearing in municipal court.

Butler said the suspect was not the same man who residents told police was committing lewd acts on the beach early in the evening between 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> streets on Aug. 3. That suspect is described as white, mid- to late 20s with short brown hair, earring and chin strap beard. He had a large build, and appeared to be between 6 feet and 6 feet 2 inches tall and 200 to 230 pounds. Butler said the suspect was last seen wearing a white tank top and black and white Oakley sunglasses.

Anyone with information on this incident is asked to call Ship Bottom police at 609-494-1518. —E.E.

shack.”

His admiration for the shack, he said, led him to participate in a campaign years ago that was similar to Atkins’ effort, involving two years of research among local friends and lawyers. Though they eventually “got nowhere,” he said the last he had heard concerning what they did find was that the land on which the shack sits was included in the Wes Bell estate.

Desiderio described his favorite visage of the shack, circa 1986, when a 1957 International white truck was parked in front of it. Another popular look, he said, is from 2001, marked by its multi-holed roof that gave it a straw-like appearance.

“They’re not going to ever get it back to that way. If they did, it’d be a miracle.”

He also accepts the possibility that it may never be restored. “If it goes, it goes. I never fall in love with anything. There’s always something else out there to focus on.”

— Michael Molinaro  
michaelmolinaro@thesandpaper.net



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