

Wildwood Historical Society, Inc.



George F. Boyer Museum

609.523.0277

WildwoodHistoricalMuseum.com

3907 Pacific Avenue
Wildwood, NJ 08260

*Gathering, preserving and presenting
the Wildwoods' history*

New! 2023 Museum Hours

April 6-May 27

Thursdays-Saturdays 10 am-3 pm

May 30-September 2

Mondays-Saturdays 10 am-3 pm

Closed Sundays

Fall hours to be announced

Issue 50. Winter/Spring 2023.

Retail Therapy In The Wildwoods

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

I'm not old enough to remember, but those who've lived on the island long enough insist (with photographic evidence!) that Pacific Avenue was once a true downtown hub – Main Street U.S.A., so to speak. With restaurants and nightclubs, it surely gave the famous boardwalk a run for its money when it came to providing things to do. It even had department stores, which I would have loved to have seen. I grew up just in time to see the end of five & dimes like McCrory's and Woolworth's, as well as independent gems like Epstein's in my hometown of Morristown. The closest the island had to a department store in my time was Silen's, which my mind says closed last year, but in reality probably closed almost a decade ago. Despite being among the last of its kind, it was definitely a curiosity, much like many things in The Wildwoods.

My mother overpacked for our week-long vacations and my father struggled to load it all into the family station wagon, although he'd eventually celebrate victorious over the Herculean task. Despite traveling with half of the family's possessions, something would no doubt get left behind, and it was usually something we needed that first morning on the beach. A few blocks north of the Cape Cod Inn was Crest Pier – not the cur-

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A 1960 photo of the Acme Markets located at 5300 Park Blvd. This Acme was renovated in a Doo Wop style in 2006 and still stands today. Courtesy WHS collection.

Four Rooms at Wildwood Historical Society Museum Dedicated to Former Museum Presidents

Rooms at the city's historical museum telling stories of the Wildwoods' veterans, first responders, schools and athletes were dedicated to four past Wildwood Historical Society presidents at a ceremony Sunday, October 16.

Al Brannen and Larry Lillo, both of Wildwood, and Bob Scully and Anne Vinci, both of North Wildwood, were the honorees. Four plaques were presented, each bearing the name of a dedicated room, and all of which will be affixed to the entrance to their respective rooms.

"Every one of these people helped push the museum forward significantly," Brannen, an emeritus member, said after his plaque was revealed.

The current board told the four they would be honored but the dedication of rooms was a surprise that was revealed at the ceremony.

"It was difficult to keep this a secret, but the payoff was worth it," said society president Taylor Henry. "The honorees were visibly moved that their many lifelong contributions to the historical society will forever be remembered, as their names will be permanently affixed to the museum."

Brannen is a Coast Guard veteran who was responsible for reviving the previously inactive Wildwood Historical Society in the 1970s. After George Boyer, the founder and namesake of the museum, died in 1976, there was no one to keep the society going until Brannen became president.

The society under Brannen's leadership grew from a room of artifacts in city hall to the large building on Pacific Avenue that houses the museum today. Al served on the historical society in one capacity or another for the next several decades, finally

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The Scully family, photographed at WHS's dedication of four rooms to former museum presidents. Courtesy Dorothy Kulisek.

New Life for One of Pacific Avenue's Most Historic Buildings

by Al Alven, Wildwood 365

After years of rumors and speculation about its fate, a century-old, original nickelodeon in Downtown Wildwood has been painstakingly restored to its former glory.

Old Movies By The Sea has been the buzz of Pacific Avenue since opening in early December, following the transformation of the long-vacant Sea Theater. Now a fully-functioning moviehouse and events venue, it features seating and dining tables for up to 40 people and an outdoor patio in the rear of the property.

Guests enter from Pacific Avenue into a small lobby, with a ticket booth and concession stand, that leads into the theater. The main room consists of seven rows of seating set on an inclined ramp facing a stage. Deep red period wallpaper and lighting fixtures compliment an early-20th century aura, complimented by some modern touches.

The venture was described as a "true labor of love" by proprietors Glenn Kingsbury and Karen Drew

"At the heart of this project has been the idea of bringing back something very special from the past and modernizing it for the present and future," explained Kingsbury. "We wanted to do this for the community and to contribute to the improvement of Pacific Avenue."

Kingsbury explained that classic film screenings will only be part of what Old Movies By The Sea is all about.

"We see this as a unique space, a place for all kinds of events," he continued. "Showing movies in an intimate showing is the main draw, but the stage is set up so that we can host concerts, comedy nights, other live shows, receptions, you name it."

The restoration and reopening of the theater is a major win for Downtown Wildwood as well as local preservation efforts, according to Taylor Henry, president of the Wildwood Historical Society.



Old Movies By The Sea (right), a revitalization of a century-old nickelodeon in downtown Wildwood (left, shown in 1960), recently opened. Left: courtesy WHS collection; right: courtesy Al Alven.

"This is actually one of Wildwood's most important buildings," said Henry. "It's a dream come true for me that it will be restored and remain a theater. It's one of my favorite buildings in Wildwood and has been part of my neighborhood for as long as I can remember. It's such a unique experience viewing a film in a nickelodeon as opposed to a multiplex."

Henry said that the building dates to 1915 or 1916, making it well over 100 years old.

"This was one of the last nickelodeons built in the U.S.," she noted. "It was not believed to have survived for more than a



the history in this building, and that's something we tried to take into account with every step of the process of bringing it back to life. We can't wait for everyone to see it and feel it, too."

Say It Ain't So, Joe: Bellino Was Here

by Larry Lillo, Secretary

Joe Bellino, who passed away in 2019, was the first Naval Academy football player to win the Heisman trophy. How many people know of or remember him, or that he visited Wildwood?

According to Heisman.com, "Bellino was a three-sport star for Winchester High. He was good enough in basketball to be offered a contract out of high school by the Pittsburgh Pirates, but he chose to play football for Navy despite offers from Notre Dame and several Big Ten schools... In his three years at Navy, he scored 31 touchdowns, rushed for 1,664 yards on 330 carries, returned 37 kicks for 833 more yards and altogether set 15 Naval Academy football records."

In 1960, Bellino "was a unanimous All-America selection and also the winner of the Maxwell Award," it continues. "In addition to his football exploits, Bellino was an outstanding catcher and outfielder on Navy baseball teams," serving as baseball team captain in 1961.

"Bellino's number 27 jersey was retired after the 1960 season," it says. "He had a three-year stint with the Boston Patriots after he had completed his four-year service obligation. He then stayed in the Navy Reserves and reached the rank of Captain." He was inducted into the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame in 1977.

So what does Joe Bellino have to do with Wildwood? Well, it was somewhere around 1960-61 that I was at Maxwell Field for a midget football game. I was quarterback on the undefeated Crusaders, the 1961 Wildwood Midget Football Champions.

I was walking by the tower and I saw Scoop Taylor with a couple of other people. He saw me and said, "Larry, come over here." He introduced me to Joe Bellino and Joe gave me his autograph.

Street Signs Going on Sale Soon!

We will have another eBay street-sign auction this spring with streets like Susquehanna, Lake and more from the bayside. Don't miss out! Check wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com this April for dates, times and starting bids. Our auctions generally last from mid-May to mid-June, so don't forget to check our website early!



Four Rooms at Wildwood Historical Society Museum Dedicated to Former Museum Presidents

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retiring in 2021.

Because of his focus on preserving the stories of the islands' veterans and military members, the board dedicated the room about veterans as the Al Brannen Military Room.

Lillo, who currently serves as the society's secretary, is the longest-serving still-active board member, having served since the 1970s.

Lillo worked 25 years on the Wildwood Fire Department, including a time as Fire Captain. He also was a lifeguard with the Wildwood Beach Patrol.

In 1994, Lillo, a lifelong train enthusiast, opened Holly Beach Train Depot in the same Pacific Avenue building that housed his father's barbershop for over 70 years.

"To recognize his contributions to the city, the safety of its residents and visitors, and to this museum, the Wildwood Historical Society dedicates the first responder exhibit as the Larry Lillo First Responder Room," Henry said.

Scully, an emeritus member, began his time as president in the late 1990s, during which time he co-authored the book, "Wildwood by the Sea: The History of an American Resort."

The Scully family goes back to the beginnings of the Wildwoods. Bob's grandfather Christopher J. Scully arrived in South Jersey in 1892 and founded a construction company that built such still-standing landmarks as St. Ann's Church, the 15th Avenue firehouse in North Wildwood, and Wildwood Catholic High School.

He graduated from the same school built by his relatives only a few years prior. A basketball player, he was chosen for the 1951 New Jersey All-State Parochial Quartet.

In honor of his legacy as a star athlete and alum of Wildwood Catholic, the Wildwood Historical Society dedicated the school and sports exhibit as the Robert J. Scully School and Sports Room.

Vinci was the society's first woman president. She was responsible for starting the ongoing Commemorative Brick Program fundraiser, where personalized bricks are cemented into the walkway outside the museum.

By the late 2000s, the museum collection was again getting too large for the space in which it was contained. Under Vinci's leadership, the historical society undertook one of its largest and most challenging projects: construction of an addition in 2009.

Vinci retired from the board in 2014 but continues to volunteer. For her contributions to the growth of the museum, the addition she helped build was dedicated as the Anne Vinci Museum Annex.

About 50 people attended the ceremony, many of whom were family and friends of honorees.

"While many of those who contributed to the historical society have passed away, it's important for us to celebrate those who are living," Henry said. "Al, Larry, Bob and Anne all deserve to know how much they matter and how much of an impact they've made in their lifetimes."

Retail Therapy In The Wildwoods

by Rob Ascough, Treasurer

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rent incarnation featuring yoga classes and an indoor pool, although I can't be sure the previous one didn't offer those things as well. In fact, all I do remember was a store – my memory suggests on an unventilated second floor where the summer heat baked everything as if displayed on the surface of the sun. There was also a store selling similar items and beachy goods on New Jersey Avenue between Sweetbriar and Wisteria. It featured a lot less heat, but also required considerably more walking, including a crossing of busy Pacific Avenue (because for some reason, we didn't take the car).

The start of every vacation inevitably involved a trip to The Acme (and if you're from the New Jersey/Pennsylvania region, you know every neighborhood Acme grocery store was referred to as The Acme). In my youth it was a late-1950's/early 1960's-era building, constructed just as The Wildwoods were evolving into the tourist destination we know it as today. With only eight or nine aisles and overwhelmed by the variety of products introduced since its Magic Carpet doors first swung open in a gesture of welcome (Acme's words, not mine) as customers approached, it didn't take much for the store to feel cramped and claustrophobic. It was common practice for one family member to grab a shopping cart and get in the line for the registers that snaked around the perimeter of the building while others were dispatched throughout to collect items on the grocery list – a scavenger hunt involving peaches from the produce section, milk from dairy, and that toothpaste mom told us to pack, and we said we packed, but really didn't.

Each motel was a self-contained venue for spending money,

and most contained a small room with video games and gift shops (or some sort of retail display) somewhere in the vicinity of the front desk. The Tangiers had a huge game room in the attic of the lobby building – like the old Crest Pier store, it was unventilated and oppressively uncomfortable for any amount of time. Think you were good because you beat Donkey Kong as a kid? Why not try doing it with sweaty hands barely capable of grabbing the joystick while suffering from the unfortunate effects of dehydration? That was the Tangiers game room experience. Which was entirely different from the experience at the Waikiki's gift shop where two older women luxuriated in ice-cold air conditioning while watching me and my brother with intense focus, making sure we didn't touch anything, break anything, or even breathe on anything while mom exhibited a previously untapped interest in tops and handbags seemingly plucked from a Boca Raton retirement home. Considering one had to be staying at the Waikiki AND somehow stumble out of the elevator, onto the fourth floor, and to the right, it's quite astonishing there was ever enough business to keep it operational and staffed for decades.

When looking back at things lost to time and process in The Wildwoods, it's natural to look back on restaurants, miniature golf courses, and boardwalk amusements, but not necessarily stores and gift shops. But there's no denying my unspoken wish for one more opportunity to push a shopping cart over the cracked linoleum tile floor of The (old) Acme, sweat it out in Tangiers as Mario dodging rolling barrels, or be given the evil eye at the Waikiki gift shop while lusting after a plastic beach toy seemingly placed on the shelf to merely test my will.

Then and Now



Then: The A-frame at Park and Bennett was built in the 1960s by hobbyist and automotive executive Glenn Dye as a clubhouse and later an accounting office. Photo found on a negative inside the A frame.



Now: A rear view of the beloved triangular structure in its new home in Steelmantown, NJ. Last year it was saved from demolition when property owner Mark Daley donated it to be moved. Courtesy Taylor Henry

Visit <https://www.wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com/research> to buy a vintage photo of your favorite Wildwood spot for just \$10!

Membership

Please renew your membership if you haven't done so recently! If you have already done so, thank you! Donations are welcome, too! Membership donations help cover the costs of newsletters and mailings, and help us keep the lights on at the museum!

Visit wildwoodhistoricalmuseum.com to renew your membership, view past newsletters, buy items from our gift shop, and get a hit of Wildwoods history!

Other ways you can donate!



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