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Old marina ready for a new look -- and restaurant, says developer

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The Lemon Island Marina is an aging, wooden building with peeling paint on its walls, a rusted tin roof and broken windows.

The rundown relic at the base of the Chesapeake River Bridge with its worn oyster-shucking tables is no longer a bustling marina, fish market and bait shop.

It is also a far cry from the future that Beaufort developer Dick Stewart envisions: a \$1.6 million revitalization with a two-story seafood restaurant, dry dock, fuel pumps for boats and cars, and an outdoor pavilion.

"It's a unique property," said Stewart, who bought the three-acre property of marina buildings and adjacent waterfront land 10 months ago for \$2.4 million.

The location and natural beauty of the property that sits along S.C. 170 near planned residential developments on Lemon Island Point and Callawassie Island make it worth the investment, Stewart said. A road under the bridge connects the property to a public boat ramp.

"In 2009 dollars, it's expensive, but in 2020 dollars, it won't be," Stewart said, walking along the newly reconstructed dock behind the marina building. "You can imagine being here in the afternoons when the sun lights up the marsh."

The marina sat vacant for more than two years before he bought it, Stewart said. Other plans for redeveloping the site fizzled.

The last owner, the Lemon Island Development Group, had planned in 2006 to build a 150-slip dry-stack marina with 9,600 square feet of commercial space, but abandoned the project two years later.

Okatie residents said the large-scale development was too much for the site and feared it would alter the rural environment.

Before that, Clark Lowther, who owned the marina for 30 years, waged a seven-year legal battle with Beaufort County over its refusal to connect a sewer line to the property.

Ultimately, the sewer line was installed, and Lowther planned a 200-seat restaurant. But he changed his mind and sold it in 2005.

Despite previous failed plans, Stewart said the demand is still there for development at the marina that can cater to boaters, residents and tourists.

"We see a need for people in this area," Stewart said. "It's enough to meet the need by restoring (the marina) to historic use and protecting the waters of the Port Royal Sound."

Stewart said he has the permits and zoning he needs to renovate the marina and build the 55- to 100-seat restaurant. He said he is negotiating lease terms with a restaurant owner in downtown Beaufort who he hopes will own and operate the eatery.

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The recession has delayed the construction date, Stewart said, but plans for the updated marina have been drawn up.

"We're ready to move forward as soon as the terms are worked out," he said.

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Spyder wrote on 07/09/2009 12:47:20 PM:
"it's essential that this new construction and subsequent restaurant/marina follow all the county and environmental (and ethical) rules so our river remains clean and unpolluted"


What sort of "ethical rules" apply?

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savethelowcountry wrote on 07/09/2009 09:07:08 AM:
Good for Stewart. Not surprising that he sees the value here after leaving beaufort for Spring Island. Amybe this recession will cause some of the wacked out locals that "have theirs" to allow the rest of the population to have facilities we can all enjoy. Enough of the Coastal Conservation League and their no growth buddies including the Gov.

Go for it Stewart.

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staybaby63 wrote on 07/06/2009 10:15:47 AM:
Congrats on this purchase Mr. Stewart...i have long thought this would be an awesome spot to "get away" and enjoy the beauty! I would love to talk about employment at the location....love doing set ups of new places and working it there after!
staybaby63@yahoo.com

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benzbaby wrote on 07/06/2009 09:11:39 AM:
While a new restaurant, dock, etc. will be welcomed, it's essential that this new construction and subsequent restaurant/marina follow all the county and environmental (and ethical) rules so our river remains clean and unpolluted. We'll have to keep a close watch on this.

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blufftonoid wrote on 07/06/2009 08:45:27 AM:
I used to love going to the antique store next door, what was the name of it?

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beaufortboy wrote on 07/06/2009 07:41:57 AM:
It was also a long distance phone call from the marina to Beaufort!

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gritsandhashbrowns wrote on 07/06/2009 06:37:42 AM:
How many remember when the Lemon Island Marina was the only place to find a public phone on the road between Beaufort to Hilton Head? Long ago days when the marina was situated in a beautiful setting and before the line of pine trees was planted along the water. It was unfortunate that the widened road, later, put the marina site out of view.

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