

New Developments

by Staff Writers
photos by Clinton Willis



RIVER DUNES

NORTH CAROLINA

In the heart of a former pine plantation, a new coastal village is emerging. The name River Dunes is taken from the ancient dune line discovered on the site. Water—the Neuse River, Broad Creek and Pamlico Sound—surrounds the whole of River Dunes, located a few miles from Oriental, the “sailing capital of North Carolina,” in Pamlico County.

This incomparable peninsula

lies on the southwest corner of Pamlico Sound. Graced with 14 miles of waterfront, the property is perfect for sailing and for the development of a coastal community.

On a warm spring day, NC Coastal Homes & Design visited River Dunes. We talked with Ed Mitchell, president of River Dunes Corporation, and Susan Venters, company spokesperson. Their enthusiasm was obvious. Mitchell warmed to his

subject. “We offer a relaxed boating lifestyle with plenty of amenities and breathtaking vistas of big water. With that said, a major goal of our project is preservation of the shorelines and the area’s complex marine ecosystem.”

“Construction will continue for several years, but River Dunes already captures the look and feel of 19th century maritime communities. We designed it that way,” Mitchell explained.



The waning sun lights up
The Row and Grace Harbor.



Keeping True to the Environment

To keep true to the area's diversity of life, flora and fauna, the corporation has gone to great lengths to conserve the property's fragile estuaries and marshes. Some 1300 acres comprise the community; 238 are set aside, undisturbed, for wildlife and existing natural landscapes.

River Dunes' residents will reap the benefits of this stewardship. They will enjoy what maritime villagers experienced more than a hundred years ago—peace and quiet, un sullied waters, critters of all kinds,

pin es, live oaks and cedars, fishing and crabbing, intact marshlands—and unsurpassed boating.

Unsurpassed boating in deep waters is the key economic factor in the development of River Dunes. But deep-water boating has not come easily. At the corporation's request, water quality experts surveyed the land's topography. They concluded that private docks and bulkheads, at the doorsteps of every home, would threaten the wetlands and spawning grounds of the area's diverse aquatic life. They also advised against building a marina at the mouth of any of the creeks.

So River Dunes changed its plans. Committed to caring for the original environment, the developers undertook an enormous task: they constructed Grace Harbor, a 28-acre inland harbor with room for 400 boat slips. The harbor is home to the community's only permissible boat docks, and provides a safe harbor from storms. The harbor is eight feet deep at normal water level; its bulkhead is made of tough composite stone, and the floating dock system is ironwood—an exceptionally rugged and long-lasting Brazilian hardwood.

But an inland marina doesn't give boats access to the deep local waters surrounding River Dunes. So the developers dredged an 1100 foot channel, another huge endeavor. Today, the channel flows from Grace Harbor into the Intracoastal Waterway, via Broad Creek, and finally into Pamlico Sound, beyond which lies the Atlantic Ocean.



River Dunes' sailors enjoy Grace Harbor

The village center chapel nears completion.



The harbor and channel give boaters access to the Sound, and from there to the Outer Banks, gateway to the blue water fishing grounds of the Gulf Stream. Just to the south on the Intracoastal Waterway, are the historic seaside towns of Beaufort and Morehead City.

A Traditional Village

The first community targeted for construction was Harbor Village, designed as a place where people feel inclined to congregate; walk and bicycle rather than drive. Streets are narrow to discourage car traffic and throughout the community boardwalks and nature trails will tie the buildings to the land. “Our streets are laid out in grids, like traditional American villages used to be,” Mitchell explained. “The grid pattern makes for a walk-friendly neighborhood.”

To create a sense of place, Harbor Village has its own village center. In the old days, village

centers kept towns vigorous and were places where neighbors gathered to socialize. Plans for River Dunes’ village center include a post office, chapel, retail shops, bike and cart rentals, an inn and a fitness center.

Interestingly, the post office will not deliver mail to individual homes. Residents will visit the village center to pick up mail. “Our village center will have an old-timey feel to it. Walking or biking to the center brings people together,” said Mitchell.

The Harbor Village Neighborhoods

Susan informed us that Harbor Village is intended to establish the maritime character and architecture of the whole community—that’s why it was the first community to be built.

Buyers can choose from several house styles and water views. The Row, facing directly on Grace Harbor, will set the architectural standard for the village. Chapel Square will feature Tidewater bungalows and cottages, with views of the harbor and Mill Creek,



Homes in "The Row" neighborhood. Pictured homes built by Stuart Hardy Construction, Maher Construction, and Watermark Homes.

as possible southern coastal homes and buildings," Mitchell said. "That's why we partnered with Historical Concepts. To ensure authenticity, we drew many of our ideas from older waterside towns in North Carolina—Beaufort, New Bern, Ocracoke and Oriental—and from the Battery section of Charleston, South Carolina. "Of course modern amenities are offered because residents, after all, live in the 21st century."

Modern Materials Create an Old-Fashioned Look

Susan Venters gave us a tour of some of the buildings still under construction in Harbor Village.

Susan pointed to the exterior of one of the houses. "We sheathe our homes in

HardiBoard. That's a tough cement fiber siding that lasts practically forever. It can be made to look like old-fashioned wooden clapboard, one of the oldest types of siding. The working shutters and gas lighting are further examples of River Dunes attention to detail.

"The exteriors of River Dunes homes are modern adaptations of older materials," Susan pointed out.

The roofs are an example. River Dunes uses standing-seam metal roofs. The seams of two roof panels are crimped together.

The crimping keeps water out. Metal is one of the best materials for protection from wind, rain, hail,

and homes in The Channel neighborhood will reflect the stately architecture of Charleston.

Architectural Character

Distinctive southern charm characterizes the coastal architecture of River Dunes. Historical Concepts, a renowned firm of architects and planners, helped establish the town plan. Blending elements of Southern Lowcountry and Tidewater architecture, Historical Concepts has designed a remarkable maritime village that combines the past with the present.

"River Dunes' architecture replicates as faithfully



Builder Bill McClay, of Preservation Homes, will soon complete this Chapel Square bungalow.

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fire and rot. The roofs are virtually maintenance-free and last 50 years or more. And the product can be finished to resemble any type of roof.

Ahhh, front porches. Only a porch can provide a shady outdoor space to escape the heat, serve as a comfortable spot for sipping iced tea and for lounging in a porch swing. Porches—a true Southern tradition—catch summer breezes, allow room for rocking chairs, and by their very presence, invite neighbors to visit.

Each Harbor Village home will have a spacious, welcoming front porch; some will have double-story porches. All will be cooled by ceiling fans. “Our porches are the transition from the family’s private quarters to our neighborhood streets. In eastern North Carolina, a porch is the perfect place to enjoy the outdoors from spring through fall,” Susan said.

BELOW: This gracious front porch faces the harbor. The impressive mahogany door and warm gas lighting invite you inside.



RIVER DUNES PHOTO



The roof tops & exterior of Harbor Village homes

Inside

Susan ushered us into a large home still under construction. First impression: light, space, air, water. Second impression: intricate, elegant architectural details.

Large 6-on-6 pane double-hung windows, with deep windowsills, fill the rooms with light and promote cross-ventilation. Transoms and ten-foot ceilings define the space. Spectacular views of the harbor and channel from the upper porch bring the water into the interior.

Classic baseboard design, beautiful window and door trim and elegant ceiling crown molding lend character to any home’s interior. And rich trim is abundant in this home.

Bob Laverty, the interior trim carpenter, explained some of the details. “Look in the kitchen. The wainscoting is plain and almost smooth. It plays up the kitchen’s functionality and

modernity. But as you go into the dining room, the wainscoting is more formal and complex. The formality is echoed by the raised window bases.”

The dining room is made elegant by deep window bases, formal wainscoting and heart pine floors.

Wainscoting once served a practical purpose. Before washable paint and wallpaper were common, wood wainscoting covered the lower portion of a wall, the part that had to stand up to heavy, everyday use. In the Harbor Village homes, wainscoting transforms plain wall space into interesting, decorative patterns.

Laverty points to the heart pine flooring, wide-planked, dark and beautiful. “These boards are reclaimed, not recycled,” he said. “Many of our heart pine floors come from old tobacco barns. You reclaim them by extracting all the metal nails, then you pry them up, cut them to the right length and make beautiful floors out of them.” A modern technique for to an old-fashioned look.

The home’s wide center hallway reminds me of my grandmother’s 1890s house in Louisiana.

Deep window bases and formal wainscoting enhance the elegance of the dining room.





The staircase showcases decorative wainscoting.

Custom cabinets make for a sophisticated kitchen. The keeping room is at the other end.



The staircase trim and broad banisters catch my eye. I exclaim: “Oh, I remember banisters like these. My sister and I had a great time sliding down them when we were little kids.” Bob Laverty smiled.

This formal house has a splendid kitchen, with a “keeping room” and fireplace at one end. Keeping rooms hark back to colonial days. They were communal places where families cooked, ate and worked. A fireplace was crucial to these rooms; more often than not, it was the only source of heat.

We talked briefly with master builder, Bill McClay, of Preservation Homes. He showed us the kitchen countertops. “This is oyster stone,” he said enthusiastically. “Real oyster shells are embedded into a quartz surface to make the countertops.” The oyster stone is gorgeous—a serene gray and pale beige, flecked with delicate shell pieces. The countertops are a beautiful complement to the stately, custom-made kitchen cabinets.

And what is oyster stone, we wonder? A South Carolina company, Vetrostone, manufactures this attractive material; it resists stains, cracks, scratches and heat. Shells other than oyster are available, as well as a variety of colors.



A cleverly designed guest suite is above the two-car garage, connected to the house by a screened breezeway. Everything to make guests comfortable is here: a mini-kitchen with, yes, black oyster stone countertops, a spacious bathroom, and an entertainment center. Five large windows bring sunshine into the suite. What more could any guest require?

The Harbor Club is scheduled for completion in fall 2007.



The Harbor Club

Anchoring Harbor Village is the Harbor Club. This grand structure showcases the community's maritime architecture. It has 6500 square feet of interior space, 2500 square feet of porches, and seven fireplaces.

At the club's front door, oversized architectural windows, pulling the marina into view, greet members and guests. The first floor is a welcome center for boaters and guests. A ship's chandlery and an antique billiard table are here as well, plus a library and trophy room, which will display the trophies of River Dunes residents past and future boating competitions.

On the second floor, the main dining room, with post and beam ceiling, caters to large gatherings and intimate ones. A bar overlooks the harbor, and on the upper-story porch, diners can enjoy the water view and the setting sun.

The club's outdoor comforts will be luxurious. Two in-ground spas, surrounded by a stone patio and flanked by outdoor fire pits, and an infinity pool lit by gas lanterns are some of the amenities the club will offer. Within the pool area, three cabanas will be available for full-spa services, including massage. (The cabanas can become food service stations for private parties.)

Guest boaters needing a place to stay can do so at one of the transient docks at The Landing, located on the club grounds. Dock boys will be on hand for any assistance required. The Landing's six guest cottages are loaded with creature comforts: laundry, showers, king-size beds, morning kitchen, flat-screen TV with surround sound and concierge services. Should the business world beckon, the cottages are equipped with internet access, computers and fax machines.

Future Neighborhoods and Amenities

Two other neighborhoods are planned. The Dunes will be sited on the Neuse River, and the Broadwater section will be located on the big-water creeks of Paris, Broad and Tar. Broadwater homes will be estates with sufficient acreage to guarantee owners lots of privacy.

A small inland lake, suitable for launching rowboats and canoes, will be stocked with a variety of fish. This "fishing hole" offers calm waters to cast a line.

Kayak devotees will enjoy miles and miles of creek paddling trails. More amenities are coming soon: the Nature Center and Adventure Lodge, a canoe club, hiking trails and the River Dunes Club with pool and tennis.

21st Century Infrastructure

River Dunes has been described as "aggressively environmental," a factor that will pay off handsomely for homeowners. Detailed planning, with the help of state and federal agencies, has resulted in an infrastructure designed to handle issues associated with building in a complex water environment.

River Dunes indicates "Our developers have worked closely with many authorities who are stakeholders in the preservation of the coastal environment. The result is an award-winning land plan that reflects the most modern methods of land and water management while creating a world-class community for families to enjoy for generations to come."

The Harbor Village is engineered so that water is guided to water gardens that will recharge the aquifer.

River Dunes is more than a community—it's an idea—a place that joins people to the water and the land, one that offers an enriching way of life in a natural setting, and brings tremendous economic growth to eastern North Carolina. ♻️

Many trees have been saved from construction damage, such as this Live Oak. Circular mounds protect tree roots. The green bag around the trunk delivers water.

