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Skipper and friend make their own ocean in a jar during the Museum's 35th birthday party!

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Greetings! Is it Spring yet (no more blasts of winter temperatures!)? An early Happy Easter to all!

Welcome Aboard to Jenn Ballinger who is the newest member of the Crew at **our** Museum. She joins Shannon, John, and Toni and we – speaking for all the Friends - are so pleased that the State was finally able to get a 4th employee here in Southport! We look forward to working with you, Jenn.

A big congratulations to the Crew (Shannon, John, Toni, and Jenn and all our Volunteers for receiving the Maggie Award for Favorite Family Fun Spot. Well deserved!!!

The lease agreement between the State and the City is complete!!!!!! It outlines the roles and responsibilities of both parties. Work on the Memorandum of Agreement – outlining the roles and responsibilities between the Friends and the State - continues. Kevin Locklin (the Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors) and I traveled to Raleigh on March 13 to discuss items with the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) leadership. It was a very good meeting. When DNCR sends back the latest changes, the Board of Directors will review and discuss.

We are hosting a very special evening with Richard Neal to discuss the history and future

of the Frying Pan Shoals. Additionally, we are organizing a May trip to Old Baldy. Look for more info in this newsletter or emails!

As you all know, this year we celebrate America at 250! I would encourage you to look at the NC First In Freedom Celebrations Guide (NCFirstInFreedomFestival.com) to see local celebrations.

As always, remember to visit the Ship's Chandlery (Museum Gift Shop) as there are some fantastic items available.

A repeated request from me -> Fellow members and supporters, we need your help. Our Volunteers are an integral part of our daily operations. They are our face to the public welcoming new visitors and serving customers in the gift shop (the Ship's Chandlery). Many others help build new exhibits or help in our library. All share a love of **our** Museum, Southport, and maritime history. Please submit the form at our website (www.friendsncmmsouthport.com/volunteer) and join the many other volunteers with a love of maritime history. Of course, if you've a friend who loves Southport and maritime history, ask them to consider joining the Friends!

Thank you for your continued interest in preserving and sharing our maritime history, especially at **our** Museum! If, at any time, you have any questions, issues, or ideas, please do not hesitate to discuss them with me.

Have a blessed Easter and, of course, Smooth Seas,

Tom

Celebrating Toni Foster Soles Volunteer Coordinator, NC Maritime Museum of Southport



This April, as we celebrate 50 years of National Volunteer Week, we are reminded that strong communities are built by people who show up. Since 1974, this national celebration has recognized the power of volunteers to strengthen neighborhoods, preserve history, and make a lasting difference. It takes place each April during Global Volunteer Month, and it gives us a meaningful opportunity to say thank you.

Here at the Maritime Museum of Southport, our volunteers are truly the heart of what we do. They greet visitors, share stories, answer questions, and help preserve the history that

makes our coastal community so special. And at the center of that volunteer family is Toni Soles. As our Volunteer Coordinator, Toni does far more than schedule shifts or lead volunteer training. She builds relationships, notices people's strengths and encourages new volunteers who may be unsure on that first day as a volunteer. She helps create the welcoming spirit that visitors feel the moment they walk through our doors.

So this month, we're turning the spotlight toward Toni.

Toni, anyone who has seen you at the front desk has likely wondered — how do you keep that authentic and constant smile? What inspires that joy? Every time visitors walk through our doors, I get excited knowing they're about to discover something new. There's something powerful about choosing to learn on your own time, and I know visitors are here because they want to be. That energy is contagious.

Was there someone in your own life who mentored or inspired you in a similar way? How has that shaped the way you support others? I was lucky enough to have some great mentors in college. My professors gave me space to grow, try new ideas, and sometimes fail but always with support. That shaped me deeply when moving on to the "real world." It taught me that people thrive when they feel seen and believed in. Because of that, I try to support others the same way: by creating a welcoming space, offering guidance when it's needed, and encouraging curiosity and confidence along the way.

Do you have a favorite item in the Gift shop — something that feels especially meaningful to you? Some of my favorite items in the shop are the ones made right here in North Carolina. We carry beautiful pottery from Walton Clay Studio located in Star NC, praline pecans from Elizabeth's Pecans in Turkey NC, and handcrafted jewelry from Ken's Handcrafted Jewelry in Edenton NC, just to name a few. It's great that items in the shop represent and support makers from across the state, and especially the Cape Fear Region.

Is there a particular story, exhibit, or piece of Southport's maritime history that holds a special place in your heart? My favorite artifact in the exhibit hall is the 1000 year old canoe we have from White Lake in Bladen County. Many people don't know there are still canoes resting in the lake today. For every dollar spent to recover one, it takes about five dollars to preserve it- which is why some remain where they are. I love that it reminds us there's still so much history waiting to be discovered. That sense of ongoing learning and exploration is what makes this work so meaningful.

When you're welcoming someone as a museum volunteer, what qualities do you look for? What helps someone become that friendly face our visitors remember? I look for kindness and curiosity. The daily routine of museum operations can be taught, but a genuine interest in people and a willingness to learn make all the difference. The volunteers that visitors like to engage with are the ones who are present, who smile, listen, and share their enthusiasm in a natural way. When someone truly enjoys being here and cares about the visitor's experience, that warmth is what makes the volunteer and the museum unforgettable.

If you could add something new to the museum — an exhibit, event, or experience — what would you love to see? If I could add something new to the museum, it would be to implement formal training for volunteers to give guided tours. Right now, staff give guided tours to groups that book them in advance- but it would be great to have volunteers willing to walk through the exhibits with visitors and share the stories behind what's on display. There's something special about experiencing the museum alongside

someone who can bring exhibits to life. That personal connection can make a visit even more memorable and have guests wanting to come back.

What is your dream job — or are you already living it? My dream job is one where I get to make someone's day a little better- whether that's by sharing new information, sparking curiosity, or simply offering a warm welcome. I've always wanted to be in a role where learning feels joyful and accessible. Getting to do that here, connecting with visitors and helping create meaningful experiences, is something I'm truly grateful for.



As the public face of the museum, Volunteers are responsible for welcoming visitors and ensuring a positive experience - from the little ones to the curious ones. Would you consider joining us? We are currently in need of help running our gift shop or being a greeter at the front desk (currently have opening for Wednesday am and Thursday pm).

For More Information visit our [website](#) or call 910-477-5154 and ask for Ms Toni Soles



Meet our Newest Team Member - Jennifer Ballinger

I relocated to Southport, NC from Medina, OH in November 2023 with my husband Mike and our fur baby Koa (our energetic and loveable Goldendoodle). We started vacationing here when my mother moved to Southport almost twenty years ago, and we always knew we would eventually relocate here to be closer to her. We have two children who still live in Ohio. Our son, Zak is an Army veteran who currently works as a detailer for a car dealership. Our daughter, Kira will be graduating this May with her Bachelor of Arts degree in Cultural Anthropology & Forensics from Kent State University and will be continuing on this fall to pursue her master's degree in the same field. In my spare time, I enjoy taking Koa on walks to the park and the beach, reading, attending events with the ladies' group I became involved with this past year, and exploring all that Southport, Oak Island and the surrounding areas have to offer. I am excited to be joining the team at the NC Maritime Museum of Southport!

Jenn's focus as administrative assistant is to assist with day to day operations, volunteer and visitor services, and administrative tasks, and educational programming. We are absolutely thrilled to have her join the team!

Friends Events

Happy 35th Birthday to our Museum! There was a wonderful celebration on 7 March with the Crew, Friends, and visitors! Did you know that 10 years ago (March 2016) the Friends completed a 15-month fundraising campaign to pay for the building's addition; the Friends finished with a final total of \$330,800 in collected contributions! Read ON.....

Happy 35th Birthday to the Maritime Museum!!

On March 7, the Friends of the Maritime Museum of Southport sponsored a Birthday celebration recognizing 35 years of Museum operation. Birthday cake and lemonade were available as well as the opportunity to participate in a few craft items. A rope making crew positioned on the Museum's porch instructed guests on how to create a segment of rope. Inside the Museum, education staff assisted guests in the creation of their own "ocean in a jar". The craft proved to be extremely popular and will be offered again in June. Skipper the River Otter greeted everyone and received hugs from some friendly young folks.

The Maritime Museum of Southport began as a local non-profit entity in the 190's when Southport was seeking ways to encourage visitation. Originally, the Museum was located at 116 N Howe Street, the building where the Ports of Call restaurant now exists. Later, the Museum was moved to its current location and became a state Museum with the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.





FRYING PAN TOWER
FROM SEXTANTS TO SAFETY
SCIENCE AND STEWARDSHIP ON THE HIGH SEAS

Join us for a special evening with **Richard Neal**.
Learn about the history and future of the
Frying Pan Tower.

Wednesday, April 22nd at 7PM
Homer E Wright Event Center
4136 Southport-Supply Road

This event is free but registration is recommended.
Scan the QR code to the right or visit
www.friendsncmmsouthport.com to register



Learn About the Frying Pan Shoals Light Station

Join us **Wednesday, April 22nd at 7:00PM** for a very special evening with Richard Neal, Executive Director of FPTower Inc., as he discusses *Frying Pan Tower – Science and Stewardship on the High Seas*.

Learn all about the history of these light stations and the future of Frying Pan Shoals Light station.

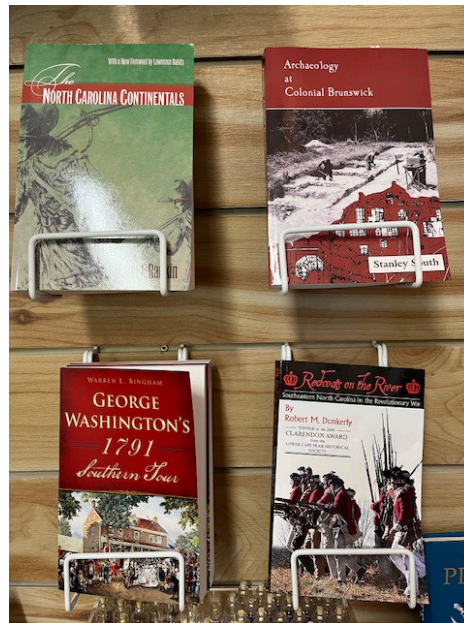
Admission is Free but registration is recommended. Visit friendsncmmsouthport.com for more information and to register.

Save the Date for Behind the Scenes Tour of Old Baldy! May 20th

We're excited to bring a special behind the scenes tour of the Old Baldy lighthouse. The tour will include an exclusive guided tour of Old Baldy and grounds, and special demonstration by the Bald Head Island conservancy. Ticket price includes ferry ticket, lighthouse admission, and boxed lunch. Follow us on Facebook and check our website for more information. Members receive a special discount. Not a member? Join today!



New Arrivals in the Gift Shop!



We have many new items in the gift shop from North Carolina based artists and small businesses. This month we are focusing on **The Appalachian Goat** based in Asheville, North Carolina. The owner, Kimberly, discovered amazing Goats Milk soaps in Africa, Asia and South America, and came home to the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina and developed formulas for vitamin rich moisturizers that naturally nourish your skin.

As we get ready for America's 250th birthday, we have several new books that showcase North Carolina's role in the war and highlight life in the colonial era.

Remember, Members always receive a 10% discount on your gift shop purchases.



Free and upcoming programs:

Skippers Crew. 10am – 3pm. Dates and themes listed below. Designed for all ages, but specifically geared toward younger patrons, Skipper's Crew features hands-on activities and take-home crafts focusing on combining art, history, and science. During the first two hours lights will be dimmed and interactives muted to provide a calmer environment for our patrons with sensitivities. Programs run from 10:00am to 3:00pm. These programs are FREE but donations are accepted and appreciated.

April 3 Budding Branches Little artists will welcome the season with this sweet springtime craft. Using paint and their own fingerprints, kids will add budding leaves to paper branches, creating a colorful keepsake that celebrates new growth and creativity.

April 18 Little Helping Hands Celebrate Earth Day with a craft that shows how even the smallest hands can help our planet! Kids will use paint and their hand prints to create an Earth-inspired masterpiece, reminding us all that caring for the world starts with just one hand.

May 2 Sunlit Sea Friends Brighten up your windows with colorful ocean themed sun catchers! We will use different kinds of paper to create shimmering sea creatures that come to life in the sunlight. A fun and creative way to bring a little under-the-sea magic indoors!

May 9 Love You Bunches We are crafting blooming bouquets just in time for Mother's Day using colorful cupcake liners! These handmade forever flowers are a fun and heartfelt way to say, "I love you bunches!" to your special someone.

May 23 Petals of Honor Kids will craft bright red poppies to honor Memorial Day. These meaningful flowers are a symbol of remembrance, giving children a creative way to show respect and learn about the heroes who have served our country.

June 6 Tiny Tanks We are diving into sensory play by creating our own ocean-in-a-bottle! Using clear bottles, water, glitter glue and mini sea creatures, each child will build a tiny tank they can shake, swirl and explore. It's a fun and exciting way to bring the undersea world to life!

June 20 For A Reel Great Dad Celebrate Father's Day with a "fin-tastic" craft! Kids will use their hand prints to create colorful fish, making a one-of-a-kind keepsake for the "reel" great dads (or father figures) in their lives. A splash of fun and a whole lot of love!

DEEP DIVE INTO HISTORY:

Coin of the Realm: Historic Currency in North Carolina May 23 11am - 3pm

Join a historic interpreter as they delve into the fascinating world of 18th century North Carolina currency – and get the chance to see some up close. This event is part of the museum's Deep Dive Into History series, programs designed to give visitors a deeper understanding of our shared past through costumed interpretation.

Get your hands on history! Anchors Aweigh is geared towards families and folks of all ages, and each hands-on activity will focus on a specific theme in Lower Cape Fear and North Carolina history.

School of the Sailor May 27 11am – 2pm. We will be gearing up for adventures on the high seas! Join us to see if you have the skills to become an 18th century sailor.

Cyphers and Codes June 10 11 am – 2pm You have the opportunity to learn about Cyphers and Codes of the American Revolution – and make your very own!

Seal the Deal June 24 11am – 2pm We will be making our mark! Visitors will have the opportunity to write a letter the 18th century way – with ink, quill, and wax! Seal your own to take home with you.

For more information on museum programs, visit ncmaritimemuseumsouthport.com or call 910-477-5151.

FUN FACT!

THANK YOU SOUTHERN LIVING MAGAZINE

Our Maritime Museum has been profiled in the February 2026 Issue as one of the 11 BEST things to do in Southport.

Check it out!

<https://www.southernliving.com/southport-north-carolina-11904698>