



HERALD NEWS PHOTO | DAVE SOUZA

Sandy Beach, the site of a bustling amusement park in the early 20th century, is now a neighborhood beach off Atlantic Avenue on Mount Hope Bay. It's one of the more unknown sites in the city, unrecognized even by lifelong Fall Riverites.

Where's the beach?

Even many Fall Riverites haven't yet strolled along 'Old Elm'

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FALL RIVER — At first glance, the rocky shore and broken-down dock gives the casual passerby a feel of neglect and misuse. But for those who live close to this once-vibrant public shoreline, Sandy Beach is one of the Spindle City's best-kept secrets, and has been for more than 65 years.

Once a strong competitor with the likes of Lincoln Park, this stretch of beach off Atlantic Boulevard on Mount Hope Bay, once called Old Elm, first opened in 1892 and featured its



SUBMITTED PHOTO

This old postcard shows Sandy Beach at the height of its popularity. The Depression years were not kind to the area, as part of its park was destroyed in a 1930 fire and in the Hurricane of 1938.

own amusement park, carousel, concession stands, boathouse and dance pavilion. Part of the bayside park was destroyed in a 1930 fire and then wiped out with the Hurricane of 1938.

Today, all that's left of the Sandy Beach is the boathouse, now a three tenement house, and the millions of stones that now line the beach instead of sand. But that doesn't take away from the solitude the beach still exudes off its rocky shore.

With a 2004 tourism study stating that a majority of the people who travel to New

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England are there looking for beaches — and with Horseneck State Beach in Westport seeing 105,000 more beachcombers last year than in 2003, paying \$7 per person — quiet, uncharted beaches like Sandy Beach should get more visitors than it actually does.

"People still swim, but people that like to go to beaches like to feel sand, not rocks," said Fall River City Councilor and Sandy Beach neighbor Pat Casey.

Unlike most beaches, Sandy Beach is anything but, as small sea stones are spread out over the areas that once harbored soft sand.

Even an attempt to add sand to the beach proved futile 12 years ago when the sand, much like it did during the '38 hurri-

cane, floated back out to sea.

But the beach has had other problems too.

"We, at one time, had problems with the sewerage treatment plant, but those problems have long been cleared up," Casey said. "I have been swimming in this water for 62 years. The city has done a lot to clean up the bay, and it shows."

An old, broken sewerage pipe near the beach serves only as a relay for rain water overflow.

As good as the beach is for swimming, Casey said, there are just as many people that fish off the dock or the shore and is also a great backdrop for boating, but there are only two boats moored along its shores.

Casey helps organize the Sandy Beach Organization, a group of neighbors that pools together to fix things in disre-

pair on the beach or to pick up trash along the beach. She said they plan to fix up the decaying dock within the next few months and hope to see a boat ramp up the street someday to allow for greater access for the boats.

Two weeks ago, the association fixed the wooden stairs that allow walkers to reach the beach from Atlantic Avenue.

"Years ago, people would use this area as a dumping site, anything from wood from a house construction to broken-up Sheetrock," Casey said. "But this neighborhood is very tight and we watch out for each other."

Signs along the beach warn people that the area is being constantly watched by neighbors and security cameras.

Even Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., paid a visit to Sandy Beach a few years ago when he

was working on a bill to be able to prosecute dumpers caught in the act of dumping, instead of waiting until after the dumping was completed.

"I remember catching this one guy while he was dumping, and besides forcing him to pick up all that he had dumped, I made him clean up all the garbage on the beach too," Casey said. "I told him that if he ever came back here, I had his license plate."

Besides a few isolated incidents, the dumping has just about ceased over the last decade.

Today, Sandy Beach stands as a reminder of a Fall River era that has long passed, but there are those who think the past has a funny way of catching up to the present, given a little push.

"Plans to make this a (tourist)

beach are very possible, but the problem would always be the lack of parking in the area," Casey said. "Years ago, a trolley would bring people down Mount Hope Avenue."

But there are no more trolleys, and the houses, once summer cottages, are all year-round homes now.

"Although we have no immediate plans to do anything at Sandy Beach, it doesn't mean that we never will. Pat Casey and her neighbors have done a wonderful job at keeping that area up," said Fall River Mayor Edward M. Lambert Jr. "Ultimately, it would have to be a passive recreational area because we would not want the beach's beauty to be degraded. With the (combined sewage overflow) project now completed, we could see a project like this could

certainly be on the radar screen for the future."

When asked why a place like Sandy Beach is so unknown, even to Fall River residents who have lived in the Spindle City for dozens of years, Casey said that a lot of it has to do with the fact that there is really only a few streets off Bay Street that can actually get people to the beach. Most streets adjacent to the beach are dead ends.

"A lot of the time, people don't realize what you have even when it's in front of you," Casey said. "If it was sandier, maybe more people would come, but the sunsets out here are absolutely gorgeous."

Even if it's for an audience of just one.

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