

Join Isle of Hope Historical Association to Preserve our Past for the Future

BY DAN WILLOUGHBY

The longtime leadership of the Isle of Hope Historical Association, after many years of service to our community, has passed the torch to a new group of officers. We thank President Michael Curran and board members Chip Goldsmith, Bill Kehoe, Bonnie Gentes, and Brigette VanBaelen for all they did for Isle of Hope. As we head into 2022, the "new" Historical Association will begin with a membership drive and focus its efforts in three areas.

First, the Historical Association will take the



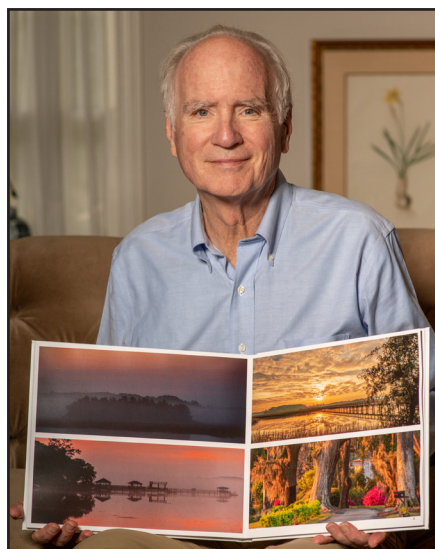
Bluff Drive Near Barbee's Pavilion

Photo submitted

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Dan Biggerstaff Shares His "Happy Place"

BY CHRIS BRANTLEY
EDITOR



Dr. Dan Biggerstaff with this book,
Isle of Hope: My Happy Place
Photo submitted

I moved back to Isle of Hope in 2019 and quickly realized that this place was disproportionately blessed with excellent photographers. Unfortunately, Sammy Moore had passed by then, so I missed out on getting to know him.

But one guy I would see almost every time I took my dog for a walk in the mornings was Dr. Dan Biggerstaff. He was always strolling by with a camera in hand or hanging from his neck. Eventually, we got to know each other. He helped my wife, Lauren, when she got a new camera and needed advice on taking photos.

So I was really excited when he told me he planned to

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Front Porch

BY CHRIS BRANTLEY, EDITOR

"In a life properly lived, you're a river. You touch things lightly or deeply; you move along because life herself moves, and you can't stop it; you can't figure out a banal game plan applicable to all situations; you just have to go with the "beingness" of life, as Rilke would have it. In *Sundog*, Strang says a dam doesn't stop a river, it just controls the flow. Technically speaking, "you can't stop one at all." – Jim Harrison.

Almost every day, I walk my dog down the Bluff and observe the Skidaway River. This year, I also have spent time navigating other parts of the Intracoastal waterway as well. Boating has forced me to be aware of many details I overlooked before, like tides,

the wind, and weather. And one thing has become clear, it is nearly impossible to predict all the different variables. You simply have to keep moving as the river does and adjust to the unknown changes that come your way.

Who knew at the end of 2019 what was ahead of us in 2020 and 2021. In many ways, we still don't. Maybe we will never face another unexpected pandemic. But every year, there will be personal and public twists and turns. Surprising things and events – good and bad – that we will have to face and adjust to.

This time each year, I begin to look back on the year that has passed. I have much to be thankful for. I live near

most of my family. I am also grateful that my kids continue to build their own lives. Things have not always gone as "expected," but each is moving forward, growing and becoming comfortable in their own skin. I'm also so glad that I stumbled across Isle of Hope and its remarkable community.

This is nothing to take for granted. I have met more neighbors (and dogs) than anywhere else I have lived before. Yet, even though I grew up here in the 1980s, I overlooked so much that now, in my 50s, I appreciate deeply: the rich history of the island, the natural beauty of the rivers, the trees, the marshes, the stately homes, and charming cottages. But most of all, I appreciate the

Editor's Note: I want to clarify something I wrote in my boating article in the Fall 2021 issue. We only take our dog to Ossabaw Island as it is the only barrier island that allows dogs. Also, if you'd like to learn more about why some do not, please visit <https://sc.audubon.org/news/let-em-rest-let-em-nest-set-save-shorebirds>

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Preserve our Past
- Continued from page 1 -

lead in gathering and sharing information and materials regarding Isle of Hope's rich history. Currently there is no central store for historic information, documents, photographs, or artifacts.

The Historical Association has launched a new website at www.iohha.org that will make gathered materials available online. This will be an ongoing, collective effort and our online materials will grow over time.

At the outset, it will include: (1) information about the history of Isle of Hope's historic houses; (2) maps dating back to the 1700's, including the first maps identifying

Isle of Hope and its landmarks; (3) memoirs by island residents; (4) historic documents, including the original land grants to Isle of Hope's first settlers; (5) antique postcards dating back to the early 1900s; and (6) biographies of Isle of Hoppers, including one of Cyrenius Hall, an artist and Grimball Point resident in the late 1800s who has one of his paintings hanging in the Smithsonian's

National Portrait Gallery.

We hope you will visit www.iohha.org and enjoy these materials. While you are there, join - or rejoin - the Historical Association. It only takes a couple of clicks.

In the past, the Historical Association published a newsletter for its members. We will again be distributing

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"While there are pros and cons to having a historic district designation depending on the type - Overall, historic districts see higher property values and help to maintain values over the long term."

- Ed Yannett
Isle of Hope Real Estate Agent

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Dan Biggerstaff's "Happy Place"

- Continued from page 1 -

publish a book of his photos from Isle of Hope. The first copy of the finished book came back from the printer, and Lauren and I went to Dan's house to check it out.

He calls the Island his "Happy Place," The book is titled *Isle of Hope: My Happy Place*, a book of photos he has taken of the community and its people.

But before we talk about the book, let's talk a little about Dan.

Dan retired from his medical practice in January 2018 and began to work as a photographer full-time. He describes his plunge into photography with these words, "the photographer in me actually started about the same time as the doctor in me. A manual film camera, purchased during my senior year of medical school, was my first 'real' camera.

As a side note, my father thought it was an exorbitant purchase for a medical student and shamed me into taking it back to the store; as I recall, it cost about \$120. Thinking about the situation upset me, and shortly I returned to the store and repurchased the camera. I reassured the salesman that I would

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Dan Biggerstaff's "Happy Place"

- Continued from page 4 -

not be back for another return. From a photography standpoint, I have never looked back."

Dan also served 10 years in the U.S. Army before moving to Savannah and starting his obstetric and gynecology practice. He married his wife, Elisabeth, while in medical school. They had two children, a daughter, and a son, during his residency. He also has four grandchildren who he said make great photography subjects.

Though he had a variety of hobbies, saltwater fly fishing, sailing, bluegrass fiddle, and flying, his love of photography eventually replaced them all as his primary passion. But he still finds time for another love, gourmet cooking. His favorite is Northern Italian cuisine.

Dan learned his craft by taking thousands of photos and being his own toughest critic, advice he received from long-time Isle of Hope resident Noel Wright. He was also influenced by Jay Maisel, Peter Hurley, Greg Heisler, Andrew Southam, Bill Durrence, Joe McNally, and David Tejada.

Dan started with street photography (candid photos of those he came across). In his own words, he "took a gazillion photos of a variety of subjects." He also did some women's fashion photography but realized the opportunity for that type was limited in Savannah. So he moved into portrait and headshot photography.

His new book features a mix of gorgeous photos of Isle of Hope's natural landscapes and homes, as well as street shots of people going about their daily lives on the Island.

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Preserve our Past

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a quarterly newsletter, which will be entitled, "The 1736 Gazette," after the date of the island's first settlement. It will include stories about Isle of Hope's history and features on noteworthy individuals and events.

We will complement our website and newsletter with regular communications with our members. We hope you will share with us information and copies of materials that can be featured on the new website, in the newsletter, and in our member communications.

Second, the Historical Association will sponsor community-building events. For many years, the Historical Association sponsored the annual Isle of Hope Art Show.

Started by Ruthie and Noel Wright in 2000 on their porch, the Art Show blossomed into one of Isle of Hope's favorite events. The pandemic paused the Art Show, but we are pleased to announce that the Historical Association will again sponsor the Art Show in 2022. In the past, the Historical Association also traditionally held an annual members' get-together, usually in the form of an oyster roast. We will be reviving that tradition as well.

Third, and most importantly, the Historical Association will be working with the community to begin a preservation initiative to preserve and protect our river bluff area.

For almost 45 years, Isle of Hope residents have worked together through the Historical Association to protect our island from "progress" that does not respect our past. Indeed, the Historical Association was established in 1977 to prevent unwanted development along the bluff.

That year, the Historical Association worked with Isle of Hope residents to help stop expansion of the marina operations to include heavy commercial repair work, a development that would have disrupted the

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Isle of Hope Rezoning Wins MPC Approval

By CHARLES CRAIG
Staff Writer

A last-minute effort by Isle of Hope residents to block a rezoning request fell short Tuesday as the Metropolitan Planning Commission voted 8-4 to approve the development of a 16-unit condominium complex.

The vote by the MPC is subject to final approval by the Chatham County Commission, and residents opposed to the project say they will carry the fight to their elected officials.

Developers Hugh Tracy, Richard Estus, Irwin Mazo and Wayne Murphy are proposing two 8-unit condominiums on a 2.17-acre plot at 33-51 Bluff Drive. On a 2.23-acre adjacent parcel, they want to build a commercial marina.

The MPC members approved the project and the rezoning of the developers' property from single-family residential and tourist business to planned residential-conservation (PRC). The PRC designation was the subject of an MPC zoning amendment, approved last month, and is also subject to approval by the county commissioners.

The controversy over the development erupted in the latter part of September when Tracy and his partners

first proposed the condominiums on Isle of Hope.

The high-density development would be the first of its kind in the community, which is made up exclusively of more than 1,000 single-family homes and is slated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The developers first requested a multifamily zoning variance. In attempt to reach a compromise with the residents, the MPC authorized the writing of the PRC district, which regulates the compatibility of any new structures with existing ones in the district.

The PRC amendment, if approved, would apply countywide.

Tuesday, the standing-room-only crowd of Isle of Hope residents came armed with a 682-signature petition calling for the rejection of the rezoning request.

Four of them addressed the commission, saying that Isle of Hope residents should decide what is best for their community.

Among other objections, the residents said the development is a violation of the county's Land Use Plan for Isle of

See REZONING, Page 8A

Article about the attempt to rezone Bluff Drive for Condominiums in 1980s
Photo submitted



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Preserve our Past
- Continued from page 6 -

tranquility of the bluff and the island. In the early 1980s, the Historical Association, led by Jane Coslick, Jack Allen, and David Johnson, rallied the community to stop a condominium project that would have built 17 condos, a club, private tennis courts, and a pool on the bluff, forever changing Isle of Hope.

In the 1990s, the Historical Association worked with Chatham County Commission to revise county zoning laws to ensure that future development on the island would be compatible with surrounding properties.

Three new residential zoning classifications were added on the island, reducing the number of houses per acre that could be constructed. While this certainly was a welcome development, this specific zoning change, and zoning laws in general, does not prevent demolition of existing historic buildings or new construction in styles completely out of character with Isle of Hope.

The Historical Association also led the effort to have a portion of Isle of Hope along the bluff designated as a "historic district" under federal law. Sadly, and somewhat surprisingly, this federal designation also does not provide protection against the demolition of existing historic buildings or new construction that is incompatible with the island's existing architecture.

It merely lists Isle of Hope's historic district on the national register of historic places and provides eligibility for certain federal and local programs.

Despite all these efforts over many years, Isle of Hope has lost important historic structures and parts of its riverfront have been altered.

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Merry Christmas and Happy 2022!

We've had another amazing year on Isle of Hope! We love this beautiful island and close-knit community. What a blessing to live where we do and serve the people in our neighborhood. We wish you and all our family and friends a healthy and prosperous 2022.

Ed, Lisa and Lauren



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Rounding up Isle of Hope Photos, Artifacts and Memorabilia

BY POLLY COOPER

This remarkable new history group has begun to accumulate artifacts and memorabilia from the early days at Isle of Hope.

Our fascinating and rich history dates back to the early 1700s. This is our watch and we owe it to the next generation to preserve all we can.

Making an encouraging start, we have thus far managed to obtain...

1 - Two wool men's swimming costumes - the kind worn on Barbee's Pavilion in the 1920s.

2 - The posters displayed in front of each Bluff Drive home for the 275th anniversary of Isle of Hope. They show classic old pictures and tell the fascinating history of each home and our churches. (See page 11 for examples)

3 - A section of the old streetcar track which transported visitors to Barbee's pavilion and toted children to school in the city.

4 - A set of spats which many band leaders wore over their shoes while conducting.

5 - Various old and interesting photos from the good old days at Isle of Hope.

6 - A hand-knitted shrimp net. (See page 11)

7 - A few old boat-building tools.

8 - Various sharks teeth found on the mudbanks in the area.

9 - An old card game to learn about and identify various birds.

10 - A 1930s 3 horsepower Johnson outboard motor.

11 - A wooden hand-cranked ice-cream churn with the dasher.

We are making a list of things you might like to share from the good old days gone by.

Please email Polly Cooper at cooperpolly@gmail.com and describe what you might like to contribute.

Photos would be helpful with descriptions.

Suggestions -

1 - Old waterskis - the clunky 6' long wooden kind, or an aquaplane.

2 - Barbees terrapin soup cans.

3 - Street signs.

4 - Pics of sailboat races.

6 - Pics of the bands and activities inside Barbee's Pavilion.

7 - Streetcar pictures.

8 - May Pole dancing.

9 - Picking crabs inside the pavilion.

10 - More!

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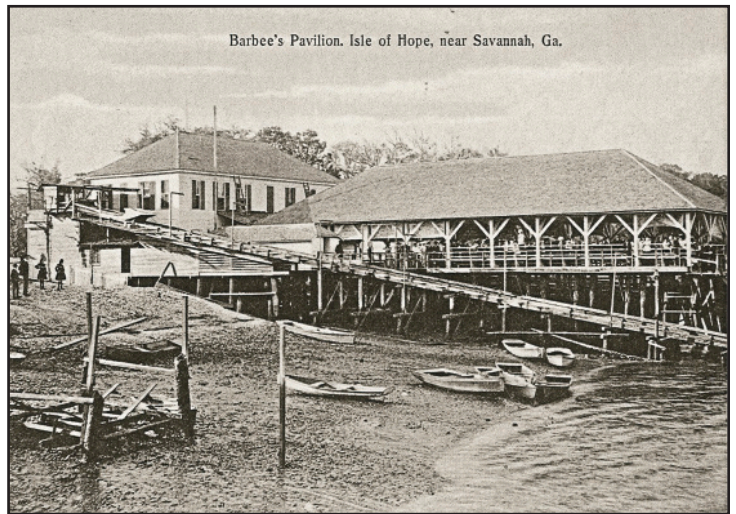
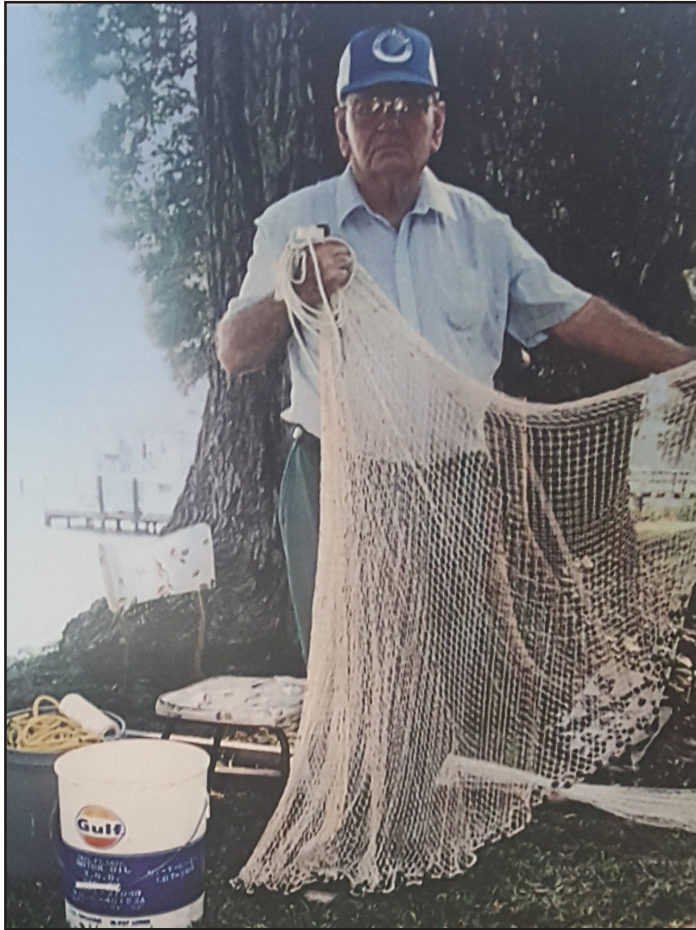


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Pictured above: A hand-knitted shrimp net made by Harry L. Hucks; Pictured at top right and at right are the posters displayed for the 275th anniversary of Isle of Hope
Photos submitted

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Preserve our Past

- Continued from page 7 -

History has shown that a determined real estate developer can override overwhelming neighborhood opposition, sympathetic county commissioners, beefed-up zoning laws, and even a prestigious federal historic district designation to demolish historic buildings or erect new buildings incompatible with Isle of Hope's traditional style.

The threat is real. Over the last few years, several Bluff Drive homeowners have been approached about "knockdown" sales of their properties with their homes to be demolished and replaced with new houses.

At present, every sold

house on the bluff is at risk for demolition or fundamental change no matter what the neighborhood wants.

Your "new" Historical Association wants to provide Isle of Hope's bluff area with real protection through a preservation initiative. This effort would focus solely on the bluff area and not affect other parts of the island.

The most effective way to save the bluff from unwanted development and preserve its current character is to have this riverfront area designated as a local historic district by Chatham County.

We look forward to working with the community to obtain this designation and we hope you will join us.

Front Porch

- Continued from page 2 -

most of all, I appreciate the sense of community that binds us together.

We may not agree on everything, but most everyone I run across values the uniqueness of this slice of paradise and wants to preserve and cultivate its distinctive character. Think about everything you love about this place and how wonderful it would be if generations to come could experience it too.




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Dan Biggerstaff's "Happy Place"

- Continued from page 4 -

As Lauren and I thumbed through *Isle of Hope: My Happy Place*, a beautifully constructed book, Dan shared how each photo also had a memory and a story behind it.

As we took in each shot, he periodically recounted the stories around the people and the places he had framed.

If you've lived on the Island for many years, you will recognize lots of the faces. If you're a newbie, the pictures will give you a sense of what makes Isle of Hope — not just Dan's — but also many others "Happy Place."

To preview or order your copy of "Isle of Hope: My Happy Place,"

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