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TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 20, 2005

THE COASTLAND TIMES

Published On Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. In The Interest Of The Walter-Raleigh Coastland-Outer Banks Areas
VOLUME LXXI NUMBER 33
MANTEO, NC 27954 Tel. 252-473-2705 • KILL DEVIL HILLS, NC 27948 Tel. 252-441-2223

Statistics from O.B. Visitors Bureau

Numbers show good summer season

By JESSICA HAMRICK

Despite a decline in attendance at many North Carolina tourist sites, gas prices and hurricanes, Dare County had a good summer season, according to Carolyn McCormick, managing director of the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau. "We've had the best year ever in the history of the Outer Banks," said McCormick. July and August's income from meals and occupancy

(money spent on food and a place to stay) have exceeded expectations.

McCormick, who stressed the bottom line is gross revenues, said that meals were up 8 percent for June and July compared to last year's numbers for the same months.

Occupancy during the summer season jumped up about 10 percent from \$77 million in 2004 to \$88 million this year, even though the cost of renting a place to stay had only increased about 3 percent.

Looking at other figures released through the Visitors Bureau, the North Carolina Aquarium had more visitors in June, July and August in 2005 than in 2004. During June and

July, there were attendance increases at Roanoke Island Festival Park, Fort Raleigh and the Wright Brothers National Memorial, on the other hand, got slower than usual starts in June.

Despite an aggressive Ocean City radio campaign trying to "sell" the Maryland vacation spot over the Outer Banks, requests for information about the Outer Banks "are up dramatically," said McCormick.

All of this is good news considering, as McCormick pointed out, that fuel costs have increased about 20 percent. This led to less traffic traveling on the Chesapeake (Va.) Expressway, but more people traveling in one vehicle. "We encourage car

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pooling," said McCormick.

"We did go into the summer with some concerns," she added. "We were successful in a very difficult time in the world."

With the fall season just beginning, McCormick is hoping that growth will continue. McCormick said, "fall is our second strongest season, the whip cream on the cake."