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The dunes aren't made for walking

Local beachfront property owners say there is a reason their property is posted

By PASHA CARROLL
SUN REPORTER

A Santa Rosa Beach couple has taken dune restoration into their own hands.

Since Hurricane Ivan hit in September, Stephen and Debbie Holmes have spent their own money to restore the original 10-foot dune in from of their home.

Stephen Holmes said he doesn't know how much he spent as dune restoration is for "necessary protection."

"We had one of the highest dunes on the beach," Debbie Holmes said. "(In nature) the height would have taken 10 years to be restored."

"It is important to the whole ecology of animals

and protection (to beach homes) in storms," Stephen Holmes said.

"If another storm came through we would have lost our first floor," Debbie Holmes said.

While restoring the dunes, the Holmes have encountered a significant obstacle — keeping people off the dunes.

"It is a natural attraction for kids and adults to roll down dunes and slide down them," Stephen Holmes said.

To deter those who don't know about dunes and their restoration, South Walton Tourist Develop-

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Courtesy photos
Top: The beach at the Holmes property on Sept. 17, 2004, the day after Hurricane Ivan.
Left: The Holmes property on Feb. 18 after dunes restoration had begun. The Holmes posted their property to keep people off the partially restored dune, not from the flat part of the beach nearer the water.

Red flags fly as dozens are pulled from rip tide

By GWEN BREAK
SUN EDITOR

It started shortly before noon on Wednesday, an almost constant stream of calls for water rescues along Old U.S. Highway 98. Before the day had ended, approximately two dozen people had been rescued in Walton County, including at least two children.

Three surfers vacationing from Tallahassee made the first rescues at the beach access at Frangista Beach, at the end of South Holiday Road.

Holt Jones Jr., Nathan Jones (no relation) and Donnie Brodeur were resting on the beach with their boards when they heard people in the water yelling. "At first we thought they were just playing," said Holt Jones.

"But then we heard them start yelling 'help,'" said Nathan Jones.

"Then some lady said they had been in the water

for a while," said Holt Jones.

The two Jones men grabbed their boards "and got to them as fast as we could," said Holt.

They pulled four people, college-aged men and women, from the rip tide even before emergency workers could arrive.

By the time a second call for rescue in the same general area came in, South Walton Fire District personnel were positioned along the beach from Whale's Tale west. Walton County Sheriff's Deputies manned the east side of the county.

SWFD Chief Les Hallman said one of the biggest concerns he had in making the rescues was the beach erosion.

"Because of the beach erosion, we cannot get our full sized vehicles on the beach in so many places," said Hallman. "So, all we had was our 6x6 and the sheriff's ATVs."



TRUE HEROS — Holt Jones Jr. (middle) and Nathan Jones (far right) (no relation), rest with friend Donnie Brodeur after the two Jones' rescued four people from rip tides on Wednesday near Pompano Joe's. All three are from Tallahassee here on spring break.

Okaloosa and Bay counties also had several water rescues during the day. There were no drownings reported and Hallman said he did not believe any of

the three people transported to Sacred Heart on the Emerald Coast were seriously injured.

In addition to water rescues, Okaloosa emergency

personnel were busy with a crane accident at Crystal Beach and a boat fire in

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Artists at Gulf Place relocate. See page B1.



Kathleen's Cottage offer up homemade chic. See page C1.



South Walton breaks into win column. See page C25.

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ment Council has posted signs to keep people off the dunes. Those signs can also be purchased for \$10 and posted by private property owners.

"We are trying to deliver a serious message in a friendly manner," Stephen Holmes said.

Last Christmas, tourists were sledding down the Holmes' sand dunes, which even now look a lot like snowy slopes in the heart of winter. The Sheriff's Office had to be called even though signs were posted and the dune was roped off, Stephen Holmes said.

"I don't like to call the Sheriff. But my God, if they can't respect the sand dunes and private property I have to," Holmes said.

Debbie Holmes credited county beach scraping with "how back-to-normal the beach already is."

"They have done a phenomenal job," she said of the county's efforts to restore the beach and its dunes.

Dune restoration is accomplished, initially, through beach scraping. Thus far approximately \$1.3 million has been spent on beach scraping, Brad Pickel, Director of Beach Management, said.

"By the end it will cost somewhere between \$1.75 and \$1.8 million," Pickel said.

Money has been appropriated through Federal Emergency Management Agency and state funds, Pickel said. The local cost is paid with TDC taxes. What portion of the final bill to be paid by the coun-

ty will come down to what is actually covered by FEMA and the state, he said.

Next, what has been scraped will be pushed up on a hill into dunes for the shaping process, Pickel said.

The next step for the Holmes' to restore their once towering dune, said Stephen Holmes, is to plant more sea oats and bring in irrigation water to encourage growth.

"It provides lots of stability for the dunes," he said.

The Holmes plan to retire in about three years from San Francisco to their Walton County home.

"We are trying to wind the clock backward," Stephen Holmes said. They have owned their south Walton property for approximately 14 years.

ATMs installed at tax collector's office

DEFUNIAK SPRINGS — Paying your taxes just got a little more convenient. Tax Collector Rhonda Skipper has implemented after-hours payment drop boxes in both the DeFuniak Springs and South Walton branches of the tax collector's office.

"The payment drop boxes provide our customers with after-hours convenience for non-cash tax bill payments and vehicle/ vessel registration renewal," said Skipper.

The after-hours drop boxes are prominently located near the entrance of each branch. The drop boxes are clearly marked and provide instructions on their use. The registrations/bills are collected and processed daily. Receipts are mailed for property tax payments. Completed registrations and new decals/license



courtesy photo

After hours payment boxes have been installed at the DeFuniak Springs and South Walton branches of the tax collector's office.

plates are mailed to the owner.

In addition, ATM machines have been installed in the branch lobbies as a convenience to customers. "We have received numerous requests for this service and are glad to provide it for our customers and the county employees who work near our offices," Skipper added.

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