

Beach rites of springs

Wrightsville parking meters pop up again; Can seasonal tide of tourists be far behind?

By Todd Volkstorff

Staff Writer

WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH | Free parking spaces here will again become the coveted rewards of early risers and penny-pinching beachgoers.

Beginning March 1, expect to pay \$1.25 per hour for beachside parking between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m.

For those without change to spare, the town has installed bill and credit card pay stations in 10 lots.

At \$11.25 for a day, "that's a lot of quarters; those lots are a nice alternative," said Jonathan Harris, project manager for Central Parking System.

The Nashville-based company manages parking for the town. Its parent company Central Parking Corp., does the same in downtown Wilmington.

The 1,080 regulated spaces – about half the spaces in the town – haven't changed since last year; however, town officials will likely add 18 spaces to the west end of Marina Street, said Town Manager Andy Honeycutt.

Forgetting to feed the meter means a \$20 parking ticket. Forgetting to pay the ticket within three days adds \$10. Forget to pay that \$30 within 10 days and pay another \$20.

Parking in no-parking zones or half in/half out of two spaces draws a \$30 ticket, which also goes up \$10 after three days and another \$10 after 10 days. No ticket may exceed \$50.

Throughout the season, the company will employ five to six parking enforcers. They will patrol the full nine hours every day on bikes or carts.

While some who received tickets in the past might not have seen the pay stations, Central Parking Systems will add about 40 signs, some of them larger than existing signage.

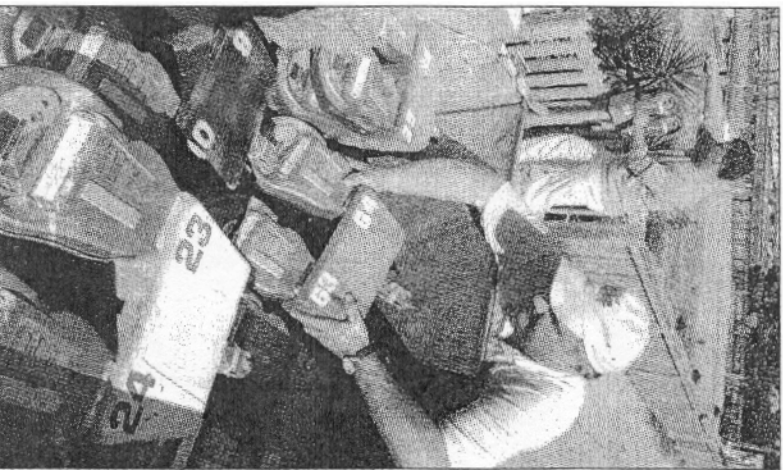
Last year, parking meters generated about \$522,000. Adding in fines and permit fees brought the total to \$808,000, Mr. Honeycutt said.

Permits are available to property owners for \$25. There is a limit of two per household. Mr. Honeycutt said the town government is mulling whether to issue business permits for \$250 apiece.

For questions on parking issues in Wrightsville Beach, the Central Parking System office is at 5 Live Oak Drive and the telephone number there is 256-5453.

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Don Carroll (right) and Jonathan Harris haul out parking meters at Wrightsville Beach on Tuesday. The seasonal parking fees go into effect on March 1.