

Spring Means Baseball

By Claude Milot

There's a new sound in the air, the pop of a baseball hitting a catcher's mitt. As I write this, pitchers and catchers are already at work at spring training camps all over Florida. Heard soon will be the crack of a bat as seasoned major leaguers shake off winter rust and hopeful rookies get in their early swings to impress managers and coaches.

Soon there will be a new sound, the rumble of boat engines tuning up for the return to summer nesting grounds. Spring is here!

If you're a looper who also happens to be an avid baseball fan, there is one stop along the route north that should be of great interest to you. Once in the Albemarle Sound, hang a left and head for Hertford, the little town on the Perquimans River, home of one of the neatest baseball museums on the East Coast: the Jim "Catfish" Hunter Baseball Museum.

You can find the museum tucked inside the premises of Hertford's Chamber of Commerce on Market Street, around the corner from Woodard's Pharmacy, famous for its 80¢ double-scoop ice cream cones. The Chamber's director is a man named Sid Eley. He also happens to be a one-man welcoming committee for all loopers who anchor in Hertford Bay Marina. He may even find you a vehicle to get you down to Food Lion to replenish your supplies. But be prepared: Sid Eley will box your ears with a constant chatter about Hertford and the museum. You want some history about Hertford and Perquimans County? He's got plenty to tell you about that, too. Sid was born and raised in Hertford and has always been involved in every aspect of life here. Along the way he has been a science teacher, a coach, a volunteer fireman, and a member of the Rescue Squad. He has also served as Hertford's mayor for 12 years and is still a member of the town council.

Sid Eley was one year behind Jimmy Hunter in Hertford High School and remembers watching Jimmy (people in Hertford never call him "Catfish") overpower batters from the high school pitching mound. He also remembers the day Jimmy signed with the Kansas City Athletics and the day he went directly to the major leagues in 1965 without playing a single game in the minors. And, of course, Sid followed Hertford's most famous product as he pitched a perfect game for the Oakland A's in 1968 and earned his way into the Baseball's Hall of Fame in 1987. All this and more is documented in the museum: artifacts, memorabilia, autographed baseballs, news clippings, and photographs fill all available space in the small room, each one with a story. And if you are prepared to listen, Sid will share his memories of Jimmy Hunter for as long as you have time to listen.

Additional Notes: Local knowledge for approach to Hertford Bay Marina:

A waterborne visit to Hertford requires a long, upstream trek on the beautiful Perquimans River. This stream breaks off from the northern shores of Albemarle Sound, west of Little River, and east of Yeopim River.

The Perquimans River is a gentle stream usually seen by only a few fishermen plying the waters in their small skiffs. It has just about everything cruisers could ask for except marina facilities. The river is deep almost to its shoreline and offers no navigational difficulties. It takes a heavy blow to raise a rough chop on the Perquimans. Generally, wave conditions are ideal for larger pleasure craft. The banks are lined with untouched belts of cypress and hardwood trees, broken here and there by picturesque homes. West, northwest of Barrow Point, you must cruise under the fixed, US Highway 17 Bypass bridge, with a mere 33 feet of vertical clearance. This span will not hinder a visit by most power craft to Hertford, but for sailors, it is a very different story indeed.

Next you must negotiate a swing bridge with 7 feet of closed vertical clearance. This span opens on demand from April 1 to September 30 from 8:00 A.M. to midnight but remains closed during the early-morning hours. From October 1 through March 31, the span opens on signal from 10:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. Depths here run from 12 all the way up to 20 feet of water. The Hertford S-Bridge Swing Span bridge tender is on duty on the following schedule:

April 1 - September 30: 8 a.m. - 12 midnight

October 1 - March 31: 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.

To contact the bridge tender for a scheduled opening, use Channel 13 or telephone 252-426-7241 during the above noted hours.

The Hertford Bay Marina is located just beyond the swing bridge almost due south on your port bow.

