

# PRESS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
February 6, 2009

## **14<sup>th</sup> Annual “BE A TOURIST IN YOUR OWN HOMETOWN” Event Features 33 Attractions & Azalea Belles; Team Mascots**

Residents of New Hanover County are invited to become “Hometown Tourists” during the **14<sup>th</sup> Annual “Be A Tourist in Your Own Hometown” Appreciation Day** on **Sunday, March 1, 2009**.

Each year on the first Sunday in March, participating area attractions open their doors to New Hanover County residents free of charge. In cooperation with presenting media sponsor *ENCORE* magazine and the Wilmington/Cape Fear Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau, 33 area attractions will welcome and honor local citizens on Sunday, March 1st. It’s a way for the attractions to thank residents for their support and familiarize them with area tourism assets. Last year 30 attractions reported combined attendance of 14,877 “hometown tourists.”

Back by popular demand is the Hometown Tourist online promotion. Residents of New Hanover County can register online to win a Hometown Tourist goodie bag. A list of participating attractions and Hometown Tourist gift bag registration instructions can be found online at [www.capefearcoast.com/hometown](http://www.capefearcoast.com/hometown). Each online registration (completed and verified) will be put into a drawing for one of six Wilmington/Cape Fear Coast canvas tote bags filled with gift certificates, admission tickets, promotional items, small gifts and coupons that have been donated by area attractions, tours, cruises, restaurants, retailers, and other tourism-related businesses.

Due to construction along the riverfront, this year’s Visitor Information Center activities will take place at the year-round visitor center in the historic New Hanover County courthouse (24 N. Third Street). The Visitor Information Center will host an Open House (1pm-3pm) with refreshments, displays, and special guests. From 1pm until 3pm special guests will greet residents, provide photo opportunities, and sign autographs. You can also tour the **NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher’s new outreach vehicle/mobile classroom** in the adjacent parking lot at the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Princess streets (1-3pm). Everyone is invited to stop by to meet the special guests and to learn about the aquarium’s outreach programs, tour the vehicle, and see and touch a variety of marine invertebrates commonly found along the NC coast. Confirmed special guests include: **Azalea Belles** (courtesy of the Cape Fear Garden Club); **“Salty Dawg”** (Wilmington Sea Dawgs pro basketball team); **“Sharky”** (Wilmington Sharks baseball team); **“Sledge”** (Wilmington Hammerheads pro soccer team). Then, come inside the Visitor Center in the historic courthouse to enjoy some refreshments and to receive a complimentary balloon, courtesy of the Wilmington/Cape Fear Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau, the official destination marketing organization of New Hanover County. The County Commissioners meeting room (upstairs) will be open.

“Local citizens are our most valuable tourism ambassadors,” states Kim Hufham, president/CEO of the New Hanover County Tourism Development Authority. “With the summer travel season just around the corner, it’s important for residents to experience our tourism assets first-hand so that they can tell their friends, family and visitors from outside the area about all there is to see and do. Word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool.”

Hours for individual attractions vary and restrictions may apply. While most attractions and tours will offer free admission to all visitors, some are free only for New Hanover County residents. The list of participants, descriptions, and Hometown Tourist gift bag registration instructions can be found online at [www.capefearcoast.com/hometown](http://www.capefearcoast.com/hometown). Citizens interested in taking advantage of this one-day only free event are encouraged to bring proper I.D. (driver’s license, etc.) that proves residence within New Hanover County. Non-county residents are advised to carefully check the participants’ list and to call individual attractions for restrictions. Presenting sponsor *ENCORE* magazine will publish a complete list of participants in its February 25 issue. A list of participating attractions with hours, rules, and eligibility is also available at the Visitor Information Center (24 N. Third Street), or interested residents can call 341-4030.

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**NOTE TO MEDIA: See attached pages for listings of participating attractions. Please note that hours and event offerings vary for each attraction, and restrictions may apply. Images are available upon request.**