

THE STATE PORT PILOT OUR TOWN



Photo supplied
Joe Higginbotham (foreground) and Victor Cash install supports to brace and stabilize the lintels of the World War I-era rifle range pit at Caswell Dunes. The structure is among the few remaining examples of how Americans trained before being sent overseas.

Caswell Beach

Event benefits rifle range pit

By Lee Hinnant
Staff Writer

The public is invited to have a meal, cheer on their favorite horses and help save a Caswell Beach landmark during a Kentucky Derby party set for Saturday, May 3, from 2:30 to 7 p.m. at the Caswell Dunes clubhouse.

Organizers hope for a good turnout, as the inaugural event last year raised more than \$1,000 for the World War I rifle range pit, located in a nearby public space next to Oak Island Golf Course.

Constructed in 1918, the 12-foot-deep concrete pit protected operators, who would raise paper targets on metal poles, then mark where the targets were hit. Used for long-range rifle training, the facility is one of the few left in the United States and a reminder of the work and sacrifice American soldiers endured to save Europe from the Germans.

The 200-foot-long pit was the victim of benign neglect until 2011, when a group of residents, led by Norma and Ron Eckard, began efforts to save and restore the structure.

They have cleaned the pit and showed it to several experts on historic structures. In December 2013, the rifle pit was named to the National Register of Historic Places, along with the other structures at Fort Caswell.

Last week, Ron Eckard, Joe Higginbotham and Victor Cash installed six-by-six posts to stabilize the aging doorways, called lintels.

"It doesn't restore the rifle pit but it keeps it from falling apart," Norma Eckard said. The work also increases the safety for anyone who ventures into the structure, nestled against a large mound of earth.

Next up are plans to raise about \$10,000 for an engineering study

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and removal of several trees whose roots are tearing apart the walls. The hope is that this work will keep the rifle pit stable for at least a decade.

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ister. They are also considering acquiring some prototype targets and replacing the roof on the storage section of the pit.

The May 3 event costs \$12, and includes a baked ham dinner and one mint julep. Participants may bring their own beverages. The party will include tabletop horse

races, door prizes, a silent auction and contests for the best hats and the best-dressed couple.

Bob Schaffran and Rob Clarke will again serve as emcees for the party.

"We want the public to come," Norma Eckard said. "This is not just a Caswell Dunes event; it's for the community."

She said the committee working on restoration of the rifle pit could also use additional members.

The clubhouse is at 45 Pinehurst Drive, and tickets will be available at the door. For more information, e-mail the Eckards at normaron@mindspring.com.