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Current

# Scarborough's history in the making

*Karen's Corner*
*by Karen Vachon*

This past week I tackled the task of hanging up posters all over town. The goal was to blanket the key summer hot spots announcing that "Scarborough at 350 – Linking the Past with the Present" can be reserved now.

If anyone told me a year ago that I'd be out promoting and contributing some stories to a history book, I would have told them they were nuts. When asked to write the history of Scarborough Downs, I agreed to do it believing that surely it had already been done, I would just need to find it, update it and write it in my own words.

But there was a problem. The history of the track hadn't been written. Committed, I discovered the world of research. With special appointments at the Portland Press Herald to go through the archives, and hours spent at the Portland Public Library scanning years of microfilm, old phone books and obituaries, I was able to assemble the chronological history of Scarborough Downs.

I wrote the piece for the book, called it done, but knew that in no way was it complete. Instead, it left me with more questions: What were the personalities of the people behind this business? What was going on in town at this time? I soon discovered I was approaching history with renewed interest.

History has a way of opening your eyes and making you more aware. During this time, I took the family bowling at Big 20. As I was leaving, two historic photos on either side of the door caught my eye. I noted the year – 1950. It was the same year that Scarborough Downs opened. I sat down with Chris Anton, Big 20 owner, the next day and wrote the history of Big 20. A few months later, standing in the entrance of Anjon's Restaurant, I noted a sign: Established 1954. I could envision the development of Route 1 in the 1950s. By now, I was addicted and had to write the history of Anjon's, too. How did the restaurant get this name? You'll have to read the book.

So there I was last week, armed with tape and push pins I took to the streets and neighborhoods of Scarborough to hang posters to promote this 400-page, historic, coffee-table book. Thirty-five local contributors interviewed hundreds of Scarborough residents, who opened their homes and photo albums to share their historic memories of people, places and things. The poster hanging didn't go as quickly as I had thought. It struck emotional chords, and people wanted to talk as my travels brought me to places and into businesses both old and new that I had never been in before.

At Conroy's on Pine Point, Jim Conroy remembered the 300th anniversary celebration. "You don't look old enough to remember that," I commented. He was just a kid then, but was already planning his float for next year's 350th parade. His gas station/oil company established in 1942 is the oldest gas station in town.

I discovered the Wild Duck campground in Dunstan Landing. "How long has this campground been here"? I asked. I was surprised to learn that it got its start in 1970 when Cliff Thompson invited horsemen racing at Scarborough Downs to come over and camp at his property. It grew in popularity, and Thompson started collecting a dollar a night. The rest is history.

History happens every day. When I spoke to people about the places written about, I was amazed with the connections that they had to these places as they shared stories and memories. I kept thinking that we could have written more – a written history is never complete.

It had been a long day. "One more stop," I thought. It seemed appropriate to hang my last poster that day at the First and Last Tavern on Pine Point. As I walked in, loaves of homemade bread stared me in the face. I was starving. Newcomers to Pine Point, the Iyer family bustled about their restaurant. They, too, were excited about the project. As we talked, Mary hung a poster and Michael handed me a pizza to go – a perfect end to my day. Their kind hospitality will be memorable: more history in the making!

Whether you're new to Scarborough, or have been here for years, be sure and save these dates: July 11-14, 2008, Scarborough will celebrate 350 years. It will be a fabulous celebration.

Available in stores in early November, the book may be ordered now. Only 2,000 hardcovers will be published. Thanks to our participating pre-book sellers - Shirley's Hallmark, Len Libby's, Nestling Duck, Golden Pheasant and The Breakers Inn – regular-edition books can be ordered, gift wrapped and shipped in time for holiday gift giving at a total cost of $47.50. And thanks to Russ Burleigh from Brown Fox Printing for creating and donating the order forms and posters.

History not your thing? This book may change your mind!