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Ding, Ding, Ding Goes the Trolley

Twin Beaches try a not-so-new way to get around

by Michelle Steel

Who doesn't love a trolley?

With their friendly faces, old-fashioned demeanor, welcoming bells, high-gloss paint and polished brass fittings, trolleys remind us of good beginnings and happy endings. They arrive on time, pick you up and take you where you're going — in style.

Trolleys have everything to do with welcome and nostalgia. They have nothing to do with traffic jams, boiling asphalt and tempers, bumper-to-bumper backups, breakdowns and gridlock.

Trolleys belong to another day that seems in retrospect so much simpler than our own, before cars drove us everywhere, including crazy.

In Chesapeake Beach and North Beach, the Beach Business Group wants to bring back some of that nostalgia from the good ol' days.

On an early June evening, a red-and-green Leesburg trolley borrowed from the non-profit Virginia Regional Transportation Authority made its rounds, catching riders and on-lookers under its spell.

Riders enjoyed a Bay breeze from removable windows (air-conditioning goes on in hotter weather), while on-lookers gawked and waved as the trolley rolled through the streets of the twin towns. The trial ran from Herrington Harbour South in Rose Haven nearly to Bay Hill Market in Chesapeake Beach. June 2's promotion ride stopped at five local restaurants in the Town.

On June 3, coinciding with the annual North Beach House and Garden Tour, 300 people took a

"There's not enough public transportation in the community, so there was a lot of excitement," says Michelle Streigel, financial planner and president of the Beach Business Group. That organization of 85 local business owners and advocates is sponsoring the drive to bring the Twin Beaches a trolley.

A regular trolley, Streigel says, would provide affordable and reliable rides for senior citizens, kids and visitors, who would in turn spend money at local businesses. Trolleys meet both purposes in our twin towns, including Chincoteague and Annapolis, where they also serve business riders.

For the tourist towns of North Beach and Chesapeake Beach, trolleys aren't a new idea.

Beginning in about 1910, a trolley rolled through their streets for five or 10 years, moving people



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forth to their beach cottages, according to Harriet Stout, Chesapeake Railway Museum Curator. Beaches revive pleasant living as their 21st century stock in trade, the trolley is getting a second

“The trolley is a creative way to bring people to local business owners in our area,” said Jed Dic assistant manager at Herrington Harbour Marina, who typically shuttles boating customers to the restaurants in a van. If a trolley came to town, visiting boaters could hop a more charming ride.

“When I think of the quaint charm of the beach communities, a trolley would add more charm,” said Van Wagner, mortgage loan officer and trolley committee chair of the Beach Business Group.

After the successful trial run, the Business Group is moving forward with a plan to bring the Beach trolley by 2008.

“Step one was letting the people actually touch and feel the project,” Van Wagner said. “Step two is to figure out the best way to obtain funding.”

Virginia Regional Transportation Authority — which oversees trolleys in 15 Virginia jurisdictions and communities — is consulting with the Business Group on state and federal government grants for trolleys — one backing up the first — to the towns on an hourly basis, starting with summer weeks. Business support will be solicited for advertising and bus stops.

“We hope this will be a private venture with initial public funding to get it off the ground,” Streige said.

Both town councils still need to approve the project, Van Wagner said.

For all who love a trolley, that’s good news.

“We’re taking the next step,” said Van Wagner, “because there is enough momentum to go forward with planning.”

Before it begins its route, the new trolley needs a name. Toby is already taken. Send your ideas to Van Wagner at mkvanwagner@aol.com.

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