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Norfolk's East Beach named one of nation's top restored beaches

By HARRY MINIMUM, The Virginian-Pilot

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NORFOLK - East Beach, a waterfront community in Ocean View that has received acclaim for the luxury housing being built there, is now getting noticed for its shoreline.

The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association named East Beach one of the nation's top seven restored beaches.

East Beach is a \$400 million community of 700 homes being built on 100 acres on the Chesapeake Bay that once contained some of the city's most blighted housing. The 1,600 units torn down by the city are being replaced with a mix of homes, some costing more than \$1 million.

Barry Strathmann, who has lived in the community for 30 years, said the transformation of the beach has been just as striking as the change in the neighborhood.

"You step out on the beach and it looks like Hatteras," he said. "It doesn't look like Ocean View."

Once littered with bulkheads and chunks of concrete, the badly eroded beach was restored in 2003 by the city, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Virginia Port Authority, which combined to place more than 357,000 cubic yards of sand on the beach. Dunes were rebuilt, replete with vegetation, that provide the neighborhood protection from storms.

Prior to the beach replenishment, officials placed 10 offshore breakwaters that they say have slowed erosion caused by the jetties at the entrance to the Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base.

"When you walk out there in the morning, you see foxes running down the beach," Strathmann. "The only things we used to have running wild here were prostitutes, drug dealers and dogs."

One amenity lost in the transformation was a large public parking lot at the former City Beach. It was razed and replaced with less-convenient on-street parking.

Lee Rosenberg, the city's environmental services manager, nominated the beach for the award. Rosenberg recently moved from Virginia Beach to a home in East Beach.

"I always saw East Beach as a diamond in the rough, waiting to be transformed," Rosenberg said.

When he came to the city in 1980, he said the beach "looked like a war zone. The erosion rates were up to 20 or 30 feet per year. Property owners would dump whatever they could to try to protect their buildings."

The city poured sand on the beaches in the early 1980s and again in the 1990s, but it eventually washed away. That changed with the installation of the breakwaters.

Strathmann said Rosenberg deserves much credit for the recovery of the beach.

"I see him out there on his days off planting sea grass," Strathmann said.

Also honored by the shore association were Folly Beach, S.C.; Surfside-Sunset Beach in Orange County, Calif.; Louisiana's Chaland Headland Restoration Project, Collier County Beaches, Fla.; Perdido Pass, Ala.; and West Hampton Dunes on New York's Long Island.

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