



Bethany homeowners protect their sand, castles

Gated communities less about prestige, more about protecting driveways from day-trippers

By Ashley Dawson

Special to The Daily Times

BETHANY BEACH -- When Bob Boyer lived in Bethany Village, he thought his neighbors in a nearby gated community were "pompous people."

Then he became one of them.

He moved behind those gates into a home in Ocean Breezes, the first community in North Bethany to restrict access by installing a privacy gate at the entrance. Then he realized the gate wasn't about prestige, but practicality.

Bethany-area Realtor Vickie York said an increase in crime didn't spur the gating of North Bethany, nor did a desire to boost property values, although the gates do add a little prestige. "I think once one did it, it just caught on," she said.

Since the Ocean Breezes gate went up at least five years ago, several other posts have been dug and swinging fences installed at the oceanfront communities along the stretch of Route 1 north of Bethany Beach. In the past year, at least a half-dozen communities have installed privacy gates at their entrances. A couple of neighborhoods even employed guards for a short time.

Boyer and other people familiar with the area say the gates arose from a need to quell the rising tide of nonresidents who drive into the communities, seeking parking and beach access -- neither of which is available to the public.

Most of the problem has been spurred by growth west of Route 1. Residents and renters of those homes must drive to the beach, where they have to compete for metered and permit parking. While parking may appear ample in North Bethany, it is not allowed along the streets, and the beaches are private.

"People were going into those areas and parking. It's really not a public parking area," said Leslie Kopp, a longtime Realtor who lives in Ocean View.

Boyer said residents don't care who sits on their beach as much as how they get there. Every weekend through summer, about six to seven cars park in the neighborhood, he said, sometimes in front of private driveways, blocking homeowners' access.

When he lived in Bethany Village, a driver once pulled his car on Boyer's lawn. When Boyer asked the driver to move, he pulled up on a neighbor's yard.

"It isn't to prevent anyone from using the beach," Boyer said. "Even though our beach is private, we don't tell anybody they can't be there."

Nuisance vehicles sometimes contain families who go much farther in their intrusion. After parking illegally and trekking past the private property signs, Boyer has seen families swimming in the community pool and even barbecuing.

Only a handful of neighborhoods in North Bethany don't have gated entrances.

Kopp is building a home in one of the few remaining communities without a gate, and residents there are discussing installing one.

At the communities without gates, quaint and subtle private signs are the only deterrent to wayward beachgoers.

Boyer said he expects that to change. As more neighborhoods restrict access, people will spill over into those communities that aren't restricted.

He has a simple solution for beachgoers. Rather than risk the ire of homeowners and a towed vehicle, he suggests people visit the nearby Fenwick Island and Delaware Seashore state parks, where drivers can park their vehicles legally and families can visit a beach with public amenities.