

# Trailer Park Zen

It's where Jimmy Buffett meets Buddha on LBI

By AMANDA SIMMONS



Bob Muroff's family has owned and operated the Long Beach Island Trailer Park in Beach Haven Inlet since 1953 and he's not going anywhere soon.

Long Beach Island Trailer Park, located on the narrow southern tip of Long Beach Island, just a half-block away from the ocean and bay on either side, offers residents a summer-living aesthetic that would probably give Snooki hives.

Just as the title of the MTV show "Jersey Shore" can be misleading, so can the term "trailer park." Shore trippers aren't all out-of-towners wreaking havoc on the boardwalk.

Similarly, trailer park homes are not all compact, drab and uniform.

LBI Trailer Park is a unique getaway, distinct from the rental houses that crowd the island. Here, residents own their homes (by signing annual contracts), and it shows. Most trailers' furnishings exude both personality and permanence.

"People here take pride in their homes," says Bob Muroff, owner of the five-acre, 146-unit park. "That's part of the interest. It's so special that any person can afford to own a home on the Shore."

Muroff's residents can do as they please with their modest vacation homes, adding patios, shrubbery and other decorations that make them distinct and welcoming.

While each home stands out individually, overall the park shares a sense of community, illustrated by the thread of Japanese pine trees Muroff planted along the perimeter with his father when he was a child.

People are respectful and friendly with their neighbors. Unlike the weekly summer rentals that make up



much of the accommodations on LBI, with new short-term tenants constantly moving in and out of their temporary digs, the trailer park vacationers humbly stay put for the season. They find it comforting to know who's living on either side of them and down the block, says Muroff.

"Our folks cannot rent out their homes — and they like that," he says. "A lot of people come from condominiums thinking they'd love that kind of living, but they prefer the rules and the community" that come with their relaxed and rustic summer homes by the beach. "You cross that bridge, and you want to leave all your troubles behind."

The Muroff family purchased the park's land in 1953. Muroff's aunt and uncle, Gus and Sys Lindell, managed the park until they drowned in the harrowing Ash Wednesday Storm of 1962. Muroff, then an accountant on Wall Street, came to LBI ostensibly to rebuild the modest

Beach Haven refuge. He wound up re-prioritizing his life in the process.

Muroff continues to work out of his unassuming office, the same one his aunt and uncle once lived in, and has no plans to move out. He does exchange islands during the off-season, when he winters on Nevis in the Caribbean.

"I have no intentions of ever selling. I used to be approached in the past, but people now know it's not for sale," he says. So while he technically is in possession of the land on which the trailers sit, "these people are the owners. They lease the ground from me, but we're honest and they know us. They know we're not going anywhere."

If there's any (dubious) comparison to be made to the Jersey Shore portrayed on television and the one lived at the trailer park, it's that Snooki and the steadfast Muroff are both genuine characters. (It should be noted, however, that Muroff, who has watched the reality show version with his grandson, is not a fan).

At 73 years old, he's still an avid

surfer and continues to teach the sport. Once a semi-professional surfer, Muroff has a generous collection of surfboards, including a thick slab of wood on which his father once balanced in the '40s.

"The only boards I didn't keep were the ones I gave away," he jokes.

The uncomplicated and generous Muroff considers himself a Zen Buddhist. And, in part due to its owner's simplicity, the park has changed little over the years. Home sizes have expanded, and what once was an area frequented by scruffy fishermen now attracts a good amount of impassioned surfers — although Muroff says he likely is the oldest in the water.

Even business has stayed consistent throughout the ups and downs of the economy. In



fact, more than ever, "people take an extra day to come down more. Maybe they take Thursday and Friday off for a long weekend," says Muroff's assistant manager, 51-year-old Tice Ryan, who adds that his job at the park is the best he's ever had.

The two men have been working together for five years, but have been friends for more than 26. They met (where else?) "while paddling out" and have continued to surf together.

Still active in the ocean, Muroff says he's been able to slow down a

bit in the office, thanks to his capable staff. Ryan stays on the island year-round, as the units are technically open 365 days a year (but most are "winterized," without water in the cold months).

"I used to feel very responsible to help people sell their homes for the right price. I used to be here working too much," says Muroff. "Now I don't take calls during dinner, because I've learned that if a buyer is really interested, he'll call back the next day."

And that's the truth. The people

who are part of this park's community want to be here. Scattered among the modest couples and families are some entrepreneurs, developers and "people of means," he says. "They just like the lifestyle. They could have whatever they like, but they like it here."

"Everyone is allowed to be an individual here, which is the kind of freedom Zen espouses," says Muroff, who writes poetry when he's not riding waves or strolling through the area.

"It's a way of life. @



Clockwise from top left: Bob Muroff, left, and trailer park resident Andy Panagis share a toast with Panagis' mother, Elizabeth, far right, and Dorothy, Muroff's wife, during the summer of 2010; Barry Cupolin of Warren County spends his summers in a 1960s trailer home; Ben and Joanne DiFranco have decked out their porch with a beach-inspired style, perfect for the LBI atmosphere.



PHOTOS BY SAED HINDASH, ED MURRAY

**WINDOW TINTING**

Residential • Commercial • Auto  
Reduce Heat & Glare  
Reject 99% of Damaging UV Rays  
Serving the Tri-State Area & Shore Points Since 1983

South Jersey  
**Window Tinting**  
Since 1985

**1-800-985-8468**  
[www.sjwindowtinting.com](http://www.sjwindowtinting.com)

THE NEW JERSEY CANCER FOUNDATION  
RECOMMENDED