

Concerned Students

Eighth-graders Want Island To Look Good For Olympic Visitors

By RICH WITTISH

Closeup Editor

Thirty eighth-graders at Myers Middle School have made some suggestions to the Chatham County Commission about improving the looks of Wilmington Island, in particular the approach to the island from the Turner Creek bridge.

The youngsters – most of them residents of the eastside islands – would like to have the island spruced up so that it would be more attractive to visitors to the sailing events of the 1996 Summer Olympics.

"I had a classroom of kids who were complaining (about the way the island looks), so I said, 'Why don't you do something about it?' " said social studies teacher Judy Ruchalski of her "red" class, which meets with her at 10:30 each morning.

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The result has been a class project that has generated ideas that intrigued Chatham Commissioner Frank Murray so much that he invited the students to share them with his colleagues on the commission.

They did so at a commission meeting early in March and received a plaque thanking them for their efforts in behalf of the community.

Here are the students' suggestions for beautifying the area:

- Tear down the vacant supermarket on Johnny Mercer Boulevard at the foot of the Turner Creek bridge and create a park on the land where it stands.

- Erect an attractive, wooden sign across Johnny Mercer from the park that would let visitors know they are on Wilmington Island.

- Require owners of businesses on Johnny Mercer to scale down the size and height of their signs and landscape their grounds in keeping with the island's environment.

- Replace metal traffic signs with signs made of wood.

Thoughts about the "state of the island" were brought out while the students were discussing the impending Olympics as a part of an examination of current events, said Mrs. Ruchalski, who is a resident of Wilmington Island.



CARL ELMORE/News-Press Staff

PLANNING ISLAND IMPROVEMENTS: (L-r) Jeff Brady, Marcus Dillon, Brad Goodman, Ryan Fowler

"They said they were ashamed of the look of the island, particularly in light of the fact that we might be getting foreign visitors," she said, referring to plans to house competitors in sailing events on Wilmington.

The students' solution to making the western gateway to the island more attractive has focused on the park and welcome sign, ideas that

they have taken to the scale-model stage.

Their park would have a fountain in the middle of a circular walkway, with lanes leading to the fountain from the four cardinal points. The park would be planted with plenty of Bradford pear trees, azaleas and flowers, and a floating dock would be erected in nearby Turner Creek

so that visitors could get a close-up view of the adjacent marsh. A portion of the supermarket parking lot would be retained to provide space for visitors' cars.

The welcome sign would be large, be made of wood and depict a marsh scene, the centerpiece of which would be a wading bird - either a heron or an egret.