

Posted on Sun, Jun. 05, 2005

U.S. Open used in drive for inclusion

Residents say economic bias denies them better services, stronger voice

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PINEHURST - A 15-minute drive gets Maurice Holland from his front porch to this month's U.S. Open Golf Championship.

But more than a century of history separates the green grass and white sand of the Pinehurst No. 2 golf course from the brown spot not far from Holland's home, the chronic resting place for raw sewage that trickles from his neighbor's septic tank when the ground gets too wet.

Holland and other African American homeowners living on Pinehurst's fringe are trying to narrow that 110-year gap.

And they want the world to watch.

Over the past months, they have seized part of the spotlight on one of golf's most storied tournaments and turned it toward their longstanding needs for utilities, police protection and better roads.

A century ago, racial discrimination shunned them to the borders of what has become one of the most revered golfing destinations on Earth. Today, they say, economic discrimination keeps them exiled.

They are controlled by the towns of Pinehurst, Southern Pines and Aberdeen, but as unincorporated areas they say they reap almost none of the benefits of citizenry.

Holland and his Midway neighbors have asked to become part of Aberdeen. Other black communities such as Jackson Hamlet, Waynor Road and Lost City are split over annexation -- the benefits of more services vs. the fear of higher taxes and vanishing community identities.

All of them say their pleas for government help have gone unanswered for too long.

With help from the Center for Civil Rights of the UNC Chapel Hill law school, they've contacted media across the state and beyond. The center is distributing a documentary about the Moore County communities titled "Invisible Fences."

Meanwhile, the Cedar Grove Institute for Sustainable Communities in Mebane has authored a report called "How Open is the Home of the U.S. Open?" In another, group president Ann Moss Joyner offers

this opening line: "Perhaps they should change the name to the `The U.S. Closed'...."

"Ultimately, we want these residents to be part of a town," says Anita Earls, a former Charlotte lawyer and director of advocacy for the civil rights center. "We want them to have the same services, to have a role electing officials and have some sense they have a say in the future of their communities."

The Pinehurst Resort, which will host the Open June 16-19, says it supports efforts by the residents and governments "to solve the complicated infrastructure needs."

Janeen Driscoll, the resort's communications manager, said Friday in a prepared statement that "we are confident of their ultimate success."

Government and community leaders say they understand the timing of the protests but decry how their towns and county are being portrayed.

"To say that Pinehurst has just ignored (Jackson Hamlet), well, that's pretty strong," says Andy Wilkison, manager of the picturesque village two hours east of Charlotte. He says no one from Jackson Hamlet has talked with him about annexation in at least 10 years.

Told the homeowners want better police protection, garbage pickup, streetlights and such, Wilkison said, "Well, if they want those things, they need to be annexed. And that can happen. But you're the first person to tell me that's what they really want."

Moore County Manager Steve Wyatt says he has initiated talks with the towns about how to help the unincorporated areas. But he warns that boundaries and sewage lines will not change overnight, particularly because many of the county's rural residents, white and black, lack water and sewer service.

"County government and government in general doesn't turn on a dime," says Wyatt, who came to the area two years ago after 13 years in Caldwell County. "Somebody's painting a picture that I can just go to the bank and send water lines to everybody in Moore County, and it ain't so."

Aberdeen Manager Bill Zell says his town has already helped get water and sewer to parts of Midway, and hopes to do more. But he's critical of some of the residents' tactics.

"They're not afraid to use that (race) card, and it has nothing to do with it," says Zell, who, like Wyatt, has been on the job for two years. "That part irks me. Let's work together and let's see what we can do."

The residents say they need more proof that a century of exclusion is about to change, and they don't apologize for their tactics or their timing.

"Come on, talk to me," says Carol Frye Henry, president of the Jackson Hamlet Community Association as she stands in Holland's front yard. "Without the U.S. Open, would the media have given us the time of day? ... Is *stupid* supposed to be written across my face?"

Holland supplies the answer. "We aren't stupid. We know how the system works. For once, we want it to

work for us."

History's a tough read

You think golf is exasperating? Try reading the lines of history and race. It's easy to see how Jim Crow put the black communities outside the towns. But it's harder to say what keeps them there.

In the late 19th century, Boston soda-fountain magnate James Walker Tufts dreamed of a working-class winter resort. He bought 5,500 acres in southern Moore County and called his vision Pinehurst.

Black laborers helped him build it. Their own homes and churches formed Jackson Hamlet, Taylortown, Monroetown, Midway. (Only Taylortown has incorporated.)

After Pinehurst opened in 1895, black workers washed dishes at the Holly Inn and bused tables at the Carolina Hotel. They cut lawns, watered flowers. And as the list of golf courses grew, they toted clubs, raked traps and read putts for generations of tourists.

At the end of the day, they returned to homes and farms that were all but invisible to the white world in which they worked.

Today, the communities appear as blanks on the municipal map. Pinehurst and Aberdeen surround Jackson Hamlet. Pinehurst encircles Monroetown. The aptly named Lost City lies along a dead-end road through the heart of Southern Pines.

"If you look at the borders of Aberdeen, they make absolutely no sense," Zell says. "The history behind it? I haven't a clue."

Earls and Joyner, the communities' advocates, say this state of separate and unequal was birthed by legal discrimination. Annexation laws that let towns sidestep poorer areas have kept the communities at bay, they say.

Across the country, this small-town phenomenon is known as "underbounding."

"Cities eat up everybody, but with small towns there's a different dynamic," says Earls, who worked on Charlotte-Mecklenburg's school desegregation case.

In North Carolina and other states, she says, predominantly black neighborhoods are being artificially excluded from towns.

The reason, she says, is largely economic.

Of economics and identity

Unlike many Southern states, North Carolina has given its cities sweeping annexation laws to keep them from being garroted by suburbs, as is the case in Atlanta and Birmingham, Ala.

In return, residents in annexed areas are entitled to all city services. Those cost money, which newer development can defray.

But towns will spend a lot more to serve older, lower-income neighborhoods than what they'll collect in new taxes.

Aberdeen, for example, recently annexed the black neighborhood of Berkley and is studying the cost of taking in Midway. The town must weigh the benefits for "some really good people" in Midway vs. what Zell calls "an awful lot of blight."

"I don't think it will have to equal out," he says. "But we have to make a business decision."

Jonathan Wells, the annexation coordinator for the city of Charlotte, says city leaders here avoid a bottom-line approach.

"That's just not good public policy," he says. "Extending city services to those who can most afford them -- I think you understand the kind of message you'd be sending."

Besides, Wells asks: What would the city's boundary map look like?

Pinehurst's map has doughnut holes in the north and south. Monroetown is surrounded by the golf course and homes of Pinehurst No. 6. In the south, there's the island formed by the 600 residents of Jackson Hamlet.

Pinehurst's Wilkison says the village annexed No. 6 in 1991 at residents' request. He says Monroetown asked to be left alone for fear of losing its community identity (though some advocates question if the city thoroughly explained the issues involved).

Jackson Hamlet has also resisted annexation in the past, Wilkison says. But Pinehurst has moved into the community anyway. The village's lines jut into the neighborhood like a straw sticking out of a juice box.

This is the Abingdon Square, condominiums annexed by the village in the last decade after the developer agreed to build a road, install water and sewer lines, and donate them all to local governments.

As a result, renters here get the full battery of village services. The nearby homeowners of Jackson Hamlet get none.

Pinehurst extends its influence into Jackson Hamlet in another way. Since the early 1980s, the community has been covered by the village's zoning laws, which neighbors say has kept some property owners from building homes or replacing septic tanks.

But the homeowners cannot vote on who makes or enforces the rules. The same goes for Midway. And that political mute button grates on Holland, president of the community association, who believes it leaves homeowners vulnerable to developers.

"Give the community a voice," he says. "Until we can say, 'hear us or we will vote you out of office,' we

have nothing."

Henry, the Jackson Hamlet president, acknowledges that many of her neighbors oppose annexation out of fear of higher taxes and fees. Earls says studies show the costs to residents will be a wash compared with what they already pay for septic tanks and garbage trips.

Wyatt, the county manager, questions her figures.

"Listen, I've been in this business for twenty-something years," he says, "and everybody wants municipal-level service until the bill comes each month."

With the help of Pinehurst, the county extended water lines to Jackson Hamlet some years back. And in his recent budget message to the county commissioners, Wyatt said the staff will work with residents to find a solution for sewage.

Given the areas' lists of needs, he believes annexation is the only long-term remedy. He hopes his talks with the towns can help that along.

"There's a hundred years of history here that I'm not qualified to talk about," he says.

"I can talk about the future."

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