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For Immediate Release

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Topsail Island: Mayberry by the Sea “The Little Island That Time Forgot”

Legend has it that Topsail Island got its name from the pirates who would hide in the sound on its west side. The pirates preyed on merchant ships plying the Atlantic, so those ships' captains learned to look for topsails rising above the tree line.

Visitors to Topsail these days still keep a look-out toward the island's sound side, but only to catch the spectacular sunsets.

Columnist Ray McAllister captures the island's unusual history and small-town charm in his new book, *Topsail Island: Mayberry by the Sea*.

“The island is intoxicating,” McAllister writes. “Everyone is friendly. Small shop owners — and there are no other kind on Topsail — are supposed to be friendly. But why the requirement that that man you meet walking the other way will not only say hello but will stop to say it?”

“Who does that anymore?”

Topsail — locally pronounced “Top'-Sul” — holds three towns within its shores. Topsail Beach lies at the southern end of the island, Surf City is in the middle, and North Topsail Beach is at the northern end, of course. These three communities coexist on a 26-mile-long island that is no more than a half-mile wide, and sometimes as narrow as 200 yards.

McAllister compares Topsail's three communities to another small North Carolina town, albeit one that exists only in reruns.

“You can't help feeling that the residents of the fictional North Carolina town in *The Andy Griffith Show* would recognize these islanders,” McAllister writes.

McAllister writes that the head of Topsail's



chamber of commerce calls the island's allure “simply ‘The Magic.’ The Magic, he says, is whatever draws a person to the island. The Magic is different things to different people.”

Ray McAllister lives in Richmond, Virginia, where he is a columnist for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. He discovered Topsail Island in the wake of Hurricane Fran, when the island's communities resembled ghost towns. He came back in 2005, after the island had been rebuilt, and was captivated by Topsail's “calm and serenity.” The column he afterwards wrote about the island resulted in dozens of e-mails, letters, and phone calls from readers saying he had “perfectly described the allure of Topsail — not a particularly difficult task,” McAllister writes. “How tough is it to describe a paradise?” He wrote this not as a history but as “something that would tell me why I liked this place.”

Title: *Topsail Island: Mayberry by the Sea*

Author: Ray McAllister

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