

S.O.S. In Retrospect
A BRIEF HISTORY
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"S.O.S." "THE RAVEN IS ROLLING AND ROCKING OFF THE COAST. GET IN TOUCH WITH CAPTAIN EARL BOSTIC ABOARD THE FLAMINGO AND ASK HIM TO MEET US AT OAK TREE IN SEPT. (signed) CAPTAIN WYNONNE HARRIS....JUNE 14, 1896"

The antique bottle with authentic. The message nearly printed on what appeared to be very old parchment was legible. The bottle was found and reported to several museums. The curators believed it and announced the find and the story soon made the National Wire Service. S.O.S. was hot national copy after a D.J. solved the riddle.

Thus, with a hoax and a hope, Gene Laughter, a former Life Guard and beach bum on Ocean Drive in the early fifties launched the first S.O.S. in the Spring of 1980. September 1980, the magic week-end finally arrived. The migration began and never stopped. They came by the hundreds. Billy Smith's Beach Party. Fat Jack's, The Afterdeck was packed. The Oak Tree Inn sold out early. Gene expected two to three hundred former Lifeguards, Stranders, and Beach Bums, but about 5,000 showed up. Ocean Drive hasn't been the same since, neither has any one who was at the first, never to be duplicated experience.

S.O.S. continued but it's future in the early days was by no means certain. The format evolved. At first there were contests and bands. Many of the Clubs had a cover charge. Clubs opened and closed. They changed hands from one season to the next. What was, suddenly wasn't. The city fathers didn't quite know what to make of our what to do with it. Encourage or prevent...support or squash. No one quite knew what to make of it.

Gene Laughter knew. He, more than any other one person knew the people, the music, the beach, and the potential of the brand new product he had suddenly become the guardian of. But the unbridled joy of everyone who attended told him one simple thing: **THIS IS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE....KEEP IT GOING AND EVEN EXPAND!**

Thus, in September of 1981, S.O.S. II and September 1982, S.O.S. III followed. Things were not well organized. There was a date base of members, regular publications, and organized and structured events. Membership cards replaced cover charges for entrance to the clubs. The early Boogie Boat proved unworkable. Contests and bands were eliminated. The D.J.'s took over. S.O.S. began to look like what we know it as today.

Throughout the mid to late 80's S.O.S. grew in strength and character. Shaggers and Stranders came back to Ocean Drive in the Spring and Fall by the tens of thousands for what everyone agreed was one of the finest parties for adults in the whole country. Everyone who ever had one grain of sand in his shoes agreed that S.O.S. was for the Grand Strand, and to miss one was unthinkable. Fat Harold's, Duck's, Crazy Zack's, Harold's Across the Street, and the Galleon became shrines to which devout Stranders made pilgrimages many times each year.

Everything was good until 1988 and 1989 when the business interest at the beach became divided. Further, the originator, for personal and business reasons, could not continue to run S.O.S. The dancing space became smaller as the crowds grew bigger and larger. The competition became fierce, and the one thing that had kept it all going was uncertain.

In February, 1989, the ASSOCIATION OF CAROLINA SHAG CLUBS received an offer from Gene Laughter for the sale of S.O.S. The board of Advisors discussed this at length at the Winter Workshop in Moresville, N.C. and without a dissenting vote approved the purchase of S.O.S. The discussion centered around the desire of the Association to bring unity to all elements involved and to assure that the kind of S.O.S. that we all loved so well would continue for many years to come.

Since there were scarcely six weeks until Spring Safari, the Interim Board plunged into the planning and organizing for the event. The Association ran our first S.O.S. with headquarters at Crazy Zack's. As in any first efforts there were mistakes, but we learned a lot. The bottom line is we brought it off, paid the bills, and made a little money. A lot of people worked long and hard and managed to have a good time doing it.

The Interim Board, with minor modifications became the Board of Directors of S.O.S. and Larry Taylor of Columbia was elected Chairman. The Board then elected Officers of the Corporation

