

# NORTH BRUNSWICK NBM MAGAZINE

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Fall 2010

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Leads Wolfpack Football

**Meet Leland Mayor**  
Walter Futch

**North Brunswick Parks**  
and the new Westgate Nature Park

**Brunswick Community College**  
Bringing Big Business to a Small Town

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# fall 2010

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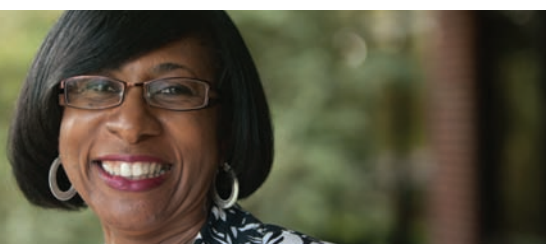


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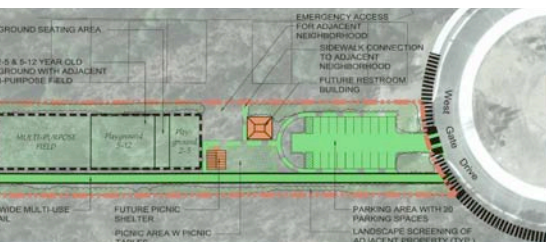
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### North Brunswick Loves Its Parks

and a New One Is on Its Way





# MAYOR WALTER FUTCH

## Looking to the Future of Leland

STORY BY BILLY JASON FRYE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LOGAN WALLACE

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** THIS ARTICLE IS  
PART 3 OF OUR SIX-SERIES FOCUS  
ON THE MAYORS OF NORTHERN  
BRUNSWICK COUNTY.

Above: Walter Futch, three-term mayor of Leland, has seen many changes in the town since he first became mayor in 2006.

Over the course of the last decade, Brunswick County's growth has been phenomenal. New home communities sprang up like wildflowers and new residents poured in like so many worker bees. Leland was expanding, absorbing tracts of land holding hundreds of houses where only horses stood before and gaining residents daily by the dozens. Under the strain of such sudden growth it would have been easy for Leland to move in the wrong direction, to send arms of ill-planned development spilling out over the countryside. It would have been easy for Leland to lose her way if not for concerned citizens like local dentist Dr. Walter Futch, who had a vision for the town and a desire to help.

A Leland resident since 1979, Futch — now three-term mayor of Leland — grew concerned with the path Leland was



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on and decided to take action.

“Leland was becoming more like her neighbors — developer driven rather than citizen driven — and I thought we needed a course correction, so I ran for mayor in 2005 and won,” Futch says.

The first term was challenging, Futch says, but his experience on the Rules Review Commission (RRC) in the North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings gave him a leg up on most first-term mayors. As a member of the RRC, his duty was to review and approve all rules adopted by state agencies, a job that required he learn to properly research, read and evaluate rules, laws and statutes. The ability he gained at the RRC to navigate the often-confounding legalese found in government documents and to conduct thorough research reduced his learning curve and allowed him to be an effective mayor from the beginning.

Futch also immediately looked to the citizens of Leland for help.

“I think one of the most important things government can do is to listen to the citizenry,” Futch says. “So we set out to use one of our greatest resources available — people.”

The Town of Leland started listening more to its citizens, began to involve them more in committees and commissions and mined the wealth of life and work experiences available.

“Leland has drawn a very diverse group of people to our area for the last 10 to 15 years,” Futch says. “We have retired lawyers, planners and architects; folks with years of experience as executives and high-level managers; folks who were involved in local politics, civic groups and community organizations. Many of these people want to be involved. It just makes sense to take their advice and experience into consideration.”

One of the suggestions brought before Mayor Futch and the Town Council was the addition of curbside recycling. After initial doubts about the affordability of the program, a cost analysis showed that the town could do it with only a minor increase in fees. The program started soon after.

“At first I wondered if people would really use it,” Futch says. “But that first week we had the recycling container at our house, I was shocked at how quickly we filled it up. When I saw how much I was recycling at my dental practice, I knew the program was a success and that it was a step in the right direction for Leland.”

Futch believes that Leland is moving in a good direction fiscally. The town recently spent \$560,000 on an 18,000-square-foot building that will soon house a new community center building. The center will expand Leland’s ability to host classes, lectures, meetings, plays and other community programming events. The purchase was a response to a long-term vision for Leland

Above: Futch’s experience working with the Rules Review Commission in the North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings gives him a leg up in the job of mayor.



and the desires of current citizens and was done without taking out a loan and without raising taxes.

“We were able to purchase the community center building through good old-fashioned fiscal responsibility,” says Futch. “We had a goal in mind, saved for it and bought it when the time was right.”

Good fiscal stewardship certainly played its role in the community center purchase, but much of the money that paid for it came from tax monies paid by residents and business

One of the keys to successful long-term growth for Leland and all of northern Brunswick County is the cooperation between the mayors of Leland, Belville, Navassa, Sandy Creek and Northwest. The five mayors meet regularly to help one another with problems, issues and concerns they face. They’ve been submitting proposals to the Department of Transportation (DOT) and other departments and commissions with a unified voice, the thinking being that when all five communities express the same concerns, someone will



Above: Futch believes in careful planning for Leland as the town continues to grow.

owners of the fast-growing town. Currently Leland has upwards of 13,000 residents, but in 2000 there were less than 2,000 and in 2004 there were just more than 5,000. In five short years Leland’s population has nearly tripled. Property values also rose accordingly.

“When I became mayor [in 2005], the total land value of Leland was \$387 million, now it’s \$1.9 billion,” Futch says.

The growth Leland has seen means big things for the future of northern Brunswick County. Once a bedroom community to Wilmington, the housing and shopping developments in Leland and surrounding towns are keeping residents on this side of the bridge and are drawing new residents and shoppers from the Wilmington side. And the potential for more growth is there.

“I believe that Leland could reach 50,000 residents in the next 10 to 15 years,” Futch says. “Our long-term plans and vision for the future of the town will have long-reaching impacts, so we have to be careful in how we proceed.”

listen. And it’s been effective. Recently, the announcement by the DOT of several projects in Brunswick County, including the long-awaited U.S. Highway 17 bypass and the widening of the busy U.S. 17/74/76 causeway between the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge and the first Leland exit, stands as evidence of the effectiveness of their unified voice.

Another benefit of working with the other mayors is the chance to renew and improve relations between the towns, particularly Leland and Belville, which until recently had a tenuous relationship. Futch says he sees that all fading into the past since he and Jack Batson, his Belville counterpart, have been mending fences during the mayoral meetings.

“Jack and I, and all of the mayors, really, have worked well together,” Futch says. “I think it’s because we’re honest and open with one another. I can see the friction between [Leland and Belville] fading into the past, and that’s good for

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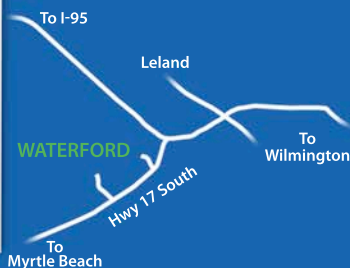
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Above: Futch has been practicing dentistry in Leland since 1979.

both towns.”

Seeing the relationship between Leland and Belville improve is one of the many changes Futch and his family have seen since he and his wife moved to Leland in 1979. Fresh out of UNC-Chapel Hill’s dental school, Futch opened his own practice here.

“I was the best dentist in town for nearly 20 years, but then again I was the only dentist,” Futch says.

He and his wife own Walter B. Futch, Jr., DDS, PA, where they both work, and their two children have stayed close to home, something that speaks to the positive economic growth and quality-of-life improvements in the area. Their daughter, a high school English teacher, lives in Columbus County, while their son and his wife live in Leland. Having both children nearby is something Futch says is good for him and his wife and something that shows his efforts as mayor are working.

“When young people want to live here, be it in Leland or in the surrounding area, it points to a strong future,” Futch says. “And it says that we’re planning and growing in the right ways.” ■