

## Haven for Homeless Homes

When a northeast storm cut a new opening through a barrier beach in the Cape Cod community of Chatham, Mass., in April 2007, owners of seasonal cottages on the narrow strip of sand were dismayed but not surprised: North Beach, as it's locally known, is in a continuous — and sometimes dramatic — state of flux. In 1987, a similar cut two miles to the south left a previously protected expanse of the bay shore exposed to the full force of ocean storms; 10 year-round mainland homes were destroyed as a result.

Despite hopeful predictions that the 2007 cut would fill in over time, it grew steadily wider and deeper through the summer and fall. By late winter, it had

swallowed up two structures and forced the teardown of seven others. But in March of this year, Chatham attorney William Hammatt — who owns the northernmost and best-protected cottage on the beach — invited the owners of the five cottages nearest the still-growing cut to move them onto his six-acre property. With the help of a local house mover and the cooperation of the town building department, the final transfer was completed just before April 1, when the area closes down to motorized vehicles to protect nesting shorebirds.

Ultimately, Hammatt hopes to develop long-term lease arrangements with his neighbors — though he's well aware that the wind and waves will have the last word on what “long-term” really means. “I had a camp south of here that washed away in the No-Name Storm in 1991,” he says. (That event — also called the Halloween Storm — is best known to the general public through the book and movie *The Perfect Storm*.) “There's nothing to indicate that this place won't be here for a while. But you just don't know.” — *Jon Vara*



Christopher Seufert

By the spring of 2008, the expanding cut — nibbling its way from right to left in this aerial shot — had already claimed nine cottages and was only days from finishing off the last survivors. Most were moved to relative safety several hundred yards to the north, but the second structure from the right, partially buried in sand by a winter storm, was deemed too far gone to save.



Cape Cod Times/Steve Heaslip

A camp owned by Chatham resident John Kelley awaits its last-minute dash to safety. Owners of the relocated structures, which were moved under emergency permits granted by the town, will have one year to work out permanent siting arrangements with the local conservation commission.