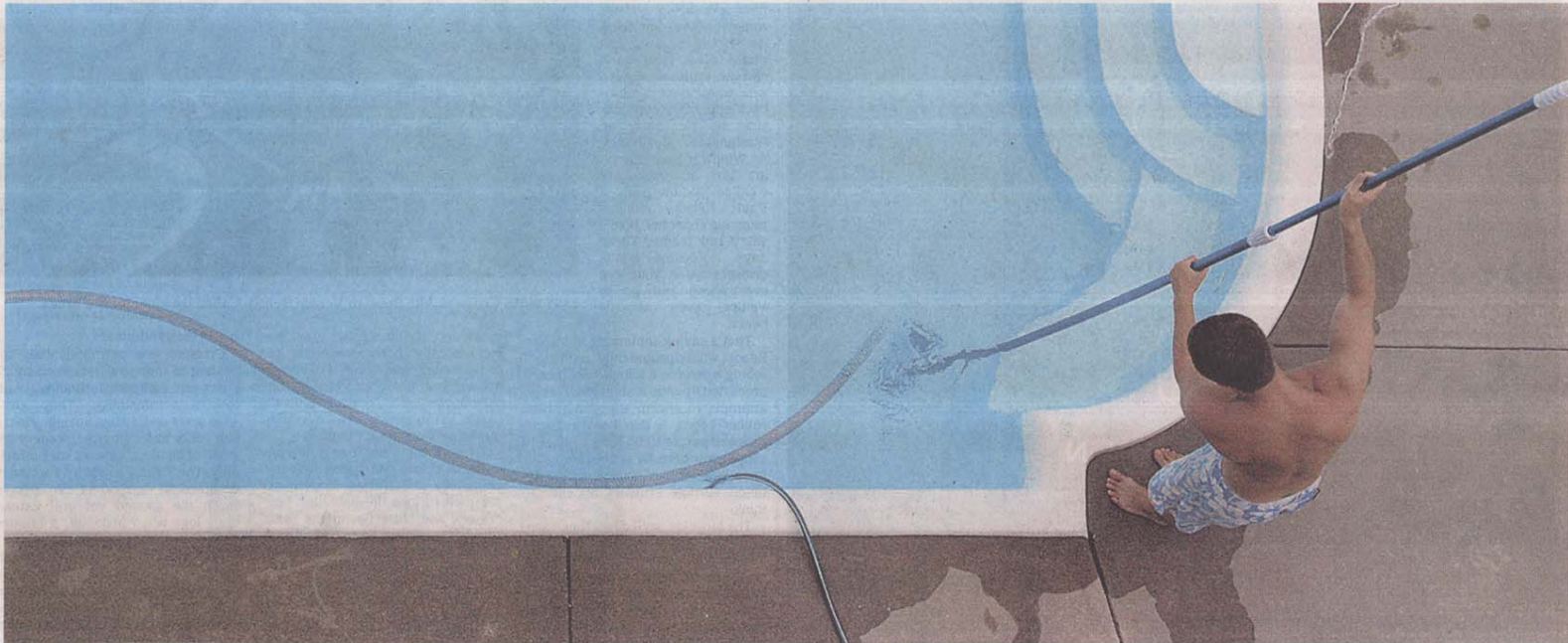


The Rush to Let Others Relax



Photographs by Karen Tam for The New York Times

PITCHING IN Paddison Hudspeth, a lawyer whose second job is cleaning pools, at a rental house in Corolla, N.C. An army of such workers keeps the weekly rental market humming along the beaches of the Outer Banks.

DRIVING

Driver's Ed, The Vroom Version



Chris Keane for The New York Times

STREET SMART A driving drill at the BMW center in Spartanburg, N.C.

By MICHELLE HIGGINS

CLUTCHING the armrest in the back of a BMW 330i, D. T. Miller braces for impact. Valerie Kuehne, a 17-year-old from Brevard, N.C., is driving in circles on a patch of wet concrete and trying to throw the car into a skid.

From the front passenger seat, Clint Kimel eggs her on. "Punch it," he says and yanks on the emergency brake as Ms. Kuehne hits the gas, sending the \$40,000-plus vehicle into a 360-degree spin. Tires squeal, dust flies and there's the scent of burning rubber as Ms. Kuehne struggles to avoid sliding off the pavement. "Whoa," she says, as the car comes abruptly to a halt.

"That was awesome!" shouts Mr. Miller, 16, her friend in the back seat,

who's also from Brevard. "Nice one!" Ms. Kuehne wasn't doing doughnuts in the parking lot at the mall. She was at driving school. And Mr. Kimel, who pulled the emergency brake?

He's the instructor. After years of offering advanced driver courses to adults, racing and performance-driving schools are increasingly adding new programs designed specifically for teenagers. For anywhere from \$400 to \$3,100 teenagers spend up to three days with professional instructors — including racecar drivers — working on advanced maneuvers like quick lane changes, emergency braking at high speeds and skid training. And they drive sporty vehicles: Audi A3's, A4's and TT's for students attending that carmaker's \$550 One-Day Teen Programs in Fort Worth, the

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INSIDE

RITUALS

A four-state yard sale puts shoppers on the road in August.

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WEEKENDER

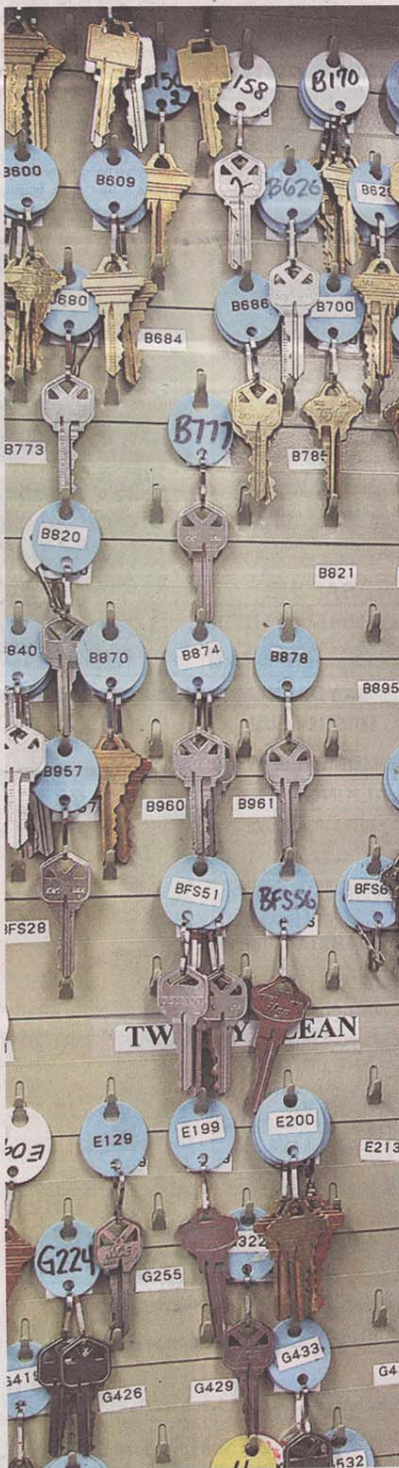
Cherry Grove, N.Y., is still part of gay summers on Fire Island, but that's not the whole story.

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SHOPPING

Going to someone's beach house? It's only polite to take a gift.

PAGE 3



GOOD TO GO Keys of houses that have been cleaned.

By ANTHONY DePALMA



Summer Weekends
Working the Outer Banks turnover.

SCOROLLA, N.C. SUMMER has a sequence all its own, a sweet shifting pattern of time and light and sun and sand set not so much by a schedule as by whim.

But at spots like this, on the breezy Outer Banks of North Carolina, there is another pattern that is as regimented as the first is carefree. It also defines the character of the place and shapes a substantial part of its culture, though most people never see it.

It is the weekend turnover.

Largely hidden from the 275,000 visitors who arrive each peak-season weekend to spend a week or more at a rented beach house, there is a phantom period from checkout time at 10 a.m. to check-in time at 4 p.m. when the easy streets are eerily quiet but the houses buzz with domestic chores.

The weekend turnover is a marvel of efficiency. Each rented house along the 130 miles of beach has to be cleaned from drip pans to lint catchers. Every bed is stripped and remade. Every toilet scrubbed. Every kernel of popcorn picked up, every grain of sand banished.

O.K., not every grain of sand, but enough to make incoming guests feel the house is theirs for a week or two.

"We've got from 10 to 4 to create a miracle," said Jon Summerton, vice president of Twiddy & Company Realtors, one of the many real estate

sales and management offices that oversee just about every aspect of renting thousands of privately owned homes every weekend. Each company focuses on its own stretch of the Outer Banks. For instance, Village Realty is caretaker for about 650 houses, mostly in Nags Head and the Southern Shore. Twiddy manages roughly 685 private homes in the northern stretches of the Outer Banks, especially Corolla (pronounced ka-RAH-ia) and Duck.

Expectations are high when the rent can top \$5,000 a week, Mr. Summerton says, and each guest has a different concept of clean. Some expect white-glove clean when they walk in, while others are willing to overlook a few Cheerios in the couch. And at the end of their week, some wipe and sweep as if it were their own place, while others just roll out of bed and leave.

Filthy or fresh, the house must be readied for the next tenant in just a few hours, and that deadline pressure can be harrowing. "Some of the cleaners say to me 'You are too picky,'" says Ramón Sánchez, 61, an inspector with Village Realty who has to sign off on a house before the keys are given to a tenant. Mr. Sánchez ran his own factory in Nicaragua before fleeing political



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SUMMER WEEKENDS

The Rush to Let Others Relax

Continued From First Escapes Page

violence there, and his standards are high. "I say 'No, I'm not too picky. But if you are going to do a job, you've got to do it well or don't do it at all.'"

Turnover day may be Saturday or Sunday, but the planning begins long before. "Our full-time job is to prepare for the weekend," said Elizabeth McCaulley, a cheery 30-year-old with the patience of a kindergarten teacher and the organizational bent of a railroad dispatcher. She manages Twiddy's cleaning operation while her business partner, Annie Ponton, 51, oversees another army of contract cleaners. Then there are the bed makers and pool cleaners, who are paid by the piece.

Using a computerized scheduling system, the two women balance time against effort as they manage more than 180 housecleaning crews that must remake Twiddy's houses almost every weekend.

The race begins in earnest early Saturday morning. At Village Realty, as many as 75 crews report to a squat industrial building in Nags Head to pick up cleaning supplies, keys and linens. Twiddy's turnover operation starts at the rear of the company office in Duck. On a deck there, Ms. McCaulley keeps two wicker baskets filled with clipboards telling crews the houses they will clean. Saturday houses — 60 percent of rentals — are on yellow sheets. Sunday houses are on pink.

In their battered Fords and Chevys, the crews line up to get their orders. In other parts of the country, these are the kinds of jobs that Americans are said to not want to take anymore. Here, few immigrants are among the crews. Most workers have full-time jobs during the week and come from as far as 100 miles away to work.

At just after 8 a.m., Vickie B. Stallings, 41, drives up in a metallic blue Ford ZX2 that was repaired in the auto body shop where she works sanding and prepping cars for painting. Although she is fighting a lingering cold, Ms. Stallings is peppy and eager. Her crew is composed of her 15-year-old daughter, Leah, and her stalwart sister, Sharon K. Harris, 42.

They left Ms. Harris's home in Winfall, N.C., at 6:30 a.m. They won't be back home before 6:30 p.m.

Ms. McCaulley hands them a clipboard with four big houses to be cleaned, and a fifth that needs only a quick check. Two of the houses get special attention, one because the owner is coming to use the house for a week, the other because the guests have paid \$85 extra for the privilege of checking in early — at 1 p.m.

After stopping briefly for supplies, the crew scampers to the top floor of the first house, a three-story, six-bedroom shingle house with a pool. As is common here, the kitchen and living room are on the third floor to take advantage of the beach views.

But they have no time to gaze through windows. They turn on a radio and get to work immediately — Ms. Stallings in the first bathroom, Ms. Harris in the kitchen, and Leah in the living room.

It is 9:01 a.m.

"I like having the extra money," Ms. Stallings says as she pulls on green rubber gloves, "and I actually enjoy doing this because all the houses we have are nice ones." She and her daughter will take home \$6,000 to \$7,000 over the 12-week summer season, which will help pay some bills and maybe provide a vacation. Her husband, Robert, a truck driver, fills in when Ms. Harris is not available.

Ms. Harris is an inspector for the North Carolina Department of Transportation, and her husband, Hurdis, is a welder. She tackles her least favorite job, cleaning the stove. "I hate it when people come in here and try to cook for the first time," she says, removing heavily soiled drip pans from the stove and wiping underneath.

They are off to a good start. The house is in reasonable shape, not like the one they cleaned last year after graduating high school seniors had a wild party. "Uncooked macaroni was thrown all over the house, and we found food and beer cans everywhere," Ms. Stallings said. "Oh, man, that place was such a mess it took us three hours."

Cleaning this house takes just over an hour and a half. Then they head down the street to the next one, which they think is the early arrival.

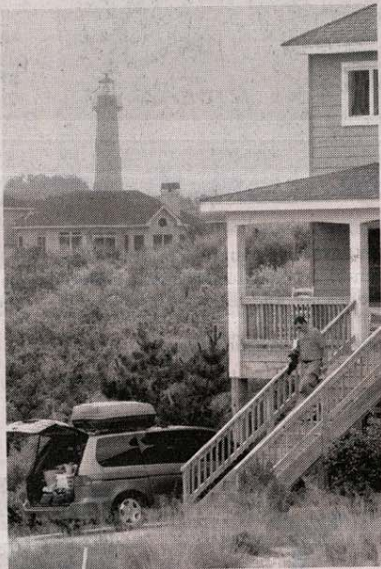
But as they pull up they see that another vehicle is already there, although it is only 10:47, long before early check-in. Cars, trucks and vans glide through the streets during turnover, delivering bicycles or retrieving empty garbage cans from the curb. Pools have to be cleaned, hot tubs serviced.

But this is no service truck. It belongs to the owners, Jo Ann and Michael Marchiori, who left their home in Elizabethtown, Pa., at 2:30 a.m. to beat the traffic. When they enter their lovely five-bedroom, four-and-a-half bathroom beachfront house they find a six-inch tear in the microsuede living room couch that they bought just last year.

Mr. Marchiori, a home improvement contractor who has been coming to the Outer Banks for 17 years, takes the damage in stride.

"If we ever came down and found everything was perfect," he says, "we'd probably keel over."

House cleaners encounter just about everything imaginable. "I should get the gold-



DEPARTURE Tenants check out of houses by 10 a.m., giving rental agencies six hours to prepare for new renters.

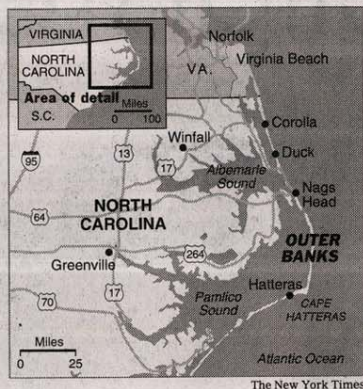
en condom award because I've found so many under the beds," Mr. Sánchez says. In one house, a crew had to wipe soot off the walls because guests started a wood fire in the gas fireplace. Watermelons get tossed from balconies, tipplers vomit in hot tubs, shaving cream gets sprayed on living room walls.

Except for the tear, which Ms. Stallings reports, the Marchiori house is relatively unscathed. But the crew is rattled when Ms. Harris realizes that they have confused the early arrival with the owner prep. It is 12:07 when Ms. Stallings punches in her special code to indicate that the Marchiori house is clean. The actual early arrival, a five-bedroom, five-and-a-half bath behemoth, has not been touched. It is supposed to be ready in 53 minutes.

Tension builds, along with fatigue. Once more, Ms. Harris begins on the stove, then



CLEANER "All the houses we have are nice ones," says Vickie B. Stallings, who wears rubber gloves to clean a jetted tub. Multiple bathrooms, pools and hot tubs are common in the rental houses.



The New York Times

"I don't know how they can get all these houses ready on time," a renter says.

makes sure that the two coffee makers and the double toaster are clean. Extravagances like double appliances are common. Nearly every house has a hot tub and a pool. Some have elevators.

While the list of amenities has grown over the last decade, turnover time has not. Crews used to handle six or more houses a day but now four is the limit. To handle the extra work, some jobs have been farmed out. For example, while Ms. Stallings is wiping down a shower door, Paddison Hudspeth, a 25-year-old lawyer from the area, vacuums sand from the bottom of the house's pool.

It is 1:11 p.m. when Ms. Stallings punches in the code to indicate they are done. "I hope they're satisfied," Ms. Harris says. Eight minutes later, the guests arrive.

When the cleaners get to the next house their energy is flagging and they are glad to see two bed makers, Ramona Pugh and Helen Evans, both 51. Until last year the cleaning crews were responsible for changing linens and making the beds, but now Twiddy hires crews to do this. Ms. Pugh and Ms. Evans get \$3 a bed, which they share. This day they will make 108 beds.



Photographs by Karen Tam for The New York Times



HEADQUARTERS Annie Ponton, above left, and Elizabeth McCaulley oversee the cleaning of almost 700 Outer Banks rental properties for Twiddy & Company. Left, cleaning supplies that Vickie B. Stallings and her crew use to clean four large houses. Below, Helen Evans, left, and Ramona Pugh specialize in making beds at \$3 a bed and more than 100 beds in a day.



ARRIVAL New tenants race into a just-cleaned house, ready for their week at the beach.

They are a bedroom tag team. Starting with just the mattress pad on top of a queen-size bed, they lay on fitted sheet, flat sheet, fluffy pillows, bedspread and finally several throw pillows. Elapsed time: 77 seconds.

YOU should have seen us when we started," Ms. Evans says. "This is our 12th house today."

Ms. Stallings is in her fourth house of the day, but she is scrubbing her 24th toilet. She's lost track of how many tubs she has cleaned, but this last one is the only one that is clogged.

"That's so aggravating," she says. She tries a plunger, then pours in bleach. "They get to where they're real stopped up," she says, watching the gray water swirl slowly. "I'll just let maintenance come take care of it."

It is 2:44 when they punch out.

All three of them are dragging as they enter the fifth and final house of the day. It has been vacant since they cleaned it a week before. All they need to do now is check for dead cow flies on the floor and rust stains in the toilets.

They finish at 3:01, and as they pack their Ford a blue-gray van stops out front. It belongs to the renters, who are champing at the bit to get in. And no wonder. The renters, Anne Marie and Kurt Holmes, left Philadelphia at 4:30 a.m. and have been killing time with their two young children since about 1 p.m.

"I just said to my husband that I don't know how they can get all these houses ready on time," Ms. Holmes says. When the cleaners leave, the Holmeses drive back to the Twiddy rental office. Minutes later they are smiling, the house keys in their hands. A few yards away outside the rental office, Vickie, Sharon and Leah are piling back in the little Ford, their clipboards turned in and their day almost done.

"All I want to do now," Ms. Stallings says, "is go home and have a drink."

But the weekend turnover is far from finished. Ms. McCaulley and Ms. Ponton are still fielding questions and complaints. Their computers tally each call in and out. Ms. McCaulley tops 300 calls. Ms. Ponton left her desk only once, for a bathroom break. Her total exceeds 400 calls.

Everyone involved in the weekend turn-

over business knows that complaints are far more common than compliments. In the 11 years he has worked weekend turnovers, Mr. Sánchez of Village Realty says, he has learned a few important things: Following his right shoulder from room to room ensures that he does not miss anything. Wealthy people can make just as big a mess as people who earn a lot less. Most tenants don't think about the cleaners or the guests who come after them.

But Mr. Sánchez gets a big surprise at the first house on his list the first Sunday in July. It is only 9:55 a.m. and the cleaning crew has not arrived yet, so he helps out by stripping beds, checking drawers and emptying the refrigerator. When he reaches the top floor he finds a chilled bottle of sparkling wine and a \$20 bill on the kitchen counter.

"Yes!" Mr. Sánchez shouts, pumping his fists in the air. "That means that whoever was here was satisfied."

He leaves the wine and the money for the cleaners and runs to the next house.

Then to the next. And the next.

Summer Weekends

Articles in this series look at the ways Americans spend their leisure time and the traditions that have grown up around the weekend.