

## Caswell Beach



File photo

Participants at last year's fundraiser rally around their picks for a tabletop horse race.

### *Derby Day event for rifle pit May 6*

Preparations are well underway for the fifth annual Derby Day Celebration, set for Saturday, May 6, at the Caswell Dunes Clubhouse.

The festive event will include a luncheon, silent auction, tabletop horse races and a viewing of *The Run for the Roses*. This fundraiser for preservation of the rifle target pit will take place from 2:30 to 7 p.m.

This year's stable of 36 tabletop horses will be named for military leaders, battles, songs and other familiar nomenclatures from the Great War.

"A lot of research went into learning about World War I this year in order to be able to list the horse names," said Norma Eckard, chairman of the Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range.

"Some of us on the committee were not even born and there was not a lot of information available about the forgotten war ... But it was fun finding the names of songs, movies and even video games that you never heard of before. We expect to learn more history in the coming months as we accumulate additional details about the part the U.S. played in helping our Allies remain free."

Norma Eckard and her husband Ron founded the Friends group to help save the range, which had fallen into disrepair and was threatened by tree roots. The structure was where American soldiers learned long-range marksmanship before heading overseas to fight. It has been cleaned and partially stabilized, but is in dire need of additional repairs.

"As far as we know the rifle range is the only standing World War I historic structure in Brunswick County," Ron Eckard said. "Contributions are needed to remove soil from the north center passageway wall so that hydraulic jacks may be positioned inside the pit in order to straighten the wall. At the present it is bowed inward inches with a likely chance of falling if we don't get funding soon."

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the range is also on the Historic Wilmington Foundation List of Most Threatened Historic Places in the Cape Fear Region.

Anyone wishing to attend the event may send an e-mail to [ftcaswellrifle@gmail.com](mailto:ftcaswellrifle@gmail.com) for information. A new website, [www.caswellrifle.com](http://www.caswellrifle.com), also has more information.