

Catching Corey's Wave

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Written by Lisa duBusc-Miller

Against a backdrop of upheaval in Montauk, NY, where local surfers spent the winter protesting Army Corps beach excavations and another busy, intensely crowded summer looms, Corey Senese, 34, and Tom Casse, 24, of CoreysWave stand out. Yes, they can shred with the best of them, but what makes these two Montauk residents unique is how they give back to their local community while guiding CoreysWave, a surf instruction business, to success in the swift-moving East End landscape. Although Corey grew up in San Diego and Tom in Warwick, NY, their multi-generational ties to Montauk, along with their own lifelong experiences, strongly bond them to the beach in this summer haven.

So how do two brown-haired, green-eyed groms morph into accomplished businessmen with a loyal clientele? Tom and Corey both lay claim to the sea-misted sanctuary of Ditch Plains' modest trailer park, the perfect combination of neighborhood, seaside perch, and consistent pointbreak. Corey's family dates their area history to camping in Montauk Shores Condominiums when it was merely a campground; his wife Kristin (née Angiulo) Senese's great-grandmother had the foresight to land squarely across from what would become premium real estate in Ditch Plains, where she purchased a lot and built



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the family house. Likewise, Corey's grandparents were some of the first inhabitants of the trailer park when it was still a campground. Corey's dad and Kristin's dad, who were friends from Little League baseball in Massapequa and who learned to surf together at Tobay in Central Long Island, each met their wives in Montauk in the '70s; both couples eventually moved to San Diego, with Kristin's parents moving back to Babylon. Corey and Kristin spent every summer in Montauk since birth, along with Tom, whose grandparents have been in the Ditch trailer park for decades.

Corey Senese and Kristin Angiulo Senese and Tom Casse with some of last summer's CoreysWave campers. Photo: Madeleine Javier

"Ditch is our home," Kristin said last summer standing astride her beach bike with a bin full of sandy wetsuits. "It's the beach and the neighborhood I've known as my home break my whole life." As director of CoreysWave, she's in her uniform: a serious look, an iPhone, a bikini, sandy feet, and a pink CoreysWave baseball cap. In the distance lies her great-grandmother's porch, bedecked with boards, wax, leashes, beach towels, coolers for that night's beach bonfire, and a Grateful Dead flag. The understated home sits a mere stone's throw from the dirt lot where Jimmy Buffett's green van squeezes in on good days, between sparkling Range Rovers and rusty beach jeeps piled high with soft-tops. Kristin's eyes are alive from the morning's longboarding session that she somehow managed to fit in.

Back on land, though, she's all business, her eyes darting from a fiercely loyal client paddling out in the whitewater to the buzzing phone in her hand full of lesson requests. She lays down her bike to stand in the hot sand and quickly size up the board, booties, and wetsuit needs for the new group of clients. She checks the surf report again, then nods to Corey and Tom, who stand poised, eyes trained on the horizon, boards in hand, ready to give that next lesson. ESM caught up with Tom and Corey last off-season, as they were conducting one of their Destination Surf programs traveling and surfing with former students.

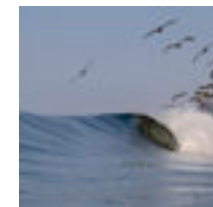
ESM: Corey, how did you and Tom meet and become friends?

Corey: We stayed in the trailer next to the Casse family when Tom was 5 and he was just a grom. I'd yell out the window to him, "How's the surf?" when they would lay their boards on the rack between our trailers. Tom was 14 and I was 24 when we really got to know each other. Then Kristin and I pulled him on board to train him as one of the very first CoreysWave instructors in 2009.

ESM: Tom, how did you get introduced to surfing?



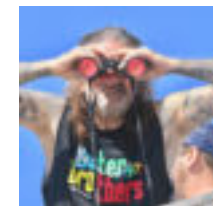
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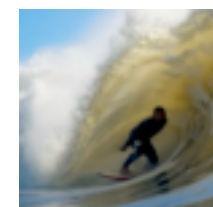
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Tom: At 3 years old, I was hit by a wave and was anti-ocean. Then my mom picked me up off the beach at Ditch and put me onto a boogieboard in the whitewater. I had this “Aha!” moment when the water lifted me up, and I was obsessed from then on. I had my first wave on a real board with fins, my dad’s fish, and I remember the feeling of looking down at the rocks going by beneath me as I stood and glided along. I was hooked.

Tom Casse, one of CoreysWave’s first instructors in 2009, with campers. Photo: Kristin Angiulo Senese

ESM: What is it about surfing, and how does that translate to what you do with CoreysWave?

Corey: It’s an indescribable escape, really. When you get going fast and have the confidence to control your board and your destiny on the wave, it’s a unique and elated feeling.

Tom: I love the freedom of it, the complete way it takes over once you go under your first wave. It’s like entering a new world. Getting as much speed as possible and the rush of taking everything in – it’s sensory overload and all you can do is keep doing it.

Corey: For a long time, no one was really interested in giving lessons, because it’s part of the surfer’s code that you put in the time, take the beatings, and learn on your own. But that’s getting phased out and being replaced with more of a, “surfing is sharing” mentality. We care a lot, and I think that is what students respond to. They feel the passion we have for teaching surf skills. When a student suddenly looks at a wave in a different way and something clicks, it’s as good as if it’s clicking for you. That moment is genuine stoke and nothing beats it.

Tom: It’s really a team effort in the water. You can always hear instructors encouraging their students with “Let’s go, team!” The more eyes on the students, the better. We create a safety net out there, with one-on-one input, but also tips on the fly from our other instructors out in the water. The students are in the CoreysWave cocoon. Learning to be safe in the water is the most important part of the process. And the instructors are carefully hand-chosen by Kristin to match perfectly to the students. It makes for real connections.

Corey Senese with CoreysWave campers. Photo: Kristin Angiulo Senese



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ESM: How do you both juggle your own surfing with that of teaching?

Corey: When it's off the hook and tubing, with all the shortboarders out there, but Ditch is still good for lessons — that's when it's the hardest.

Tom: Surfers develop the fear of missing out. It's all about opportunity cost. And the higher level you reach in surfing, the more fear there is. The good news is that the reward of teaching is so high that it tends to be an equalizer. When the waves are perfect, and you can get barreled, that's what you live for and that's what you don't want to miss. That's the goal. When conditions are setting up for that, you are super alert and have to be in tune. You have to grab the chance when it's good, since the wind can pick up and things can change so fast. That's what being an East Coast surfer is all about — when you luck into a session and find perfect little gems when no one else is expecting it to be good, that's hard to beat. But at the end of the day, if I'm sitting on my board in the ocean, every wave is fun. It beats sitting at a desk any day.

ESM: So Tom, what are your future surf plans?

Tom: To surf bigger barrels and bigger waves and enter more professional contests. I competed through high school and college, and was president of my college team at (what college?). I plan to compete at a higher level so that I can get pushed to raise my game. I ultimately want to start my own business in order to fund my surfing and maintain my surfing life.

Tom Casse. Photo: Justin Burkle

ESM: How about for you, Corey?

Corey: In surfing, you are always learning, and even the best surfers are still learning and gaining new things from every session. Surfing is one of the more unique physical activities, where room for growth and development goes way past your prime youth years and experience and knowledge often carry more weight than physical strength. I'm constantly learning, and I'm better at learning about surfing now than I ever was. I can pinpoint and communicate areas where there is room for growth both in others and in myself better than ever, but I doubt I've hit any kind of ceiling. I want to continue to become a better surfer and a better wave reader, and experience more waves both at home and everywhere else.

Corey Senese. Photo: Kristin Angiulo Senese

ESM: How does this fit with the growth of CoreysWave?

Corey: My surfing growth feels like it's in tandem with my personal and career goals. All three are wrapped up together and everything just keeps getting better. I'd like CoreysWave to have more year-round action so that our team of instructors, who are all like family to me, can be kept busy all year long doing what we all love so much. We are ramping up our Destination Surf and Winter Surf programming, as well as our Wave Share program, which brings other aspects of our passion for surfing into focus: surfing in new places around the world, surfing in more challenging and awesome winter conditions, and sharing surfing as a resource with those who do not have access to it. It feels like we are rounding out what surfing means to us by exploring these other areas and making it part of our business. Also, board shaping: I'm really having fun shaping and testing boards, and improving them to suit the needs of the surfer and the waves they like to surf. I'm learning so much about board design from master shapers, and it definitely adds another layer of learning to every surf session when riding new designs.

ESM: How do you balance making a living in the summer off of a mostly tourist crowd with your status as longtime, entrenched locals?

Corey: I think a lot of people rely on the summer and tourist industry to make a living or at least supplement the rest of their yearly earnings. There are people that don't agree with the tourist industry no matter what, and the reasons for that crop up again every summer. But the percentage of people whose earnings are tied to the summer — whether directly or indirectly, whether it's themselves or close friends or family — has to be very high. It seems like more people are realizing the potential that summer has for unique and passion-driven employment like what we do. We are very fortunate. I think that more people are accepting of newcomers, especially if the new people are respectful, and luckily for us we mostly meet and teach really great people — many of whom we have now been friends with for years.

ESM: What does giving back to your community mean to CoreysWave?

Tom: CoreysWave has been so incredible in this area. We volunteer our time teaching for incredible organizations such as Camp SoulGrow, Camp Interactive, the YMCA, and A Walk On Water. The kids we teach through these organizations and in the Montauk schools are all so grateful and it really means a lot. When you're out there at the beach a week later and you see the kid that you taught with a busted surfboard trying to surf... That means so much.

Corey: It feels so good to give back. It took us a little while to figure out what we could do, but then we realized how our greatest gift is already in place: our surfing team, our teaching skills, and our time. We can give surfing to anyone, and we understand how transformative a surfing experience can be. It pays back so much more.

Corey Senese with last summer’s CoreysWave alumni. Photo: Ingrid Silva

Find out more about CoreysWave at CoreysWave.com

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