

Chesapeake Beach on the Half Shell

LOCAL NEWS

Town Recruits Volunteers for Project By Diane Burr

Another Chesapeake Current Exclusive

Interested in the fascinating life cycle of oysters – and what they do for our waterways?

If you missed the first meeting of the Chesapeake Beach Oyster Cultivation Society (CBOCS) at Town Hall on Saturday, June 18, you won't want to miss the next.

More than 30 people attended the informational meeting, and at the end, signed up for committees to help do everything from prepare the spat on shell for cages to actually placing them in Fishing Creek and even tending them during the nine months they will stay there and grow.

Chesapeake Beach resident Keith Pardiek is the project leader, and he says, "I want to see 100 or so cages under the boardwalk on Fishing Creek in the next three to four years. That would mean we could raise a half million oysters a year, right here!"

This has become Mayor Bruce Wahl's "pet" project since learning about the success of the Southern Maryland Oyster Cultivation Society (SMOCS) in Mill Creek, Back



Photos by Bruce Wahl

The innovative oyster cage designed by Jon Farrington turns with the tide to protect the spat from barnacles and sediment build-up.

Creek and St. John's Creek in the Solomons and Lusby areas. In just a few short years, SMOCS' efforts have resulted in enough oysters to filter the waters of these tributaries in an area where there were no oysters just a few years ago.

Wahl says Chesapeake Beach is the first municipality in the state to participate in Governor O'Malley's 'Marylanders Grow Oysters' program. Residents along 24 other streams and rivers statewide are also involved, and they're up to about 8,000 oyster cages.

Maryland offers a \$500 tax credit to each individual who raises oysters. Wahl says even if you're not on the waterfront, here's a way to raise oysters through this program, and get every penny you donate back. You don't have to be a resident of Chesapeake Beach to participate, so any Maryland resident purchasing the cage system for \$500 to add to the Fishing Creek project gets the tax credit. Contact Chesapeake Beach Town Hall for details.

An informational web site about the project is under construction, and Wahl also wants to document the entire CBOCS project with videos on YouTube to encourage others to raise oysters to help the Bay.

John Farrington, owner of Johnny Oyster Seed Company at Wells Cove in the St. Leonard area, has designed an innovative oyster cage (pictured) that turns with the tides to take the

drudgery out of oyster maintenance, which many cultivators complained about. Four of these cages are on their way to the town.

Len Zuza of SMOCS told the volunteers that one, three-inch oyster can filter 55 gallons of water a day, which helps to reduce algae and sequester nitrogen and phosphorous.

"Oyster beds also create a rich habitat for fish and other wildlife and offer shore protection from waves," Zuza adds.

"Oyster survivorship today is also at its highest since 1985, so we have a very good chance. Critics will say that oysters cannot clean the Bay or make a difference, but you are in a position to reduce pollution incrementally, and anything we do can help make change happen," Zuza says.

Wahl called the oyster cultivators, "An inspiration for everyone interested in making a difference."

Pardiek says he expects the spat on shell (baby oysters) to be delivered in August or September, giving the various teams time to organize through the summer, so there's still time to get involved. He says boats will be needed so volunteers can anchor the cages under the boardwalk, and about six people will be needed to help "winterize" the cages. The yearlings in 2012 will be planted at a local oyster sanctuary, probably Old Rock, and several volunteer boats will also be needed for that effort.

Beach Elementary School Principal Dr. Michael Sisler attended the meeting along with two teachers who pledged to get local kids and parents involved. He predicts, "It will be an excellent learning experience for them."

Anyone interested in finding out more about volunteer opportunities – and/or sponsoring an oyster cage - should contact Chesapeake Beach Town Hall at (410) 257-2230 or (301) 855-8398.

About the Author: Diane Burr is the founder and executive editor of the Chesapeake Current.

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**The Chesapeake Beach Railway Trail
along Fishing Creek is now open!**

See story on page 12.



Several spat (baby oysters) fuse to an old oyster shell where they grow for about a year protected in a cage before being transported to oyster beds.