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*Historic*

20

URBANNA

25

# OYSTER FESTIVAL



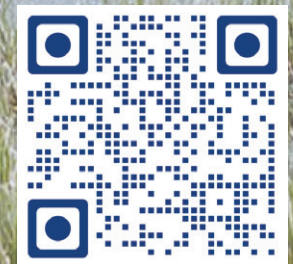
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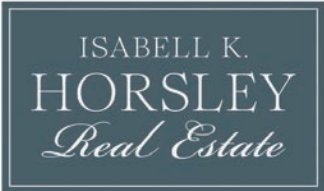
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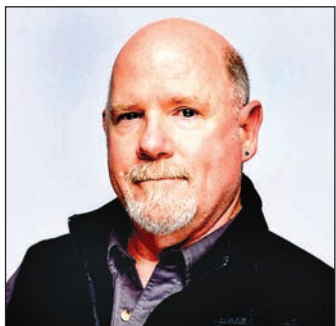
## ON THE COVER: 2025 UOF POSTER

Design studio owner Charlie Small of Richmond is the winner of this year's Urbanna Oyster Festival poster contest. His entry, which appears on the cover of this supplement, was selected by the Oyster Festival Foundation Board based on the artistic skill and representation of this year's theme. As the winner, he will receive \$500.

Every year the Urbanna Oyster Festival has a poster contest. This year's theme: "Icons of Urbanna." The small port town that hosts the Urbanna Oyster Festival is home to iconic and historical buildings, breathtaking scenery and a calming air that is good for the soul.

The poster, which is 18 by 24 inches, can be purchased for \$20 (unsigned) and \$25 (signed) at the Urbanna Oyster Festival information center RV that will be on the corner of Virginia Street and Rappahannock Avenue. It can also be purchased by calling the festival office at 804-758-2122.

Other official Urbanna Oyster Festival souvenirs will be for sale under the tent near the Primis bank's Urbanna branch on Friday and Saturday. Free Oyster Festival programs will be distributed at parking areas and the info center.



Charlie Small

# Welcome to the 68th Urbanna Oyster Fest

by Tom Chillemi

**T**he 68th Urbanna Oyster Festival is set for Friday and Saturday, Nov. 7 and 8, and once again the event promises good times, delicious food, two parades, live music on three stages, historic buyboats, tall ships, crowning of the Urbanna Oyster Festival Queen and Little Miss Spat, the Virginia Oyster Shucking Contest and more. Admission is free; however, parking is \$20, which offsets festival expenses and contributes to the programs of the Urbanna Oyster Festival Foundation.

## Parades

The annual Fireman's Parade is set for 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 7, and the Urbanna Oyster Festival Parade is set for 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 8.

The Fireman's Parade will wind its way through town, while the Oyster Festival Parade will bypass the main part of Virginia Street. Both parades will assemble on the west side of town.

The Fireman's Parade will feature 60 fire and rescue units, queens and dignitaries. It is sponsored by the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department (MVFD) of Urbanna.

The Fireman's Dance follows the parade on the Urbanna firehouse grounds at 330 Virginia St. from 8 p.m. to midnight with the band "The Unusual Suspects" (beer garden gates open at noon on Friday). The dance is sponsored by Mike's Custom Golf Carts with Budweiser, Bud Light, Michelob Ultra and Devils Backbone beers being served.

Saturday's Oyster Festival Parade will have about 40 units, leading off with our honorees, grand marshals and captain, and queens and spats. And, about five or six high school bands will be marching in the parade. The Oyster Festival



Parade's special features this year include: a "Fort Eustis Color Guard, Order of the Oyster, Virginia Cardinals Cheer and Dance Team, Norfolk Khedive Shriners and special surprises!

## Festival Queen

The 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival Queen and Little Miss Spat will be crowned Friday, Nov. 7, at 4 p.m. inside the Urbanna firehouse at 330 Virginia St. As the Oyster Festival has evolved over the years, so has the selection of the Queen and Little Miss Spat (a spat is a baby oyster). What was once a beauty pageant is now a scholarship-based competition for the queens. The queen contestants must be high school seniors and residents of Middlesex County. Each queen contestant mentors a first grade contestant as her Little Miss Spat.

The foundation of this competition is character building and community service. Each queen contestant must volunteer a minimum of 25 hours benefiting Middlesex County.

The Queen and Little Miss Spat competition starts early in the spring and extends until the crowning.

This year there are seven

queen hopefuls and eight Little Miss Spat contestants.

The 2025 Queen contestants and their Little Miss Spat contestants, in alphabetical order, include:

- Lorelei Cooke and Emersyn Soles.
- Elisabeth Gobush and Charlotte (Charlee) Parsley.
- Macon Kissman and Camdyn Putney.
- Cara Moss and Sawyer Edwards.
- Taylor Newman and Marilyn Major.
- Kallie Robins, Blakelee Anderson and Blakelynn Moore.
- Ashlynn Sears and Skyler Epperly.

The Queen contestants are judged in five areas:

- Individual community service project.
- Individual judges' interview.
- Academic achievement.
- A written response to a random question.
- Overall participation in the competition.

The Little Miss Spat contestants are judged separately from the Queens in the following areas:

- Participation at an ice cream social and a tea party.
- Individual judges' interview.
- Overall participation.

## History

Urbanna Museum and the historic James Mills Scottish Factor Store (formerly called the Old Tobacco Warehouse), which houses the Urbanna Museum and Visitor's Center on Virginia Street just up the hill from Urbanna Creek, will be open from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. both days of the festival. Go inside and see the rare John Mitchell Map, which is a first edition, third impression that was published in 1755. This map was used to define the boundaries of America following the Revolutionary War. Find out the exciting history of why Urbanna has this priceless map!

Robert Keyes, a multi-faceted solo finger-style guitarist, will perform on the front porch both days.

## Community Row

The museum porch overlooks "Community Row," sponsored by Primis Bank, that will feature crafts, demonstrations and exhibits from Middlesex artists and local nonprofit groups. The size of Community Row has been reduced due to vehicle access requirements and the vendors will be on Virginia Street closer to Cross Street.

## Food and crafts

More than 100 vendors will be open for business when the festival begins at 10 a.m. on Friday and goes until midnight with the dance at the Urbanna firehouse, and on Saturday the festival runs from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Bring your appetite. An array of foods will be available from more than 30 food vendors. The honored oyster is always featured in a variety of presentations — raw, roasted, fried, steamed and stewed. The famous Middlesex Lions Club oyster fritters return this year at their same location on Virginia Street near the intersection

(See Welcome, Page C5)

## Welcome...

(Continued from Page C4)

with Rappahannock Avenue.

In addition, visitors can enjoy crab soup, crab bisque, seafood chowder, clams, crab cakes, shrimp, fish, corn dogs, sausages, hamburgers, hot dogs, turkey legs, roast beef, funnel cakes, kettle corn, roasted nuts, ice cream, cotton candy, snow cones, candy apples and many other goodies.

In addition to great food and desserts, visitors will delight in the variety of crafts available throughout town. Among the many offerings will be stained glass, wood carvings, sculpture, pottery, dolls, brass, silver, leather goods and jewelry. Many craft vendors will be in Taber Park on Rappahannock Avenue at Festival Village.

### VIP Oyster Lovers

The VIP Oyster Lovers Experience returns for its sixth year and has sold out for both days. Historic Lansdowne at 271 Virginia St. will be the setting for the VIP event and check-in.

Included for VIPs are exclusive VIP tables and seating, support from a festival concierge to help navigate the event, private restroom facilities, bottled water, discounts at local businesses from November 2025 to April 2026, VIP seating at the Virginia Oyster Shucking Contest on Saturday, Nov. 8, a 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival commemorative poster, six wine tastings, six beer tastings, six oyster tastings, and a gift swag bag.

Plan ahead for 2026 (Nov. 6 and 7) and find VIP ticket information at [www.urbannaoysterfestival.com](http://www.urbannaoysterfestival.com). VIPs must be 21 years or older to purchase a ticket. An ID will be required.

### Waterfront

Two water taxis will operate from the Urbanna Town Marina on both Friday and Saturday from 8 a.m.-7 p.m. They will transport visitors to and from their boats anchored in the harbor. Boat tours of the creek also will be available.

The Oyster Festival waterfront at the Urbanna Town Marina will showcase the area's varied history and

emphasize the conservation and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. Since its days as a crucial colonial port, Urbanna's waterfront has always been an essential part of town life. In its recent past, its docks were filled with Chesapeake Bay buyboats and deadrise workboats as watermen bought and sold oysters and crabs they had harvested.

During the Oyster Festival, history comes alive at the waterfront. Festival-goers are welcome to board the Lynx, a replica of a privateer inspired by the original historic tall ship from the War of 1812.

Other boats that will be open for tours include 100-year-old buyboats F.D. Crockett and Peggy; along with Explorer, a replica of the boat used by Captain John Smith to explore Chesapeake Bay in 1608. The Crockett and Peggy are based at the Deltaville Maritime Museum.

Also on display will be the sloop Luna, a replica of an 18th century sailing cargo vessel, built by the Colonial Seaport Foundation based in Deltaville.

### Waterfront activities

The waterfront area of the festival provides opportunities for visitors to look at the beautiful Urbanna Town Marina and harbor, learn about the marine life of the Chesapeake Bay region, and listen to live music. Come to the waterfront to climb aboard a historic boat, examine marine creatures in touch tanks, and taste some local seafood.

Highlights for this year's waterfront include:

- A variety of hands-on exhibits from the Yorktown Watermen's Museum, the Fairfield Foundation, Chesapeake Bay Governor's School, Friends of the Rappahannock, Christchurch School, and the Tidewater Soil and Water Conservation District.
- Music and refreshments.

### Oyster shucking contest

The Virginia State Official Oyster Shucking Contest, sponsored by Walton Seafood, Tony Walton Seafood and T.M. Williams and Son Seafood, will start at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 8, on the stage in the field behind the Urbanna firehouse.

Since Urbanna is the home of Virginia's "official" Oyster Festival, it is only appropriate that some of the best oyster shuckers in the world practice their trade near the town. The top professional shucker in the contest wins \$300. The first place prize in each of the men's and women's divisions is \$100; second, \$50; and third, \$25.

The winner is declared state champion and advances to compete in the National Oyster Shucking Contest in St. Mary's County, Md., in October 2026.

There will be an amateur shucking competition with a plaque for the winner, and an official festival poster for second and third place finishers. Registration begins at 9 a.m. behind the firehouse. Multi-time state champion Deborah Pratt is expected to return to defend her honor.

### Wine tasting

Returning this year is wine tasting featuring several Virginia wineries. The wine tasting area at Historic Lansdowne on Virginia Street will be from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on both days of the festival. There is a \$20 admission fee.

Oysters will be available for tasting from Aylett Country Day School, Middlesex County Kiwanis Club and Tidewater Oysters at the waterfront, pairing them with local wines from 7 Lady Vineyards, Jolene Family Winery, Mattaponi Winery, Wind Vineyards and Zoll Vineyards.

The craft beer tasting event will be at the far end of Festival Village. Craft beers include:

- Bold Rock.
- New Realm.
- Midnight.
- That Damn Mary.
- Devils Backbone.
- Hardywood.
- Landshark.

The \$15 admission includes a souvenir cup and four tastings. Brewery reps will be on hand to answer questions.

Fun for children at The Children's Activity Village sponsored by Wildings Playscapes and Atlantic Union Bank – a nature-inspired play area for children and families will be available in the children's activity area in Festival Village on Rappahannock Avenue, where

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children ages 4-10 will get creative. Hands-on crafts available for children include: Corn Sensory Play area, Mud Kitchen Play Area, Oyster Shell Painting, Performance Area entertainment, Hunter Rhodes Magic and Barefoot Puppets just to name a few fun-filled activities.

Master magician-juggler Jonathan Austin will wow the crowd with his high energy and mesmerizing acts in the children's area on Friday from 10 a.m. to noon and again from 1 to 4 p.m. A carnival

and midway presented by R.T. Carnival and Amusements will be at The Kids Zone featuring rides, an assortment of bounce houses, the Rock and Roll, the Whirlybird, the Tumble Weed and other surprises. For a one-time fee of \$20 children can ride all day. Or purchase a wristband for \$15 for 15 tickets. Purchased separately each ticket is \$1.25. Each ride takes multiple tickets. Game Trailers are cash only, please no big bills. Amusements take cash or credit cards for wristbands and tickets.

# Seven high school seniors seek title of Urbanna Oyster Festival Queen

The 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival Queen and Little Miss Spat will be crowned 4 p.m. Friday, Nov. 7 inside the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department station (the Urbanna firehouse) at 335 Virginia St. This year, the seven Queen contestants and eight Little Miss Spat contestants raised thousands of dollars and contributed dozens of hours of community service.

As the Urbanna Oyster Festival has evolved over the years, so has the selection of the Queen and Little Miss Spat (a spat is a baby oyster). What was once a beauty pageant is now a scholarship-based competition for the Queens. The Queen contestants must be high school seniors and residents of Middlesex County. Each Queen contestant mentors a first grade contestant as her Little Miss Spat.

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This year's Queen hopefuls in alphabetical order include:

- Lorelei Cooke
- Elisabeth Gobush
- Macon Kissman
- Cara Moss
- Taylor Newman
- Kallie Robins
- Ashlynn Sears

This year's Little Miss Spat co-contestants in



Lorelei Cooke and Emersyn Soles



Elisabeth Gobush and Charlotte (Charlee) Parsley

alphabetical order include:

- Blakelee Anderson
- Sawyer Edwards
- Skyler Epperly
- Marilyn Major
- Blakelynn Moore
- Charlotte (Charlee) Parsley
- Camdyn Putney
- Emersyn Soles

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- Individual judges' interview
- Academic achievement

- A spontaneously written response to a random question

- Overall participation in the competition

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- Individual judges' interview
- Overall participation

The foundation of this competition is character building and community service. Each Queen contestant must volunteer a minimum of 25 hours benefiting Middlesex County.

For scholarship sponsor opportunities, email [christyhogge82@gmail.com](mailto:christyhogge82@gmail.com) or call 804-832-0036.



Macon Kissman and Camdyn Putney

## Past queens

- 1960 – Jean Stone
- 1961 – Tommy Lou Cusimano
- 1962 – Mary Kay Mercer
- 1963 – Charlie Pierce
- 1964 – Sandra Ward

- 1965 – Frances Marie Hall
- 1966 – Barbara Davis
- 1967 – Julie Marshall
- 1967 – Joyce Bowen
- 1968 – Patrice Thrift
- 1969 – Sheila Moore
- 1970 – Debra Marshall
- 1971 – Susan Harrow
- 1972 – Sandra Hogge

(See Queen, Page C7)

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# Queen...

(Continued from Page C6)

- 1973 – Carolyn Norton
- 1974 – Sharon Harrow
- 1975 – Susan Crittenden
- 1976 – Kathy Redmon
- 1977 – Shannon Warren
- 1978 – Leslie Pugh
- 1979 – Diana Durham
- 1980 – Tammy Jackson
- 1981 – Michele Mankowski
- 1982 – Tara Fuccella
- 1983 – Sandra Brahn
- 1984 – Noele Mankowski
- 1985 – Kelly McMurtrie
- 1986 – Sara Townsend
- 1987 – Gloria Mercer
- 1988 – Lisa Handley
- 1989 – Connie Wright
- 1990 – Stephanie Henley
- 1991 – Genessa Dail
- 1992 – Tammy Lynn Jackson
- 1993 – Jennifer Wright
- 1994 – Addie Rowilson-Hall
- 1995 – Katie Rothery
- 1996 – Jenny Walters
- 1997 – LaNae Briggs
- 1998 – Crystle Felthouse
- 1999 – Hannah Chowning
- 2000 – Ashley Rowe
- 2001 – Kelly Proctor
- 2002 – Casey Haynes
- 2003 – Lily Smith
- 2004 – Brittany Jones
- 2005 – Charlee Eades
- 2006 – Kenleighe Longest
- 2007 – Maggie Ballantyne
- 2008 – Ashley Figg
- 2009 – Kendall McNamee
- 2010 – Lauren Figg
- 2011 – Allison Crittenden
- 2012 – Allison Payne
- 2013 – Leigh Harrow
- 2014 – Angel Abbott
- 2015 – Austen-Taylor Dozier
- 2016 – Hailey Walton
- 2017 – Haley Revere
- 2018 – Elizabeth Wilding
- 2019 – Marissa Halbig
- 2020 – Katie Brooke
- 2021 – Madysen Davis
- 2022 – Courtney Harrow
- 2023 – Carina Bednarczyk
- 2024 – Hailey Bruce

## Past Little Miss Spats

- 1966 – Marie Barrett
- 1967 – Karen Strickland
- 1968 – Emma Jean Williams
- 1969 – Gwendolyn Major
- 1970 – Stacey Green
- 1971 – Linda Linthicum
- 1972 – Janna Fuccella



**Cara Moss and Sawyer Edwards**



**Taylor Newman and Marilyn Major**



**Kallie Robins, Blakelee Anderson and Blakelynn Moore**



**Ashlynn Sears and Sklyer Epperly**

- 1973 – Stephanie Brill
- 1974 – Wendy Burch
- 1975 – Cathy Kirby
- 1976 – Allison Hight
- 1977 – Carrie Randall
- 1978 – Margaret Montgomery
- 1979 – Wendy Coulson
- 1980 – Jennifer Jenkins
- 1981 – Kate Gaskins
- 1982 – Farrah Schultz
- 1983 – Brooke Ailsworth
- 1984 – McKann Folliard
- 1985 – Catherine Woodard
- 1986 – Shannon Russell
- 1987 – Lisa Boone
- 1988 – Heather Wilson
- 1989 – Jennifer Reardon
- 1990 – Sharon Carole White
- 1991 – Jamie Mears
- 1992 – Blair Rainier
- 1993 – Patricia Tanksley
- 1994 – Kimberly Hayes
- 1995 – Abby Rose Cosimini
- 1996 – Elly Montague
- 1997 – Kristin Jessie

- 1998 – Maggie Hall
- 1999 – Christine Rodgers
- 2000 – Allison Crittenden
- 2001 – Sarah Grace Hurley
- 2002 – Sarah Goodrich
- 2003 – Lauren Bleeker
- 2004 – Maggie Bull
- 2005 – Hailey Walton
- 2006 – Emilie Smith
- 2007 – Sarah Walton
- 2008 – Hope Britton
- 2009 – Katie Brooke
- 2010 – Emma Fairheart
- 2011 – Abigail Smiley
- 2012 – Bailey Fairheart
- 2013 – Anna Carey
- 2014 – Kallie Robins
- 2015 – Rori Stuart
- 2016 – Hannah Lambert
- 2017 – Bailey Pullman
- 2018 – Nadya Crader
- 2019 – Adalyn Parsley
- 2020 – Caroline Ward
- 2021 – Emalynn Norwood
- 2022 – Kayleigh Carias
- 2023 – Caitlynn Epperly
- 2024 – Josie Anton



# Festival to feature big parades on both Friday and Saturday

The annual Fireman's Parade is set for 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 7, and the Urbanna Oyster Festival Parade is set for 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 8.

The Fireman's Parade will wind its way through town, while the Oyster Festival Parade will bypass the main part of Virginia Street. Both parades will assemble on the west side of town.

Traditionally, the route of the Fireman's Parade is as follows: from the staging on the west side of town, east on Virginia Street, left on Grace Avenue, right on Bonner Street, left on Rappahannock Avenue, right on Marston Avenue, right on Cross Street, right on Virginia Street, and return to the staging area. The judges stand will be at the Urbanna Firehouse.

The Fireman's Parade will feature 80 fire and rescue units,

beauty queens and dignitaries. It is sponsored by the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department (MVFD) of Urbanna.

The Fireman's Dance follows the parade on the firehouse grounds from 8 p.m. to midnight with the band "The Usual Suspects," which performs rock and country tunes (beer garden gates open at noon on Friday). The dance is sponsored by Al Pugh Distributing with Budweiser, Bud Light, Michelob Ultra and Devils Backbone.

Saturday's Oyster Festival Parade will have more than 50 units, leading off with festival honorees and grand marshal and captains, queens and spats. About five or six high school bands will be marching in the parade.

Traditionally, the route of the Oyster Festival Parade is as

(See Parades, Page C9)

The Middlesex High School (MHS) Charger horse mascot, well-portrayed here by student Kyлина Morning, leads the MHS Band in the 2024 Urbanna Oyster Festival Parade. (Photo by Don Richeson)

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**Amateur:** Plaque awarded for 1st place  
 2nd and 3rd places will receive official Oyster Festival t-shirts  
 Sign up in Fireman's Field Saturday morning at 10 a.m.



## Parades...

(Continued from Page C8)

follows: from the staging area on the west side of town, east on Virginia Street, left on Grace Avenue, right on Bonner Street, left on Rappahannock Avenue, right on Marston Avenue, right on Cross Street, right on Prince George Street, left on Virginia Street, and return to the staging area. The judges stand will be at Virginia Street and Rappahannock Avenue, which is also the location of the festival headquarters for the weekend. Prime viewing is on Marston Avenue or Prince George Street.

### Fireman's Parade history

In 1939, Urbanna residents met to organize the first Volunteer

Fire Company in Middlesex County. After its organization, the new department purchased its first piece of equipment, a 500-gallon Ford pumper. The 1940 Ford, still owned by the department today, was the first and only fire truck in Middlesex.

By 1986, the parade on Saturday had gotten so large that festival officials decided to have a "Fireman's Parade" on Friday night. This exciting parade will feature more than 80 units from all over the state, including everything from giant ladder trucks to small brush trucks, ambulances and historic fire vehicles from the past. The units' sirens will be loud -- be sure to bring ear protection.

The men and women participating in this parade, unselfishly serve to protect property and save lives.



Lower Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department Firefighter Whit Walden drives the Deltaville station's ladder truck in the 2022 Fireman's Parade. In the left background, a man at a Polish sausage stand reacts. (Photo by Don Richeson)

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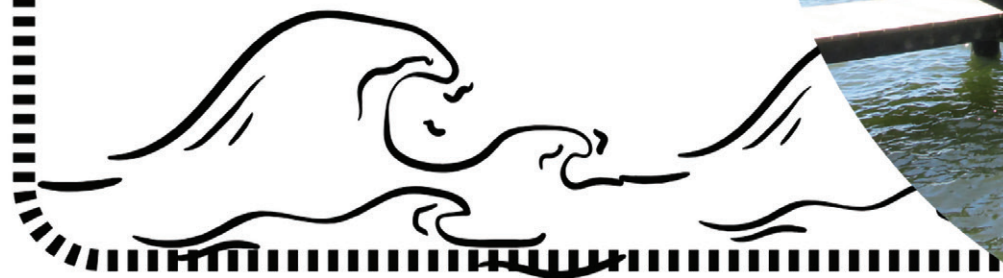
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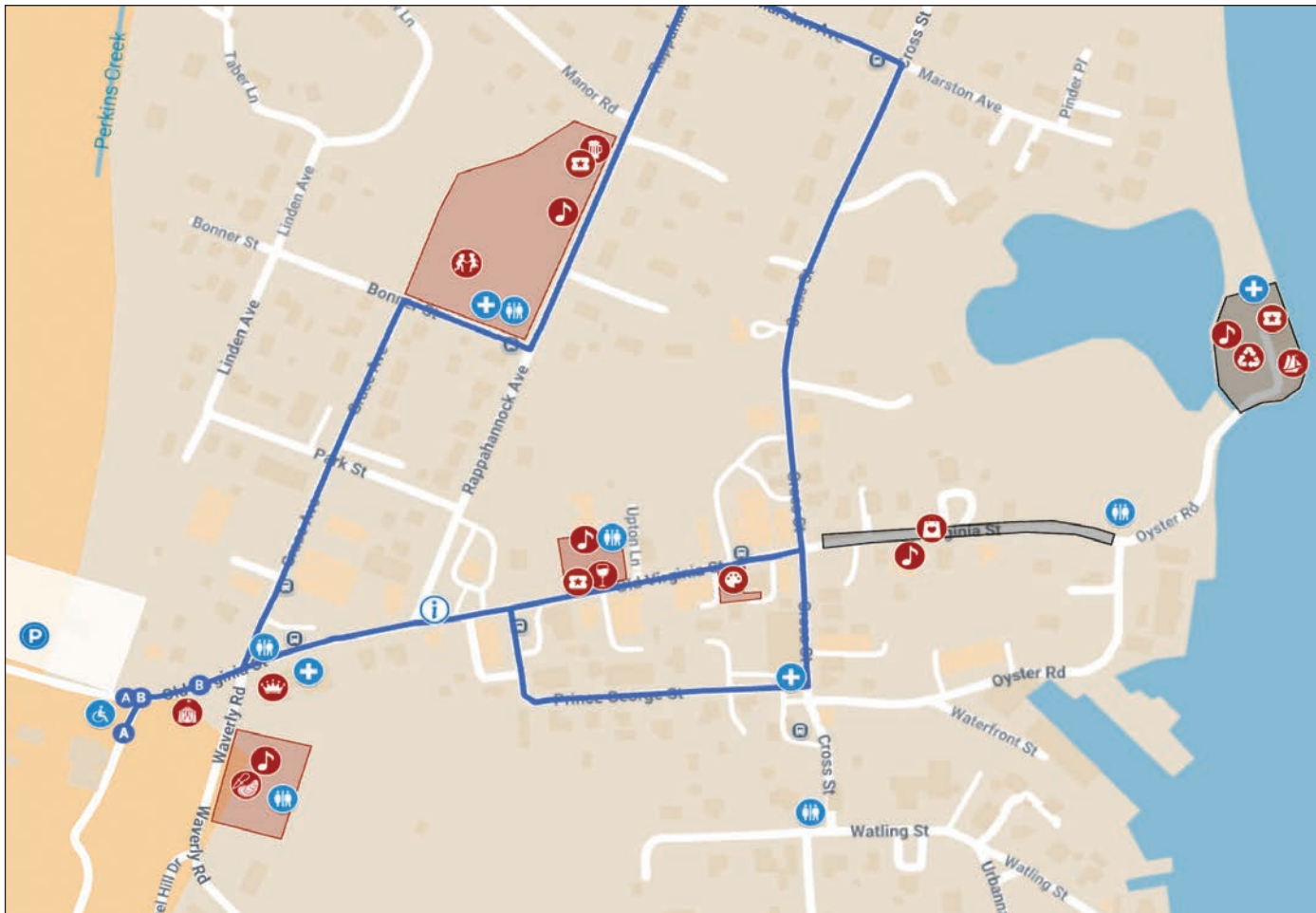
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**Events**

- Craft Beer Tasting
- Virginia Wine Tasting
- Fine Art Show
- Virginia Oyster Shucking Competition
- Oyster Festival Queen Crowning
- Festival Waterfront & Marine Legacy Program
- NEW! Carnival

**VIP Areas**

- VIP Craft Beer Area
- VIP Waterfront Area
- VIP Check-In / VIP Wine Area

**Festival Areas**

- Children's Activity Village
- Virginia Wine Area at Landsdowne
- Art Show Area
- Festival Village

**Music**

- The Unusual Suspects (Fireman's Dance)
- Festival Village Stage
- Virginia Wine Area Stage
- Scottish Factor Store Stage
- Waterfront Stage

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# Authorities to guard festival goers' safety

The Urbanna Oyster Festival (UOF) police headquarters will be at the intersection of Cross and Prince George streets in the parking lot behind Bay Design.

Emergency medical services will be covered by zones and stationed at the Urbanna firehouse on Virginia Street near Urbanna Market; Bonner Street and Rappahannock Avenue near Festival Village; and the intersection of Virginia and

Cross streets.

Lost and found will be at the Oyster Festival Information RV near the Urbanna Primis bank.

In a typical year, UOF emergency medical technicians (EMTs) respond to 40 calls during the festival, reported Middlesex County Sheriff David Bushey.

For information, call 804-758-2122 or visit [urbannaoysterfestival.com](http://urbannaoysterfestival.com).



Virginia State Police motorcycle troopers are part of the security team at the Urbanna Oyster Festival. (Photo by Tom Chillemi)

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Showing off their Urbanna pilsner glasses in the craft beer area are 2021 festival celebrants, front, from left, Francesca Sperberg of Lancaster, Rose Ribeiro of Richmond; and back, same order, Kirstie Milne of Richmond, Joy Laurence of Richmond, Kassi O'Brien of Richmond and Volunteer Jenny McMurtrie of Hartfield. (Photo by Don Richeson)

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## Craft beer tasting offered at far end of Festival Village

### Craft beer tasting

The craft beer tasting event will be at the far end of Festival Village. Craft beers have typically included:

- Bold Rock
- New Realm
- Port City
- That Damn Mary
- Devils Backbone
- Hardywood
- Dividing Creek

The \$15 admission includes a souvenir and four tastings. Brewery reps will be on hand to answer questions.

### Wine & Oyster tasting

Returning this year is wine tasting featuring several Virginia wineries. The wine tasting area will be on the lawn of Lansdowne at 271 Virginia St. in Urbanna from

10 a.m.-5 p.m. on both days of the festival. There is a \$20 admission fee.

“Boutique” oyster tasting from Rappahannock Oyster Company of Topping will bring the flavor of its oyster-tasting room, Merroir, located at Locklies Marina, to the wine tasting. The taste of these aquaculture-raised specialty oysters varies from heavy salt, sweet, and mildly salty, depending on where they were raised. Their names give a clue to their flavor — Olde Salts, Rappahannock River Oysters, and Stingray Oysters. Chefs will prepare the oysters, pairing them with local wines from Mattaponi Winery, Williamsburg Winery, Saude Creek Vineyard and Zoll Vineyards.

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# Luna and Lynx will offer deck tours for festival

by Larry Chowning

The Urbanna Oyster Festival has many traditions and in 1985 at the 28th annual oyster festival, the first tall ship, Alexandria, came to the town's waterfront, marking the beginning of an annual tradition with large sailing vessels down by the water.

This year, the Urbanna Oyster Festival Marine Science Legacy Program has scheduled quite a history lesson for the America's 250th anniversary celebration and the waterfront will feature Luna, a replica of a colonial sailing vessel that represented Virginia's Navy founded in the fall of 1775 and the tall ship Lynx, a replica of an 1812 privateer.

Deltaville Maritime Museum's boat shop manager John England, who for years has seen to it that the festival has had unique and appropriate watercraft down at the Urbanna Town Marina waterfront, said that the two vessels plan to arrive on Wednesday Nov. 5. "We are hoping they can arrive and enter the creek at about the



The colonial vessel replica Luna, home-ported in Deltaville and owned by the Colonial Seaport Foundation, will be available for deck tours while docked at the Urbanna Oyster Festival down at the waterfront at the Urbanna Town Marina. (Photo by Bob Waldrop)

same time, but weather, wind and tide will determine that," he said.

Luna, based in Deltaville, has a strong Middlesex County

connection as son, Jock, and father John "Chip" Collamore, who is a retired Deltaville boatbuilder, spearheaded the vision, concept, and

construction of the Luna and creation of the Colonial Seaport Foundation (CSF).

Luna is a reproduction of a typical colonial era coastal trading sloop that is used to support CSF's mission to provide hands-on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) educational opportunities, promotes environmental stewardship of the Rappahannock River/Chesapeake Bay, and serve as a traveling welcome center for Middlesex County and Middle Peninsula.

She is also a goodwill ambassador for the Museums of Middlesex County (MOM). MOM is a nonprofit

organization composed of four groups — the Deltaville Maritime Museum, Colonial Seaport Foundation, Middlesex County Museum and Historical Society and the Town of Urbanna Museum.

While Luna most often represents a cargo vessel, the original Luna was conscripted into military service in 1775 representing the State of Virginia Navy, which ultimately was to become the U.S. Navy. During the American Revolution, Luna was charged with disrupting and seizing British commerce, preventing British officials from establishing new strongholds on shore and intelligence gathering.

The tall ship Lynx is an educational organization dedicated to hands-on programs that teach history surrounding the struggle Americans faced at sea during the War of 1812. The ship is an interpretation of an actual privateer built in 1812 to serve in the War of 1812, when Americans, once again, had to take up arms against the British.

The original Lynx was involved in the 1813 "Battle of the Rappahannock," where she and three other privateers were captured by a British blockade.

The two vessels will be open for deck tours at the Urbanna Town Marina at 210 Oyster Road throughout the day on Friday and Saturday, Nov. 7 and 8. On Thursday, Nov. 6, the day before the festival starts, they will be participating in the annual Oyster Festival Marine Science Legacy's Education Day event. However, the vessels will not be open to the public on Thursday.



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Karen Glasgow, a visitor from Delray Beach, Fla. who was staying at Grey's Point Campground, chomps on a giant barbecued turkey leg as she strolls down Rappahannock Avenue on the first day of the 2022 Urbanna Oyster Festival. (Photo by Don Richeson)

# Festival food choices abound

More than 100 vendors will be open for business when the 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival begins at 10 a.m. on Friday and goes until midnight with the dance at the Urbanna firehouse, and on Saturday the festival runs from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Bring your appetite. An array of foods will be available from more than 30 food vendors.

The honored oyster is always featured in a variety of presentations — raw, roasted,

fried, steamed and stewed.

The famous Middlesex Lions Club oyster fritters are expected to return this year at their same location on Virginia Street at Rappahannock Avenue.

In addition, visitors can enjoy crab soup, crab bisque, seafood chowder, clams, crab cakes, shrimp, fish, corn dogs, sausages, hamburgers, hot dogs, turkey legs, roast beef, funnel cakes, kettle corn, roasted nuts, ice cream,

cotton candy, snow cones, candy apples and many other goodies.

In addition to great food and desserts, visitors will delight in the variety of crafts available throughout town. Among the many offerings are stained glass, wood carvings, sculpture, pottery, dolls, brass, silver, leather goods and jewelry. Many craft vendors will be in Taber Park on Rappahannock Avenue at Festival Village.



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The Urbanna Museum and Visitor's Center offers various interesting map exhibits. A couple checks out the rare 1755 John Mitchell Map during a previous Urbanna Oyster Festival. (Photo by Tom Chillemi)

## Museum items interesting

The historic James Mills Scottish Factor Store (formerly called the Old Tobacco Warehouse), which houses the Urbanna Museum and Visitor's Center on Virginia Street just up the hill from Urbanna Creek, will be open from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. both days of the Urbanna Oyster Festival.

A museum exhibit, "Oyster

is King," traces the influence of the oyster industry on the area.

Also on display is the rare 1755 John Mitchell Map, one of the earliest maps of the original 13 colonies. It was used to negotiate the treaties between Britain and the United States that ended the Revolutionary War. The map was recently restored and fills an entire wall.

There will be a live and video presentation of the historic James Mills Scottish Factor Store and the Mitchell Map inside the museum.

The museum porch overlooks "Community Row," sponsored by Primis bank, which will be on Virginia Street between Cross Street and the waterfront. Community Row will feature crafts, demonstrations and exhibits from Middlesex artists and local nonprofit groups.

**The Virginia General Assembly named the Urbanna Oyster Festival the state's official oyster festival in 1988.**

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# 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival Music Schedule

## FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7

Festival Village	10am - 4:30pm	Southern Rock Mafi
Waterfront	10am - 3:30pm	Rappahannock Crossing Bluegrass Band
Scottish Factor Store	10am - 3pm	Robert Keyes (Solo Fingerstyle Guitarist)
Wine Area	11am - 4pm	Morgan Stewart (R&B and Soul)
Firehouse	8pm - 12am	The Usual Suspects (Rock/Country)

## SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8

Oyster Shucking Contest	10am - 2pm	Warren & Co. (Folk/Americana)
Festival Village	10am - 4:30pm	REIN (Rock)
Waterfront	10am - 5pm	Chris & Jane (Americana)
Scottish Factor Store	9am - 4pm	Robert Keyes (Solo Fingerstyle Guitarist)
Wine Area	11am - 4pm	Jayla Coggins (Country)



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# Oyster Shucking Contest is at Urbanna firehouse

The Virginia Oyster Shucking Contest will start at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 7, behind the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department station (the Urbanna firehouse) at 335 Virginia St. Since Urbanna is the home of Virginia's "official" Oyster Festival, it is only appropriate

that some of the best oyster shuckers in the world practice their trade near the town. The top professional shucker in the contest typically wins \$300. The first place prize in each of the men's and women's divisions is \$100; second, \$50; and third, \$25.

The winner is declared state champion and advances to compete in the National Oyster Shucking Contest in St. Mary's County, Md., in October 2025. The National Champion then travels to Galway, Ireland to participate in the World Championship. Middlesex County's Deborah Pratt has made several trips to Galway, Ireland to defend her championship. Although the emphasis is on speed, other factors on which the contestants are judged include the amount of shell fragments, clean separation of the oyster from the shell and damage to the meat of the oyster.

There will be an amateur shucking competition with a plaque for the winner, and an official Oyster Festival poster for second and third place finishers. Registration begins at 10 a.m. behind the firehouse.

Last year's Urbanna Oyster Festival Shucking Contest winners include:

#### Professional division

Overall winner — Robert Minor, adjusted time, 3:08.

Second place — Hannah Bush, adjusted time, 4:55.

#### Men's professional division, six contestants

First place — Robert Minor, Gwynn's Island, adjusted time, 3:04.

Second place — Sam Davis, adjusted time, 3:06.

Third place — Joey McComas, Weems, adjusted time, 3:53.

#### Women's professional division, three contestants

First place — Hannah Bush, Manassas, adjusted time, 3:58.

Second place — Jaime Southern-Kline, Norfolk, adjusted time, 4:35.

Third place — Deborah Pratt, Jamaica, adjusted time, 6:15.



Seated amid the Urbanna firehouse crowd of spectators, Brandy Minor of Gwynn's Island and her cousin, Lettie Vought of Hampton, wave a giant photo image of Brandy's father, Robert Minor, as he competes in the 2024 Urbanna Oyster Festival professional shucking contest, which he won. (Photo by Don Richeson)

#### Amateur division, six contestants

First place — Eric Speth, Cobbs Creek, adjusted time, 2:46.

Second place — Cyrus

Brame, New Kent, adjusted time, 3:04.

Third place — George White, Shipman, adjusted time, 3:06.



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# Meet the 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival captain

by Larry Chowning

The Urbanna Oyster Festival Foundation has named Sarah Hammond Stokes, 86, of Urbanna as captain of the 2025 festival.

A Middlesex County native, Stokes surprised a field of women oyster shuckers in 1983 at the Virginia oyster shucking contest in Urbanna winning the female championship and earning a trip to St. Mary's County, Md. to compete in the national oyster shucking contest.

She surprised everyone at the national championship at St. Mary's by winning the women's championship and then captured the overall (men/women) competition, both times with the slowest times, but with the cleanest shucks.

During the contest, each shucker is allowed to select 24 oysters for each heat. The object is to shuck them as fast as possible and arrange them on the half-shell as attractively and with as little damage to each individual oyster as possible. Stokes had the magic touch with her arrangements and had the most clean/undamaged shucked oysters of all.

With her win at the national contest, she won an all expense paid trip to Galway Ireland to compete in the 1984 international oyster shucking contest. Entrants from nine countries competed in the international



Sarah Hammond Stokes was the National Oyster Shucking champion in 1984 and placed third in the world competition at Galway, Ireland. (Sentinel file photo)

event and Stokes finished third in the competition.

"It was one of the greatest experiences of my life," said Stokes, who lives in Urbanna, but is currently in the

Riverside Saluda Lifelong Health and Rehabilitation Center recovering from an illness. "I was so proud when the three finishers in Galway got to stand on the stage with

the flag of their country. They gave me an American flag to hold. It was one of my proudest moments."

Stokes was the trailblazer for other Virginia women shuckers such as Deborah Pratt, a three-time national champion and a second place finisher in 1997 and third place in 1994 at the International Oyster Shucking contest in Galway.

## Stokes history

Stokes grew up in the Revis area of Middlesex and her first job was as a field hand picking tomatoes and vegetables for Crittenden's and other farms in the county. She picked vegetables in the spring and worked in a Remlik crab picking house during warmer weather months.

Along about 1960, her friend Georgia Foster asked her if she would fill in for her at Ferguson's Seafood oyster shucking house. She needed a day off. Stokes went to work that day and before the day was over, Foreman Jasper Bray told her, he had a "box" shucking stall for her anytime she wanted it.

"I think working in the shucking house was some of the happiest days of my life," she said. "There were about 40 women and men shuckers at Ferguson's then and we all

got along good."

The Remlik shucking house was one of the largest in Virginia. "I was never the fastest shucker, but I always shucked a real clean oyster. I had very few cuts on the meat," she said.

The fastest oyster shucker Stokes said she ever saw was George "Pee-Wee" Hodges. "The first day I went to the shucking house Pee-Wee came over and gave me some tips. I've never seen anyone shuck an oyster faster than Pee-Wee, but I think mine were cleaner.

"I worked in shucking houses as long as I was able," she said. When Stokes competed in the 1983 Virginia Oyster Shucking contest she was sponsored by Elmo Marshall, who owned C.E. Marshall Seafood Inc. in Church View.

"We are delighted to have Sarah as our 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival captain," said Festival Chairman Joe Heyman. "We hold this festival every year as a reminder of the amazing roll that the oyster industry played in the history, culture and economic growth of our area. Sarah is a tribute to that culture!"

This year's festival, the 68th one, is set for Nov. 7 and 8 in downtown Urbanna.

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# Meet the 2025 Oyster Festival grand marshal

Lansdowne, circa 1740, is the large colonial brick mansion that graces downtown Urbanna at 271 Virginia St. and is considered by many the structural centerpiece of the town.

by Larry Chowning

The Urbanna Oyster Festival Foundation (UOFF) named Col. (retired) Arthur Broaddus “A.B.” Gravatt III of Urbanna and Lansdowne grand marshal of the 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival.

Gravatt grew up in Kilmarnock and was attending Old Dominion University (ODU) when he met his wife to be — the late Diane Sampson. They were students at ODU and had started dating. In 1965, A.B. brought Diane home to meet his parents. His mother suggested that for an outing they take the whiskey run on the Miss Ann from Tides Inn to Urbanna.

“We walked up into town and went to Marshall’s Drug Store and I introduced her to Tom (Doc) Marshall and then we walked around town,” he said. “When we got to Lansdowne she said she wanted to go inside.”

“I had heard many times from old timers, there is not a house in Virginia that at least one door isn’t open and we found one,” he said. “She walked inside, looked around and when we got outside she looked at me and said, ‘If I marry you, will you get me this house?’”

According to A.B., when the Gravatts first saw colonial

Lansdowne it had been vacant and vandalized several times over the years. “It wasn’t very pretty to me, but Diane loved it,” said A.B.

Diane and A.B. married in 1967 on a Sunday and he was drafted to go to Vietnam on Monday, he said. Actually his father had been told A.B. was going to be drafted, so A.B. joined the Army on Oct. 5, 1967 on a delayed enlistment plan and eventually went to Officers Candidate School (OCS), got a commission and after completing OCS went to Vietnam.

After getting married, the Gravatts spent 31 years in active duty in the United States Army moving from place to place. “Every time we would move, Diane would ask, ‘When are you going to buy me Lansdowne so we can retire to Urbanna?’”

Over the years, Diane watched the progression of owners and when the time came in 1998 A.B.’s father and Bob Montague talked to the current owners about selling to A.B. and Diane. On July 5, 1998 they purchased Lansdowne and A.B. kept his 1965 promise to Diane.

The Gravatts restored the 1740s Lansdowne back to its elegance and Diane gifted her time and talents to become mayor of the town. She died unexpectedly on May 6, 2021.

“This is an honor for me to be named grand marshal, but this is really about Diane,” he said. “She is the grand marshal. The first time she saw Urbanna she loved the town.”

“One of her wishes was that



Col. (retired) Arthur Broaddus “A.B.” Gravatt III of Urbanna and Lansdowne, in background, has been named grand marshal of the 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival. (Photo by Larry Chowning)

Lansdowne could be seen by the public,” he said. “When she was alive we opened the house to house tours and since she died I have allowed the grounds to be used by nonprofits for fundraisers. I know it has been open to the public a 100 times and that’s what Diane wanted.”

UOFF Chairman Joe Heyman said, “A.B. and Diane have done much to make Lansdowne accessible to the public; they did an amazing renovation to carry Lansdowne for future generations to enjoy. The foundation is so proud to name A.B. the grand marshal for 2025.”

## More

See related story, page 24.



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# Reader shares more info on Urbanna's Lansdowne

by Larry Chowning

Sometimes mistakes foster good stories. That's the case of a recent mistake in an article written in the Sept. 25 issue of the Southside Sentinel on the Urbanna Oyster Festival's 2025 grand marshal Arthur Broaddus "A.B." Gravatt III of Lansdowne.

Mary Kay Hight of Urbanna grew up in town and she recalls clearly that Lansdowne had not been "boarded up since 1934" as the article stated.

Born in 1945, she recalls as a child annually going to the front porch of the colonial mansion in the early to mid-1950s and

getting a Halloween treat.

"When I was a little girl in the 1940s and 50s Miss Bessie Mae Brown lived in Lansdowne with two caretakers, Emma and Howard, a Black couple who I did not know their last names," she said.

"She had a niece, Penny Goode, of Hampton who came up to spend summers with her aunt at Lansdowne," said Hight. "Penny and I spent a lot of time together playing in Lansdowne and on the grounds.

"A school teacher, Miss Bessie Mae was a role model and highly respected. Even the worst disciplined children in town knew better than to mess

around with her," she said. "Every Halloween she would get a bushel basket full of red apples and put them on the front porch of Lansdowne for a Halloween treat.

"The children in town knew that every year they could get a ripe red apple on the front steps of Lansdowne from Miss Bessie Mae's basket," said Hight.

"There was no note saying how many we could take, but believe me we all just took one," she said. "It was all on an honor system but who of us wanted to take the chance of taking more than one apple and getting caught in the act."

Miss Bessie Mae Brown was born April 4, 1893 in Urbanna and started a full-time teaching career that lasted from 1911 to 1963. After mandatory retirement in 1963, she substituted for 12 years in the county school system and taught for six years in the summer at Christchurch School for boys. She taught several generations of seventh graders in the Middlesex County Public Schools system at Urbanna Elementary School and at Middlesex High School (MHS) when countywide consolidation of seventh grade white students moved the seventh grade to Middlesex High School in Saluda.

Hight said Lansdowne was abandoned probably in the late 1950s when one of the caretakers passed away and Miss Bessie Mae moved out. When the late Diane and A.B. Gravatt first looked at the house in 1967 no one had been living there for about 10 years.

The Gravatts purchased Lansdowne in 1998 and have restored the 1740s home back to its original elegance. A.B. has been named grand marshal of the 2025 festival, but proudly admits it should be an honor for his late wife Diane. She died unexpectedly on May 6, 2021.



Col. (retired) Arthur Broaddus "A.B." Gravatt III of Urbanna wears a stylish colonial-themed outfit as he motors to an Urbanna Founders Day event on a modern-day scooter. (Photo by Don Richeson)

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# The history of oyster shucking in Middlesex County

by Larry Chowning

During colonial Virginia's 1640s real estate land rush, the first official English settlers arrived in Lancaster County and, what would become Middlesex County, armed with markers, pads and broad axes to record and mark their land grant property lines.

They paddled and poled along creeks and coves looking for prime real estate for the building of a home and good land to grow tobacco. A signature of attractive waterfront property then was when there were mounds of oyster shells jutting out of the water near the shore.

For generations, Native Americans roasted oysters for sustenance and disposed of shells by tossing them onto mounded shell piles in the water. As an afterthought, settlers were looking for waterfront property where oysters flourished close to shore; but their main search was for land already cleared by Native Americans for agriculture. The mounded in-water oyster piles were a sign the land had been used as a village or home of Native Americans. The elimination of the laborious task of removing trees and forest to grow tobacco was an attractive feature of property to those early settlers.

Once settlers established their boundaries, built their homes and started living there, the oyster became a vital part in the lives of Tidewater Virginians. The bivalve provided a nature grown food source for colonists just a short walk from their homes and the oyster would later go on to become an economic force in the area's economy.

## Northern oystermen

Through the late 1600s and well into the 1700s, Virginia developed a cottage industry around oysters. As the population moved inland resulting in some Virginians having less access to the water and oysters, a cottage industry evolved. Oystermen tonged oysters and sold oysters-in-the-shell to neighbors and friends not so inclined or able to go out and harvest their own.



A young Boyd Hurley stands in his father's oyster house at the turn of the 20th century on a mound of oysters ready to be shucked. Wooden shucking stalls can be seen on the shucking line. (Courtesy of the late Jonsey Payne)

The market expanded as the customer base grew with people wanting shucked raw meat all ready to drop into a frying pan or an oyster stew pot. To meet that demand, oystermen built small buildings onto their property to shuck oysters out of the weather and where customers could come to buy.

As demand for oysters grew beyond the neighborhoods as transportation and refrigeration improved, oystermen hired other oystermen as shuckers and expanded the size of their oyster houses to increase production.

This cottage industry was already well established when in the late 1700s New York, New Jersey and Connecticut oyster boats arrived on the Chesapeake to beg, borrow and steal oysters to meet an enormous supply and demand in New York City and elsewhere in the north.

By then, Northern oyster growers had long ago passed the cottage industry stage and the large population in the north had depleted oysters on natural beds in their rivers and were unable to privately grow oysters fast enough to meet demand.

The Yanks introduced Chesapeake Bay oystermen to the national market scene and within a decade or two large oyster shucking houses in Virginia and Maryland

were built on the bay to meet increasing national demand for shucked Chesapeake Bay oysters.

**J.W. Hurley & Son Seafood  
1890s-1950s**

In waterfront towns and at steamboat landings, particularly those on the Rappahannock River where superb market size oysters grow, shucking houses sprang up. Small two and three-

man shucking houses were scattered on most every creek and stream up to fresh water lines in the rivers where oysters stop growing.

The industry started well before the Civil War, but in the aftermath of the war oysters provided sustenance and a major boost to the local economy. While many areas in Virginia suffered the economic depression associated with the South losing the war, the oyster industry helped Tidewater Virginia rebound economically.

The Town of Urbanna had one of the largest oyster shucking houses in the region, J.W. Hurley & Son Seafood. Hurley was from Hurlock, Maryland. He discovered Urbanna and the Rappahannock River while buying oysters for an Eastern Shore of Maryland oyster company. He liked the area, moved here and established a shucking house and seafood business at the

(See History, Page C29)



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**WANT TO HELP?** The shelter is in need of non-grain dog food which you can drop off or send to the Middlesex County Animal Shelter located at 2840 General Puller Hwy, Saluda, VA 23149.

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# Woman's Club has bisque at festival

These ladies have been mixing and stirring up their world famous crab bisque for the Urbanna Oyster Festival. You may purchase it in advance from a club member or contact Sabrina Klunder at [sklunder@gmail.com](mailto:sklunder@gmail.com). Quarts purchased in advance are \$32. You can purchase quarts during the festival for \$40. Cups will also be available during the festival for \$10. Buy or pick up at the group's clubhouse (the colonial courthouse) at 210 Virginia St. in Urbanna. Proceeds from sales go towards preserving the club's historic colonial courthouse building, scholarships for local students and community support projects.

(Contributed)

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Holiday Pop-Up  
 Market  
 (Nov 12-Dec 31)



VIP Experience returns; is sold out once again

The VIP Oyster Lovers Experience returns for its seventh year and has sold out for both days.

Included for VIPs are exclusive VIP tables and seating, support from a festival concierge to help navigate the event, private restroom facilities, bottled waters, discounts at local businesses from November 2025 to April 2026, VIP seating at the Virginia Oyster Shucking Contest on Saturday, Nov. 7, a 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival commemorative poster, six wine tastings, six beer tastings, six oyster tastings, and a gift swag bag.

Plan ahead for 2026 and find VIP ticket information online at [urbannaoysterfestival.com](http://urbannaoysterfestival.com). VIPs must be 21 years or older to purchase a ticket. An ID will be required.



Magician and juggler Jonathan Austin “wows” the Taber Park crowd in 2023 with his high energy and mesmerizing acts in the children’s area of the Urbanna Oyster Festival. (Photo by Tom Chillemi)

## Child-friendly fun offered

Wildlings Play Scapes is hosting and Atlantic Union Bank is sponsoring the family friendly children’s activity area in Festival Village, where children ages 4-10 will get creative. Hands-on crafts available for children include paper bag puppets, foam animal hats, sand art, necklaces, face painting and many zoo animal themed crafts.

A magician/juggler is

typically on hand to wow the crowd with his high energy and mesmerizing acts in the children’s area on Friday from 10 a.m. to noon and again at 1 to 4 p.m. There will be carnival games provided by R.T.’s Midway Entertainment.

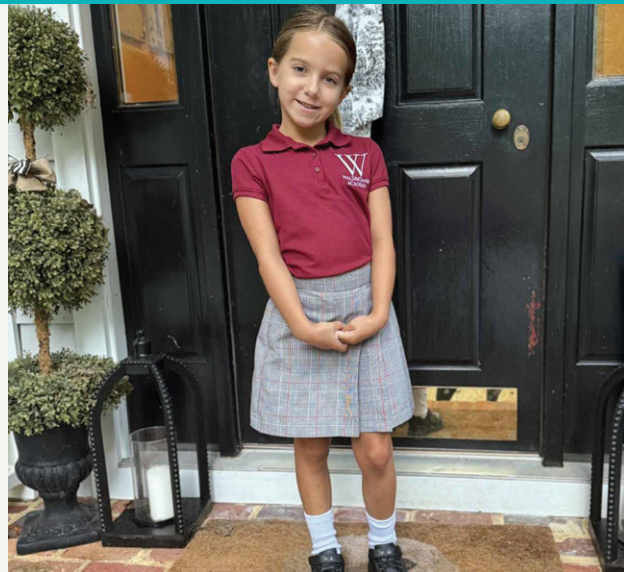
Nursing and diaper changing areas will be available.

Make your way to this crafty area in Festival Village where it’s all about kids!



## Quilt raffle

The Middlesex County Woman’s Club quilters have completed this amazing quilt for the Urbanna Oyster Festival yearly raffle. The quilt is called “Bounty of Middlesex.” Raffle tickets are on sale for \$1 or six for \$5. Buy tickets Friday, Nov. 7 at the group’s clubhouse (the colonial courthouse) at 210 Virginia St. in Urbanna. The drawing will be Saturday afternoon. For information, email Jean Kostas at [jgk25@verizon.net](mailto:jgk25@verizon.net). (Contributed)



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# History...

(Continued from Page C25)

foot of Virginia Street in town. His brand “King of Them All Famous Rappahannock River Oysters” became known nationwide.

During the oyster season, African-American shuckers came to Urbanna from surrounding counties to work at Hurley’s and at other shucking houses. Hurley’s employed between 50 to 100 shuckers to shuck between 300 and 400 bushels of “shucking stock” daily. To accommodate housing for shuckers, a boarding facility called the “Long House” was built on the shoreline. African-Americans lived in the Long House and worked six days a week.

In a 1985 Southside Sentinel interview with a Hurley employee, the late Woodland Rowe of Urbanna, he spoke of a day in the life at the shucking house. “When I came to Hurley’s (in the late 1920s) there were about 50 to 60 shuckers working, but I was told that in the early days (1890s) there were as many as a hundred shuckers. Most of them were Black males, but later on we had more Black female shuckers. I loved the sounds of the shuckers. They would hum and sing as they worked. Some of them could really sing too, boy. I was a good Methodist and attended Urbanna Methodist Church. We had a great choir, but I have to admit that shucking house choir was better.

“They would start work



**At the turn of the 20th century oyster shuckers at J.W. Hurley Seafood employed an all-male shucking crew. Later, female African-Americans worked the oyster stalls. (Courtesy of the late Jonsey Payne)**

around 6 a.m. and leave at 5 p.m. During breakfast and lunch, they gathered around the pot-bellied woodstove, ate sandwiches and canned sardines and told jokes to one another. They shucked oysters into a galvanized bucket. When full, the bucket was emptied and a tally was kept of each full bucket from each individual shucker. Shuckers were paid by the number of gallons shucked in a day. The shucked oysters were taken to a skimming room where the raw meat was cleaned of shell and grit, and measured to determine the shuckers wages. “While I was there shuckers were paid between 30 and 35 cents a gallon. Oysters were packaged for market in five-, 10- and 15-gallon containers, sealed and covered with ice” he said.

“Part of my job was to be the maintenance man. In those days, shuckers worked in wooden shucking stalls (called boxes by some), and I made every one of them. We had standard size stalls, but I even made custom

stalls. When Mason Carter got old, Mr. Hurley told me to make him a box (stall) he could step into and a board fit across it for a seat.”

There were also day men, or shell wheelers, hired to clean up and keep shuckers in oysters. “They were hired and paid by the hour. Oysters were handled in bushel oak-splint or wicker baskets.” Later, Boyd Hurley got wire baskets. I was told oak-splint bushel baskets were brought here by Yankee oystermen,” said Rowe. “The wicker baskets were purchased from Baltimore and delivered by steamboat at Burton’s

(steamboat) Wharf.”

The Hurley’s sold most of their oysters to O.E. Wentworth Co. in Baltimore. Hurley oysters were shipped to Baltimore six days a week by steamboat. On Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday they were shipped from Burton’s (steamboat) Wharf at the foot of Watling Street.

On Wednesdays, Rowe trucked iced-down oysters to West Urbanna (steamboat) Wharf at the end of Lord Mott Road. “Wednesday was the only day the side-wheeler (steamboat) Middlesex came in the river,” said Rowe. “It always

went to West Urbanna Wharf because it was too big to turn around in Urbanna Creek.” On other days, the smaller (prop driven) steamers came into the creek landings to pick up Hurley’s product.

“Steamboats did not run on the Rappahannock on Saturdays, so I hauled oysters to West Point on the York River in a snub-nose International truck to catch the steamboat there bound for Baltimore. Sometimes I’d be a half-day driving to West Point. There weren’t many good roads back then,” said Rowe.

Large area shucking houses were scattered along both sides of the Rappahannock into the 1960s and 1970s when the oyster diseases MSX and dermo brought the natural strikes almost to a halt — all of the large shucking houses shut down

Virginia and Maryland efforts to bring back the oyster by developing disease-resistant oysters and developing aquaculture methods tremendously aided in revival of the oyster fishery. The ancient craft of opening oysters can still be found inside the small roadside oyster houses on the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula.




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## Family fun abounds at the Urbanna Oyster Festival

The Brewington family (left) of Hartfield is loaded down with festival trinkets as they have fun in Taber Park during the 2022 Urbanna Oyster Festival. Dad Chris sips from a palm tree cup while holding an inflatable guitar. Daughter Montana, 5, holds an inflatable unicorn and mom Zaneta eats frozen ice. Tristan Steel (right) of Hartfield watches as Water View mother Scarlett Ebinger places the face of her daughter, Elizabeth Ebinger, in a festival cut-out at the children's playground in Taber Park during the 2022 festival. (Photos by Don Richeson)

## Group works to restore oysters

by Jen Sagan

I'm Jen Sagan, the oyster restoration specialist with Friends of the Rappahannock. We're an environmental nonprofit focused on advocacy, restoration and education for the Rappahannock River and its tributaries, and we've had a wonderful partnership for over 10 years with other stakeholders in Urbanna through the Restore Urbanna Creek project.

We also aim to recycle all of the oyster shells at the Urbanna

Oyster Festival annually to be used for oyster reef restoration projects.

Friends of the Rappahannock has a robust oyster shell recycling program, which collects shells from restaurants, festivals (including Urbanna Oyster Festival), and individuals to be used for oyster reef restoration. These shells are used as a substrate for new oysters to grow on — this base of an oyster shell with new juvenile oysters growing on it is known as spat-on-shell. Spat on

shell allows the oysters to grow out into a nice cluster which is ideal for the formation of the nice three dimensional reef structure that provides habitat and protects shorelines.

Every summer I grow these spat-on-shell oysters as well as collaborate with local oyster farms to grow individual seed oysters.

Thanks to these two growing methods, we surpass one to two million oysters grown and installed for restoration annually. In the past, we focused largely on restoration on oyster leases, but have recently started pursuing more homeowner and community-based shoreline projects. We collaborate with Rosegill to restore an oyster lease in their name. This past summer of 2025, I had the pleasure of growing and installing approximately 350,000 diploid oysters for Urbanna residents. Thanks to the growing community interest in Urbanna, I foresee many more oysters going into the Urbanna waterways in the next few years.

I encourage people to reach out to me at [jennifer.sagan@riverfriends.org](mailto:jennifer.sagan@riverfriends.org) for project questions or interest in volunteering with me at OysterFest!

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# Signature events schedule for Urbanna Oyster Festival

## UOF Friday events include:

- 10 a.m.-5 p.m. — Fine Art Show, Carnival.
- 11 a.m.-5 p.m. — Craft beer tasting, Virginia wine tasting.
- 4 p.m. — Festival Queen and Little Miss Spat crowning.
- 7 p.m. — Fireman's Parade.

## UOF Saturday events include:

- 9 a.m.-3 p.m. — Fine Art Show.
- 9 a.m.-5 p.m. — Carnival.
- 11 a.m. — Virginia Oyster Shucking Competition.
- 11 a.m.-5 p.m. — Craft beer tasting, Virginia wine tasting.
- 2 p.m. — Oyster Festival Parade and raffle announcement.

## Southside Sentinel

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Don Richeson, Editor

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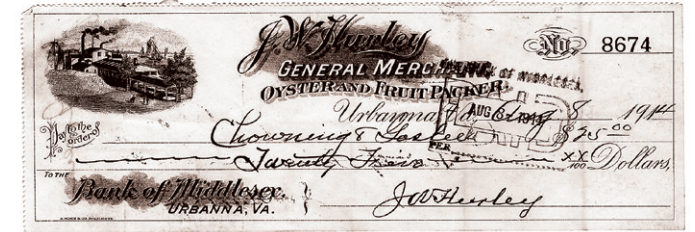
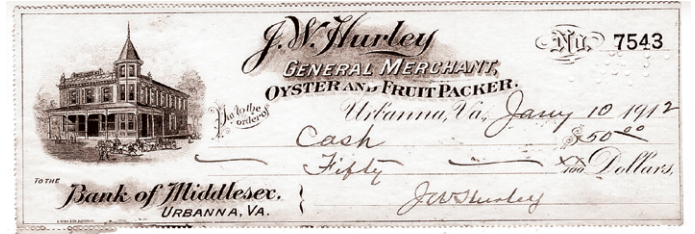
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# Presenting some oyster images from yesteryear



These “hand tongs” (above) are catching oysters from a Potomac River dory. Hand tongs were introduced on the bay in the early 1700s. During the early part of the 20th century Urbanna was a center of oyster packing and J.W. Hurley oyster and fruit packer (right) was one of the largest in the region. (Photos courtesy of the Calvert Marine Museum and the late Walt Hurley)



African-American Leary Dickerson of Jamaica in Middlesex County patented the oyster punching machine in 1924 designed to eliminate oyster shuckers from the process. The machine was never well received as hand shucking produces a cleaner shucked oyster.

(Courtesy of William B. Dickerson)



These oystermen are working off a deadrise boat with a Hooper’s Island Drake tail style stern. The photo was taken in the 1950s in the Rappahannock River.

(Courtesy of the late Ben Williams.)

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## Festival overflows with folks on bright afternoons with good fall weather

Perfect weather brought thousands and thousands of visitors that filled Virginia Street on Friday afternoon during the 2023 Urbanna Oyster Festival. (Photo by Tom Chillemi)

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# TOWN OF URBANNA

## PUBLIC NOTICE 2025 OYSTER FESTIVAL STREET AND PARKING RESTRICTIONS

The Virginia Department of Transportation has approved the following 2025 Urbanna Oyster Festival Street and Parking Restrictions pursuant to Resolutions 2025-016 and 2025-017 of the Urbanna Town Council:

### **Parking Restrictions**

Parking restrictions will be in effect within the corporate limits of the Town of Urbanna between 2am, Friday, November 7, 2025 and 11pm, Saturday, November 8, 2025, to ensure pedestrian safety, safe movement of police, fire, and rescue vehicles as well as safe parade operations. Certain streets may be opened for parking earlier than 11pm Saturday, depending on the determination of law enforcement authorities.

**No-Parking areas will be designated as Tow-Away Zones and towing will be at the owner's expense. The no-parking/tow-away zones for both sides of the streets in Urbanna include:**

Urbanna Rd. from the bridge to the Watling St. intersection. Watling St. from its intersection with Urbanna Rd. at the traffic triangle to Cross St. Cross St. from its intersection with Watling St. all the way past the Marston Ave. intersection. Prince George St. from Cross St. to Virginia St. Virginia St. east from Waverly Rd. to Oyster Rd. Marston Ave. from Cross St. to Rappahannock Ave. Rappahannock Ave. south from the Marston Ave. intersection to Virginia St. Marston Ave. east from Cross St. to first house on each side of street. Bonner St. west from Rappahannock Ave. to Linden Ave. Grace Ave. from Bonner St. to Virginia St. Park St. from Rappahannock Ave. to Linden Ave. Upton Ln. by the Post Office, Hilliard St., Rappahannock Ave., Cross St., Oyster Rd., Prince George St., and Kent St. in their entirety.

### **Urbanna Street Restrictions**

Other Restrictions: On Friday, November 7, and Saturday, November 8, 2025, law enforcement authorities may close selected streets to routine traffic as crowd and public safety actions dictate.

### **Town Entrance Restrictions**

Friday, November 7, 2025, vehicular traffic entering or leaving the Town will be prohibited beginning at 5pm on the west side (Route 602) in the vicinity of Lord Mott Rd. and beginning at 6pm on the east side (Route 227) in the vicinity of Rosegill for the Fireman's Parade. These Routes will be closed to all traffic attempting to enter the Town of Urbanna except to facilitate the movement of police and emergency vehicles. The Town of Urbanna will remain closed until 9pm or later depending on the determination of law enforcement authorities. Saturday, November 8, 2025, 9am or earlier if deemed necessary by law enforcement authorities, State Route 227 (Urbanna Rd.) will be closed in the vicinity of Molly's Way, and State Route 602 (Virginia St.) will be closed in the vicinity of Red Hill Dr. These Routes will be closed to all traffic attempting to enter the Town of Urbanna except to facilitate the movement of police and emergency vehicles. The Town of Urbanna will remain closed until 8pm or later depending on the determination of law enforcement authorities. At any time, law enforcement authorities may temporarily close the Town to routine traffic as crowd and public safety actions dictate.

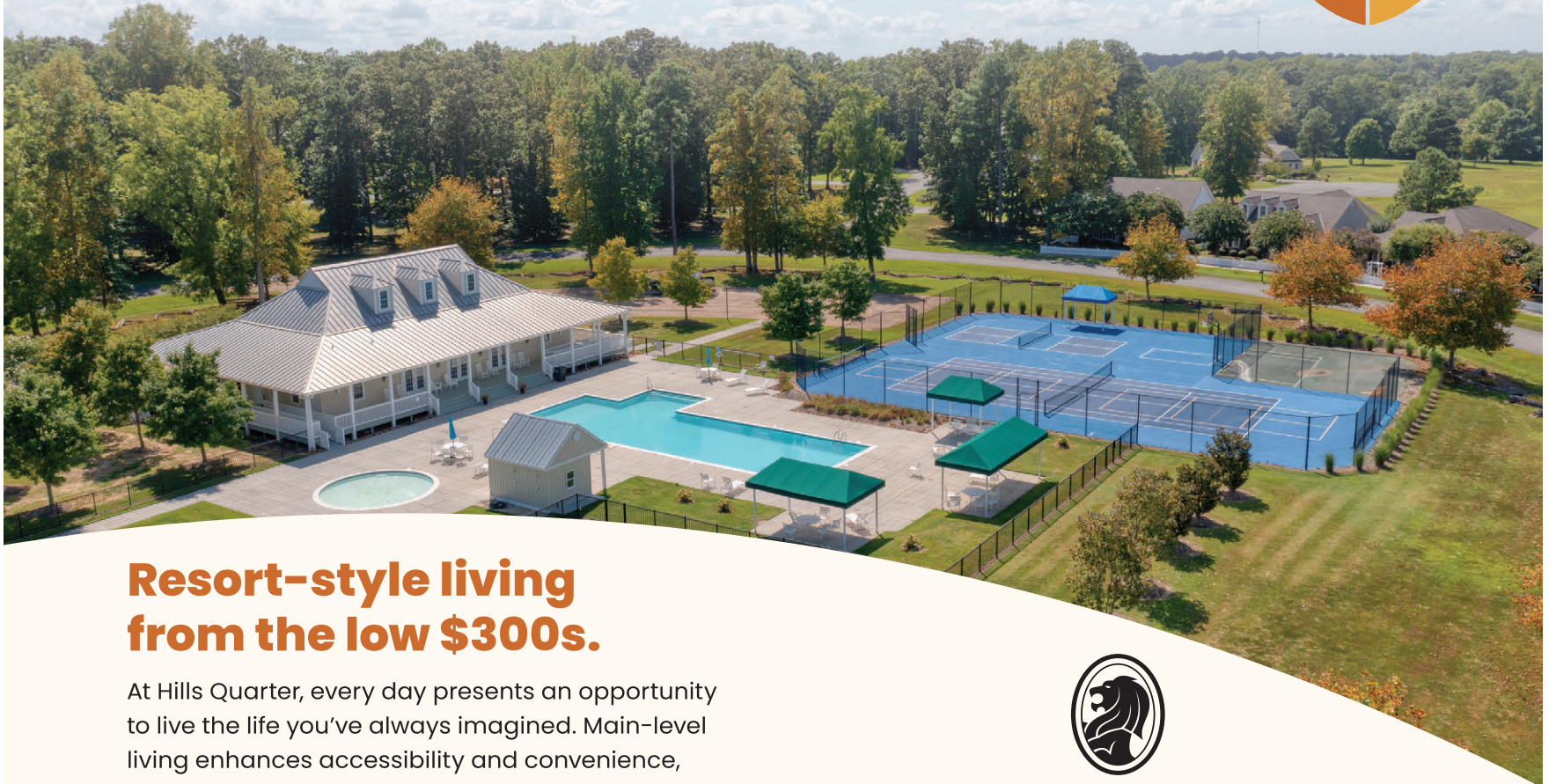
### **Parade Routes and Times**

The Friday, November 7, 2025, Fireman's Parade will begin at 7pm and commence east on Virginia St. from the area of the Urbanna Professional Center, left on Grace St., right on Bonner St., left on Rappahannock Ave., right on Marston Ave., right on Cross St., right on Virginia St. to a disband area where the parade began. The Saturday, November 8, 2025, Oyster Festival Parade will begin at 2pm and will commence east from the staging and formation area at the Waverly Commons Office Building on Virginia St., left on Grace St., right on Bonner St., left on Rappahannock Ave., right on Marston Ave., right on Cross St., right on Prince George St., left on Virginia St. to a disband area where the parade began.

**GOLF CARTS ARE NOT ALLOWED IN THE FESTIVAL AREA**



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