The 69th Annual

OYSTER FESTIVAL

20 Urbanna, VA

26 Nov. 6-7



2026 SUPPLEMENT TO THE
Southside Sentinel



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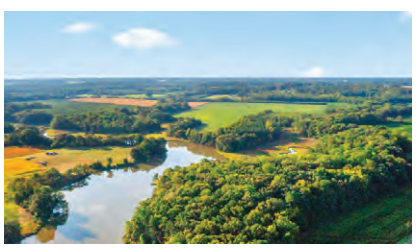
Karin Andrews combines expert knowledge of historic, waterfront, and equestrian properties with a passion for Virginia's scenic landscapes and a deep commitment to preservation. Her experience as an architectural illustrator and horsewoman, along with a love of gardening and community involvement, allows her to understand each client's unique goals and deliver truly personalized service that honors both property and owner.

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ON THE COVER:
2026 UOF POSTER

Lauren Ahnemann of Hartfield is the winner of this year's Urbanna Oyster Festival poster contest. The 69th Urbanna Oyster Festival 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, Lauren will receive $500.

The following bio info on this year's poster winner is from the website at https://www.laurenahnemann.com/:

"My name is Lauren Ahnemann, and I am an illustrator and designer studying at Virginia Commonwealth University. I love to bring whimsy and magic into my work through playful characters, enchanting settings, and fantasy themes. I am interested in children's book illustration, publication and graphic design, and visual development projects. Email: laurenahnemann@gmail.com."

Every year the Urbanna Oyster Festival has a poster contest. This year's theme: "250 Years in Urbanna." The small port town that hosts the Urbanna Oyster Festival is home to iconic and historical buildings, breath-taking scenery and a calming air that is good for the soul.

The poster, which is 18- by 24-inches, can be purchased for $20 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.

Welcome to the 69th Urbanna Oyster Fest

by Tom Chillemi



The 69th Urbanna Oyster Festival is set for Friday and Saturday, Nov. 6 and 7, 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.

Watch for the special section in the Nov. 5 print edition of the Southside Sentinel and online at SSentinel.com for all the details on the festival.

Parades

The annual Fireman's Parade is set for 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 6, and the Urbanna Oyster Festival Parade is set for 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 7.

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 fir 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 firehous grounds at 330 Virginia St. from 8 p.m. to midnight with the band "Exit 38" (beer garden gates open at noon on Friday). Beverages include Budweiser, Bud Light, Michelob Ultra and Devils Backbone beers.

Saturday's Oyster Festival Parade will have about 40 units, leading off with festival honorees, grand marshals and captain, and queens and spats. Also, several high school bands will be marching in the parade.

The Oyster Festival Parade's special features this year include: the "King & Queen Central JROTC, Order of the Oyster, Middlesex Mustangs, Norfolk Khedive Shriners, and other special surprises!

Festival Queen

The 2026 Urbanna Oyster Festival Queen and Little Miss Spat will be crowned Friday, Nov. 6, at 4 p.m. inside the Urbanna firehous 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 firs 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 benefitin Middlesex County.

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

This year there are four queen hopefuls and four Little Miss Spat co-contestants.

The 2026 Queen contestants and their Little Miss Spat contestants, in alphabetical order, include:

Olivia Hoffiel with Ava Wade, Elizabeth Justis with Callie Langford, Sarah Laster with Paisley Duke, and Mia Slider with Magnolia Williams

The Queen contestants are judged in fi e 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 firs edition, third impression that was published in 1755. This map was used to defin the boundaries of America following the Revolutionary War. Find out the exciting history of why Urbanna has this priceless map!

Robert Keyes, a multifaceted solo fingerstyl guitarist, will perform on the front porch both days.

Community Row

"Community Row," sponsored by Primis bank, 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 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

(See Welcome, Page C5)

Welcome...

(Continued from Page C4)

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 2026 to April 2027, VIP seating at the Virginia Oyster Shucking Contest on Saturday, Nov. 7, a 2026 Urbanna Oyster Festival commemorative poster, six wine tastings, six beer tastings, six oyster tastings, and a gift swag bag.

Plan ahead for the 2027 Oyster Festival and fin VIP ticket information at 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 fille 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 Godspeed, a replica of the ship that brought settlers to the New World in 1607 who founded Jamestown.

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

Also on display will be the sloop Luna, a replica of an 18th century sailing cargo boat, rebuilt 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 ACRE Oyster Restoration, BayQuest Charters, 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.

There also will be beverages available.

Oyster shucking contest

The Officia Virginia State Oyster Shucking Contest, sponsored by Walton Seafood, Urbanna Seafood & Raw Bar, and T.M. Williams and Son Seafood, will start at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 7, on the stage in the fiel 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 firs place prize in each of the men's and women's divisions is $100; second, $50; and third, $25.

The winner is declared the state champion and advances to compete in the National Oyster Shucking Contest in St. Mary's County, Md., in October 2027.

There will be an amateur shucking competition with a plaque for the winner, and an officia festival poster for second and third place finishers Registration begins at 9 a.m. behind the firehouse The 2025 State Oyster Shucking champion Sam Davis of Urbanna is expected to defend his title.

Wine tasting

Returning this year is wine tasting featuring several Virginia wineries. A new winery this year: Vibin' with Val, and The Seafood Shack will be selling Charcuterie Boxes of delights. The wine tasting area at Historic Lansdowne at 271 Virginia St. 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 Jolene Family Winery, Mattaponi Winery, Vibin' with Val and Zoll Vineyards.

The craft beer tasting event will be at the far end of Festival Village on Rappahannock Avenue. Craft beers include Ardent Craft Ales, Bold Rock Hard Cider, Devils Backbone Brewing Co., Dividing Creek Beer Co., Golden Road Brewing, Hardywood Park Craft Brewery, Kindred Spirit Brewing, Margaritaville Brewing Co., New Realm Brewing, Port City Brewing Company and Triple Crossing Beer. The $15 admission includes a souvenir cup and four tastings. Brewery reps will be on hand to answer questions.

Children's fun

Fun for children will abound at The Children's Activity Village sponsored by Wildlings Playscapes, Atlantic Union Bank and Westgate Resorts. The nature-inspired play area for children and families will be available in the children's activity area in Festival Village on Rappahannock Avenue, where children ages 4-10 can 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-fille activities.

Master magician-juggler Jonathan Austin will again 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.

URBBY
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Located at Urbanna Boat Yard & Marina

Our boutique is thoughtfully curated with one-of-a-kind pieces, offering eclectic, hand-selected items, as well as a unique pantry corner for food & chocolate lovers.



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Please join us at URBBY on Friday, November 6th to hear *Second Wind* from 6pm until 8:30pm Rain or Shine
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(located by the water below Colonial Pizza)

Four high school seniors seek title of Urbanna Oyster Festival Queen

The 2026 Urbanna Oyster Festival Queen and Little Miss Spat will be crowned 4 p.m. Friday, Nov. 6 inside the Middlesex Volunteer Fire Department station (the Urbanna firehouse) at 335 Virginia St. This year, the four 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.

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

This year's Queen hopefuls in alphabetical order include:

- Olivia Hoffield.
- Elizabeth Justis.
- Sarah Laster.
- Mia Slider.

This year's Little Miss Spat co-contestants in alphabetical order include:

- Paisley Duke.
- Callie Langford.
- Ava Wade.
- Magnolia Williams.

The Queen contestants are judged in five areas:

- Individual community service project
- Individual judges' interview
- Academic achievement
- A spontaneously 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

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 or call 804-832-0036.



Looking extra regal as they ride in the festival parade and wave to thousands of admiring onlookers are 2025 Queen Kallie Robins and Little Miss Spat Blakelee Anderson. A special float carried the 2025 contest's 15 participants. (Photo by Don Richeson)

Past queens

1960 – Jean Stone
1961 – Tommy Lou Cusimano
1962 – Mary Kay Mercer
1963 – Chalie 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
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 Rowlson-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
2025 – Kallie Robins.

(See Queen, Page C7)



Olivia Hoffield and Ava Wade.



Sarah Laster and Paisley Duke.

Queen...

(Continued from Page C6)

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
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
2025 – Blakelee Anderson



Elizabeth Justis and Callie Langford.



Mia Slider and Magnolia Williams.



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

Festival to feature big parades on both Friday and Saturday

The annual Fireman's Parade is set for 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 6, and the Urbanna Oyster Festival Parade is set for 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 7.

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 "Exit 38," which performs both rock and country tunes for those 21 and older (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)

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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)**

Welcome to the 69th Urbanna Oyster Festival!

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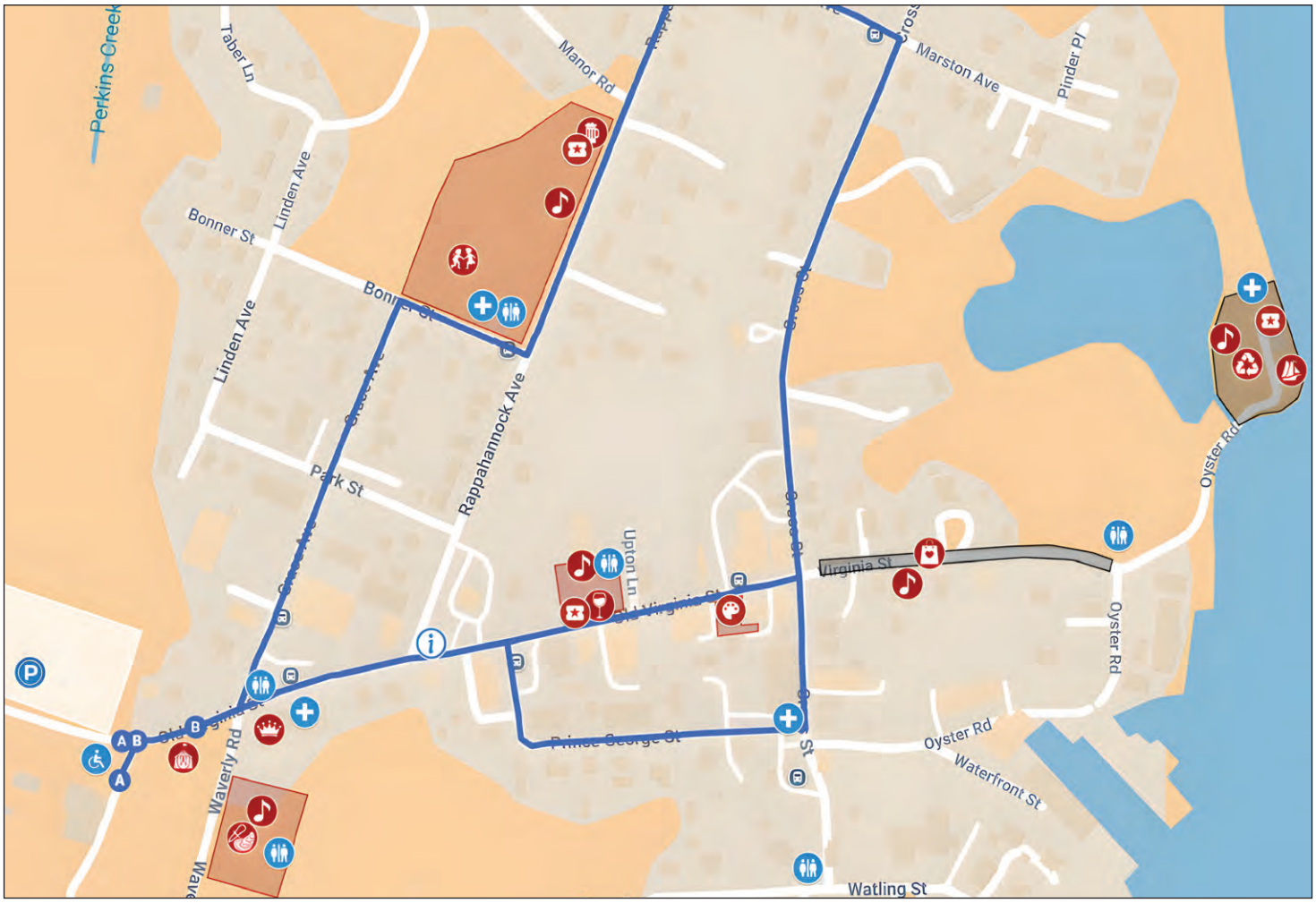
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Events

- 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
- Fine Art Show Area
- Festival Village

Music

- Exit 38 (Fireman's Dance)
- Festival Village Stage
- Virginia Wine Area Stage
- Scottish Factor Store Stage
- Waterfront Stage

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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.



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

Authorities help with 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 firehous 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 a Middlesex County Sheriff Offic spokesman.

For information, call 804-758-2122 or visit urbannaoysterfestival.com.

Craft beer tasting is offered at far end of Festival Village

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.



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)

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.





Godspeed is a replica of one of three ships that brought settlers to Jamestown in the 17th century. It is available for deck tours at the Urbana's Town Marina during the 2026 Urbanna Oyster Festival. (Contributed)



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Urbanna Town Marina is site of deck tours of Godspeed and Luna

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 an additional 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 Godspeed, a replica of one of three ships what brought settlers to Jamestown in the 17th century. The original Godspeed was a small, fully rigged merchant ship that made the historic 1606-1607 voyage from England to what would become Virginia.

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 were expected to arrive this week. "We are hoping they can arrive and enter the creek at about the 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.



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 festival on the waterfront at the Urbanna Town Marina. (Photo by Bob Waldrop)

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 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. 6 and 7. The Explorer and Four Sons will also be available for deck tours.

On Thursday, Nov. 5, 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.



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 on hand

More than 100 vendors will be open for business when the 2026 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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2026 Urbanna Oyster Festival Music Schedule

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6

Festival Village	**11am - 4:30pm**	**Jordan REIN** (Rock)
Waterfront	**10am - 3:30pm**	**Chris & Jane** (Americana)
Scottish Factor Store	**10am - 3pm**	**Robert Keyes** (Solo Fingerstyle Guitarist)
Virginia Wine Area	**11am - 4:30pm**	**Morgan Stewart** (R&B and Soul)
Firehouse	**8pm -12am**	**Exit 38** (Rock & Country 21+)



REIN



Exit 38

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

Festival Village	**10am - 4:30pm**	**Southern Rock Mafia** (Southern Rock)
Waterfront	**10am - 5pm**	**Blackout** (70's, 80's, Top 40 Rock & Funk)
Scottish Factor Store	**9am - 4pm**	**Robert Keyes** (Solo Fingerstyle Guitarist)
Virginia Wine Area	**11am - 4pm**	**Jayla Coggins** (Country)
Firehouse Stage	**10am - 2pm**	**Chris & Jane** (Americana)



Southern Rock Mafia



Jayla Coggins

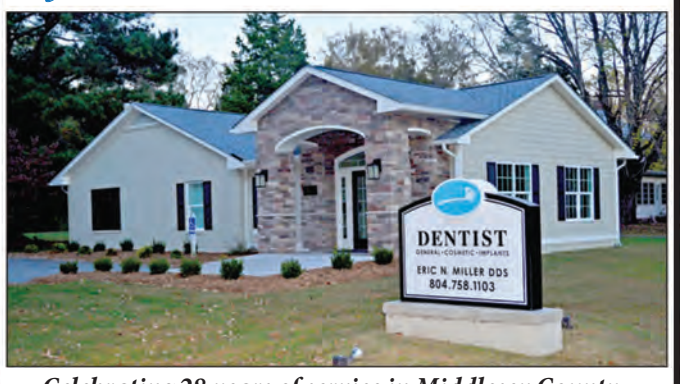




In the climax moment of last year's Urbanna Oyster Shucking Contest, Sam Davis (above) of Urbanna raises his hands to indicate he's finished shucking his oysters (time: 2:42), thus winning the Virginia State Shucking Championship. His wife, Stacey Davis (right), who waves a giant photo of his face, reacts with glee to the accomplishment. Hannah Bush (time: 5:03) of Manassas was runner-up.

(Photos by Don Richeson)

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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.



Deborah Pratt

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

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

Professional division

- Overall winner — Sam Davis, Urbanna, 2:42.
- Second place — Hannah Bush, Manassas, 5:03.

Professional men's division

- First — Sam Davis, Urbanna, 2:57.
- Second — Joey McComas, Weems, 4:07.

Professional women's division (shucking 24 oysters):

- First — Hannah Bush, Manassas, 3:47.
- Second — Leila Avery, Newport News, 4:31.
- Third — Deborah Pratt, Jamaica, 5:29.

Amateurs (shucking 12 oysters):

- First — Craig Bishop, Powhatan, 2:03.
- Second — Jacob Perry, Mathews, 3:40.
- Third — Kiki Ladendorf, Urbanna, 3:51.

Centenarian Russell named festival captain

by Larry Chowning

The Urbanna Oyster Festival Foundation (UOFF) has named 100-year-old Russ Russell of Urbanna as captain of the 69th annual Urbanna Oyster Festival set for Friday and Saturday, Nov. 6 and 7.

UOFF official Joe Heyman announced the centenarian's selection last week. He said Russell was a pioneer in efforts to Restore Urbanna Creek and set an example for later environmental efforts to clean up the creek.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Russell was president of the Friends of Urbanna Creek, a group that no longer exists. The group monitored water quality in the creek once a week for 10 years as part of the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay Citizens Monitoring Program.

Russell and his wife, the late Pat Garnett Russell, moved to Urbanna in 1981 on Russ's retirement as a captain in the United States Naval Reserves and a long career in the Federal Aviation Administration. They purchased the George property near Urbanna and built a new home on the creek. The Russells were honored by UOFF in 2018 when they were named grand marshals of the Oyster Festival Parade.

"Friends of Urbanna Creek brought legitimacy to water quality concerns on the creek," said Heyman. "Later, when Restore Urbanna Creek was founded, the work Russ and others did early on with Friends of Urbanna Creek helped us better understand the issues."

Urbanna Creek has been condemned for the harvesting of edible shellfish for years. In the late 1960s, the Town of Urbanna installed a sewage treatment plant, today owned by Hampton Roads Sanitation Department (HRSD), which discharges treated sewage into the creek.

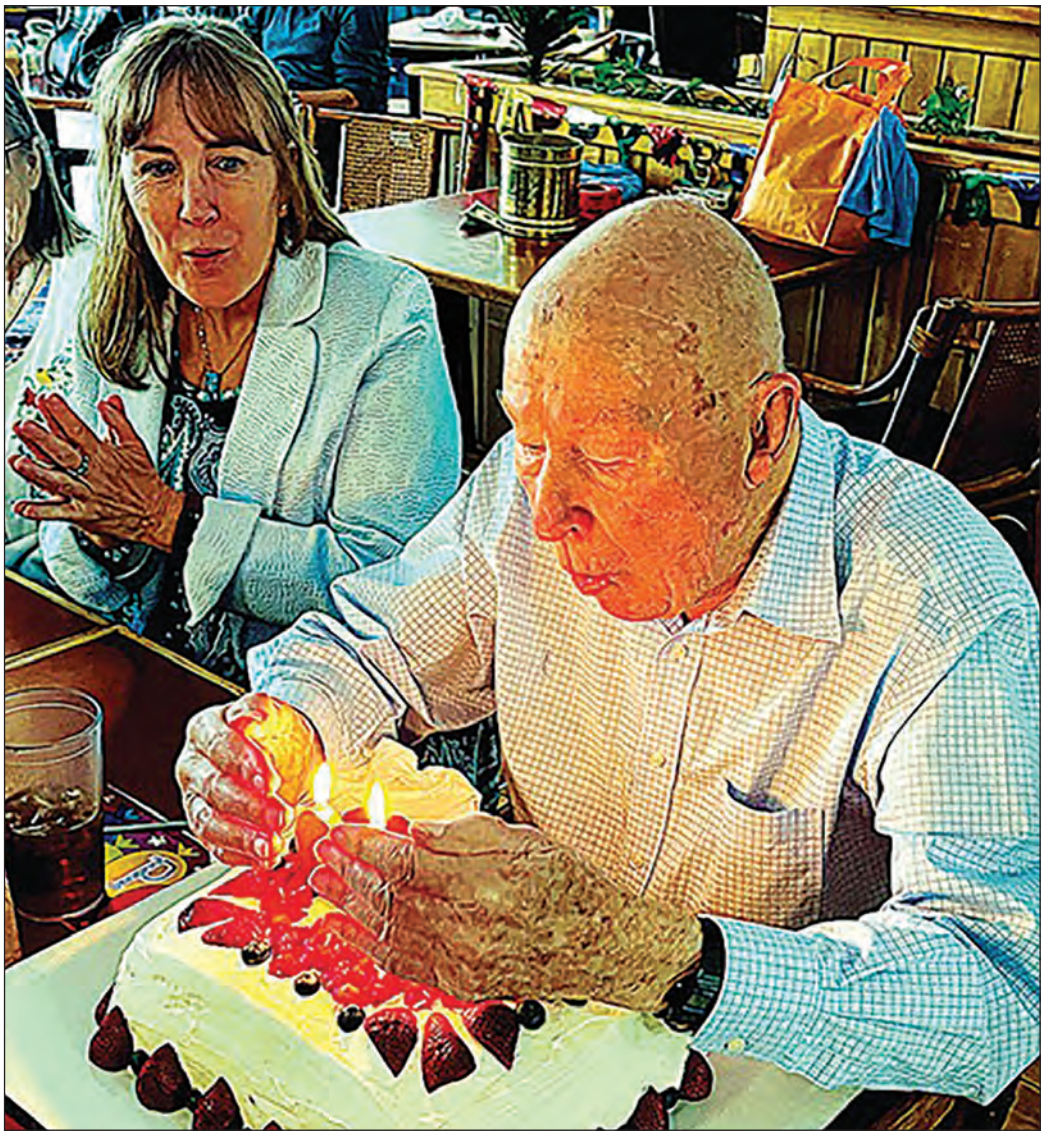
There is also a sewage treatment system discharging into the creek from the Middle Peninsula Regional Security Center and courthouse complex in Saluda.

Restore Urbanna Creek has constructed two oyster reefs inside the creek and planted tons of shell on those reefs to create cultch on which oyster spat can attach and grow. Known as "God's natural vacuum cleaners," oysters are highly efficient filte feeders that can clean up to 50 gallons of water per day. The bi-valves use tiny hair-like structures called cilia on their gills to draw surrounding seawater into their shells.

The Restore Urbanna Creek group is also focused on providing environmental information so people who live on the Chesapeake Bay understand the watershed better, said Heyman.

"It is about people understanding that a healthy watershed ups the quality of life for all of us," he said. "Russ Russell was a pioneer in that effort."

Russell will be honored at the festival by riding in the two parades, the Fireman's Parade on Friday night and the main parade on Saturday, and he was recognized at various UOFF functions leading up to the festival weekend.



Urbanna's Russ Russell, who turned 100 years old this year, will serve as captain of the 2026 Urbanna Oyster Festival, it was announced last month. The 69th edition of the iconic event is scheduled Nov. 6 and 7.

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Meet the 2026 Oyster Festival grand marshals

by Larry Chowning

The Urbanna Oyster Festival Foundation has named Linda and Dave Cryer grand marshals of the 69th annual Urbanna Oyster Festival set for Nov. 6 and 7.

The Cryers moved to Middlesex County in 2002 and have devoted "23 years of extraordinary service, leadership and compassion to the residents of the community," stated a "Resolution of Appreciation" from the Middlesex County Board of Supervisors in February.

The Cryers spearheaded the creation of the "Cryer Center" located in the Harmony Village area of Locust Hill, which provides a central location to house the volunteer organizations Hands Across Middlesex and Habitat for Humanity. Hands Across Middlesex sponsors a food bank and clothing closet at the facility.

The Cryers financed the building that opened to a great deal of fanfare in 2010. At that dedication, U.S. Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Montross, said, "What a great contribution by individuals in a community who see a need. The Cryers are certainly to be commended for their efforts but also everyone else who seizes the need to help other people in need.

"There is no higher calling than helping others in their time of need and I believe efforts like this are a window into the souls of our community" he said. "As I look around here today at the people here, I see the heart and soul of this community. A facility like this will truly help others in their time of need," he said.

Then Virginia Del. Harvey Morgan said, "What a sensational day this is and what a rare opportunity for so many people who desperately need help. I can't tell you how pleased I am to be here on this occasion and to see our county move in this direction."

Dave Cryer, who has always been humble in his description of their role in the amazing financial gift of support to the Cryer Center, said at the 2010 dedication, "The real truth of the matter is that the effort it took to build this building for me was in a twist of the wrist to write a check.

"It was hardly the effort of all the volunteers who have been here every day folding clothes for the needy, building stud walls for a home for a family in need, and people who donate the food.

"I hope you will consider volunteering because everyone in this area needs a hand or a helper," he said. "Please consider being one of those. We need your help!"

Urbanna Oyster Festival Foundation official Joe Heyman said that "the Cryers have given so much to help the people of Middlesex County and we felt by naming them our grand marshals was a small way of honoring and recognizing Linda and Dave. There are few people who have come into our county and given so much to help our people in need," he said.

The Cryers have moved to Richmond to be closer to family. They will ride in the Fireman's Parade on Friday night and the Saturday parade during the day. They will also participate in other festival activities.



Through their charitable work, Linda, left, and Dave Cryer left Middlesex a lot better than they found it. The couple will serve as grand marshals of the 69th annual Urbanna Oyster Festival. **(Photo by Tom Chillemi)**



The Cryers spearheaded the creation of the Cryer Center located in Harmony Village. It provides a central location to house the volunteer organizations Hands Across Middlesex and Habitat for Humanity. **(Contributed)**



Shucking world loses a pioneer from Urbanna

by Larry Chowning

Oyster shucking pioneer Sarah Hammond Stokes of Urbanna passed away Sept. 13 at the Riverside Lifelong Health & Rehabilitation Center in Saluda.

A Middlesex County native who worked in local oyster shucking houses, 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, winning the women's championship and then capturing the overall (men/women) championship, 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 arrangement and had the most clean/undamanged shucked oysters of all.

With her win at the national contest, she earned a trip to Galway, Ireland, to compete in the 1984 international oyster shucking contest. Entrants from nine countries competed in the international competition and Stokes finishe third in the world championship at Galway.

"It was one of the greatest experiences in my life," she said recently in an interview.

Stokes was named captain of the 2025 annual Urbanna Oyster Festival for her oyster shucking success that paved the way for other Virginia African-American female oyster shuckers to compete on the world oyster shucking stage.



Oyster shucking pioneer Sarah Bagby Hammond Stokes passed away in Saluda on Sept. 13. (Sentinel file photo)

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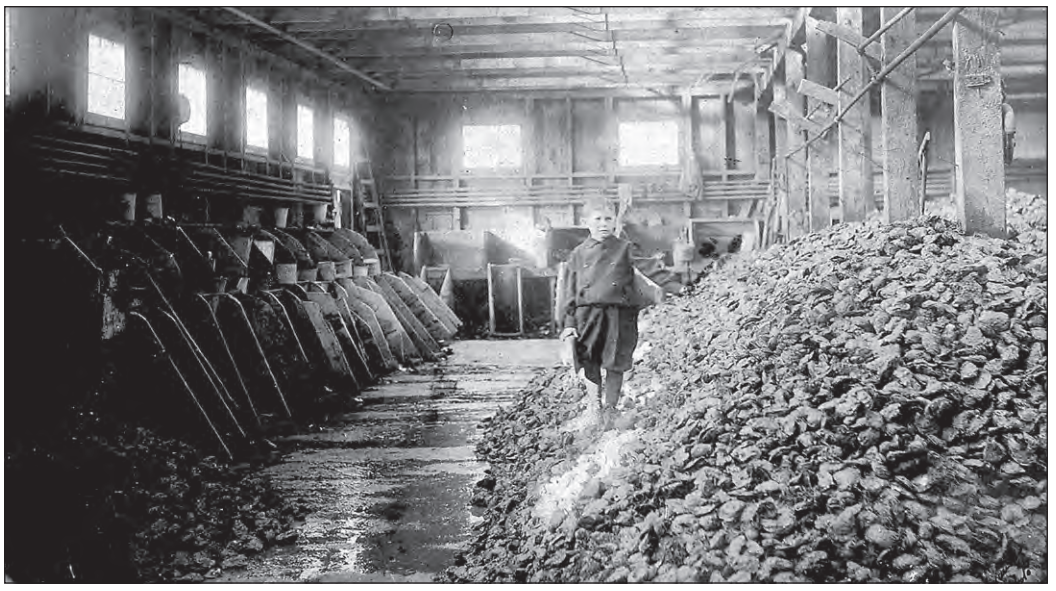
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The history of oyster shucking in Middlesex County

by Larry Chowning



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)

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.

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

(See History, Page C27)

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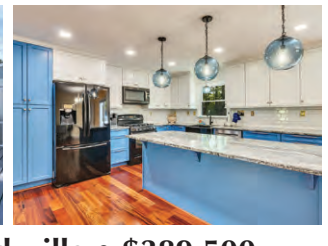


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Woman's Club 250th quilt raffl fundraiser announced

The quilters of the Middlesex County Woman's Club have finished another beautiful quilt! The red, white and blue colors honor the nation's 250th anniversary celebration. Raffle tickets are on sale now ($1 each or six for $5) and the winner will be announced on Saturday, Nov. 7, at the 69th Urbanna Oyster Festival. You do not have to be present to win. All proceeds go towards scholarships for Middlesex students and residents, maintenance of the club's colonial courthouse and grounds, and community projects. The club's 18th century building at 202 Virginia St. in Urbanna is one of only 11 Virginia colonial courthouse buildings that still exist. For information, email Jean Kostesky at jgk25@verizon.net.

(Contributed)



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)

Festival Village's child-friendly fun offered in Taber

Wildlings Play Scapes is hosting and Atlantic Union Bank and Westgate Resorts. are 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.

Master magician-juggler Jonathan Austin will again 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.

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!

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37 *Partner agencies in the Northern Neck and Upper Middle Peninsula.*

10,999 *People served monthly*

1,843,098 *Pounds of food distributed*

1,535,915 *Meals distributed*

880 *Children and adults engaged through aquaponics education*

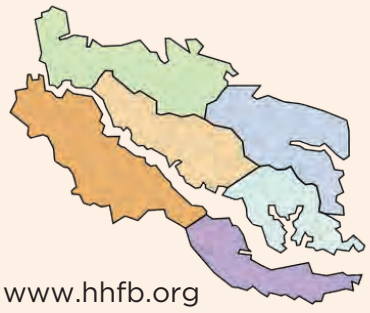
857,804 *Pounds of fresh, local produce*

761 *Children served weekly through our Backpack Buddies program*

286,521 *Pounds of produce to assist other Virginia food banks*

23,590 *Servings of FRESH produce grown through aquaponics and shared with local schools, food pantries, and community programs*

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History...

(Continued from Page C23)

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 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 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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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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Signature events schedule for Urbanna Oyster Festival

Friday events include:

- 9 a.m.-5 p.m. — Fine art show.
- 10 a.m.-5 p.m. — Carnival.
- 10 a.m.-4 p.m. — Juggler/magician Jonathan Austin.
- 10 a.m.-1 p.m. — Arts and crafts.
- 10 a.m.-4 p.m. — Craft beer tasting.
- 11 a.m.-5 p.m. — Virginia wine tasting.
- 1-5 p.m. — Nature crafts.
- 4 p.m. — Festival Queen and Little Miss Spat crowning.
- 7-8 p.m. — Fireman's Parade.

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.
- 11 a.m.-3 p.m. — Interactive oyster puppetry booth
- 2 p.m. — Oyster Festival Parade and raffle announcement.

Southside Sentinel

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Presenting some oyster images from yesteryear





These "hand tongers" (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 packers (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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