



FISH HOUSE NEWS

Ocracoke Working Watermen's Association (OWWA)
4th Edition • End of Summer Report 2010

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Manager's Report

The 2010 fishing season has been a busy one, from the early morning "coffee club" at the fish house and the fishermen getting ice for their boats to packing wholesale fish after dark. The crab season started in early March with good catches and prices for "basket" crabs at an all-time high. Ocracoke waters produce crabs earlier in the spring than other areas in NC and the Chesapeake Bay. We sell the crabs live in bushel baskets to markets in Baltimore, New York and Boston.

Spanish Mackeral were plentiful from early May until September. Spanish migrate North to coastal waters, Pamlico Sound, Neuse and Pamlico Rivers during summer months and are caught with gill nets and pound nets. Spanish and Bluefish are served by local restaurants for the "fish of the day". July and August are shrimping months in Pamlico Sound. The brown shrimp is the primary catch. Three shrimp boats from McClellansville, SC; Surf City, NC and other boats from Core Sound area all packed at the Ocracoke Seafood dock. Fresh NC shrimp, right off the boats, was the most popular seller in the retail. In September, while working around the tropical weather systems, the fishermen are gearing up for fall flounder pound nets and Roe mullet seasons. Traditionally, the fall season produces the most wholesale volume and potential profit for our fishermen. Ocracoke Seafood Co. wishes to thank all who have helped us maintain and expand our business. We serve a dual purpose—providing an outlet for our fishermen and also establishing a "fishing community" on Ocracoke Island that all can benefit from.

Hardy Plyler, Ocracoke Seafood Company Manager



Ocracoke Watermen Lose A Good Friend

William "Bill" Harrison Jemison, 78, passed away at his residence on Sunday, May 30, 2010. Bill is survived by his wife, Barbara Pierro Jemison, of Ocracoke. Also surviving are three sons, William, Michael and Steven, one daughter, Susan and ten grandchildren. Bill was a truly special man ... Impressive without being intimidating ... Generous without making you feel you owed him anything in return ... Genuinely kind. Now is the time that Bill would be heading out of Parker's Creek and into the Sound where he would be setting his nets. In his memory, wife Barbara, friends and many the island's watermen will head out of Parker's Creek to spread Bill's ashes on Saturday October 9 at 1:00PM. The Photo (by Susse Wright) is of Bill at Monroe's truck just after oystering.

Who Catches Your Dinner?

This is a popular question traveling up and down the coast during the summer tourist season along the Outer Banks. Caught, Cooked and Plated Locally – this is the tagline for the recently debuted Outer Banks Catch. Their ads say: "Columbia to Swan Quarter, Ocracoke to Corolla, the Outer Banks has a multi-generational community of commercial fishermen who earn their livelihood bringing fresh, seasonal seafood to your table. Yet did you know 80% of all seafood served nationally is imported from other less regulated countries? As a consumer, you deserve nothing less than the best, healthiest and most delicious seafood available."

Outer Banks Catch is not alone. It joins Carteret Catch, Brunswick Catch and Ocracoke Fresh. All are local initiatives to promote the benefits of eating and buying local seafood. To better satisfy consumers' growing interest in coastal seafood, North Carolina fishermen in Dare, Brunswick, Tyrell, Carteret, and Hyde Counties are working with local restaurants, seafood markets, grocery stores and dealers to promote locally caught. When you buy locally, you are not only getting the freshest seafood, you are supporting the local economy and, in Ocracoke's case, preserving traditions.



Kathy Sparrow, Outer Banks Catch Project Director and Dorothy Toolan, Dare County Public Relations visit with Ocracoke Seafood Co. Chuck Ray, Gene Balance and Arlene Burley.

Looking Forward to the NC Seafood Festival

OWWA is gearing up for their 5th consecutive year at the North Carolina Seafood Festival on the Morehead City Waterfront, October 1-3, 2010.

Beginning in 2006, the watermen set up an exhibit educating the public on Ocracoke's rich maritime heritage, present day life on the water, and their struggle to remain a thriving fishing community. "Caught Today the Traditional Way" is as much a tag line for their new Ocracoke Fresh campaign as it is just a daily description of putting food on the table. Why wouldn't people expect to eat only the freshest seafood? For those of us living on Ocracoke it may be an odd question.

The NC Seafood Festival Cooking with the Chef's Event showcases North Carolina seafood by some the coast's top chefs. The Chefs event started three years ago to introduce coastal fishermen, their catch and the benefits of eating local seafood to the public. It was a great success that first year and it continues to grow in popularity. This year, "Cooking with the Chefs: A North Carolina Seafood Experience" will feature chefs that represent the four coastal branding programs — Carteret Catch, Brunswick Catch, Ocracoke Fresh and Outer Banks Catch.

To kick off their Ocracoke Fresh campaign, OWWA will feature the Pony Island Restaurant with Vince O'Neal. "Right now I am deciding what to prepare— crab cakes or fish cakes—maybe both. They tell me that OWWA cooked close to 450 drum cakes last year and people were still waiting in line" says Vince. "I am committed to locally caught. People can taste the difference. Growing up on the island, I worry about what would happen if our fishing community died. It almost happened back in 2006. For my restaurant it must be North Carolina seafood or Ocracoke seafood - better flavor, healthier, retains jobs, helps the island economy, keeps the heritage strong—those are pretty good reasons to eat locally caught, whatever community you're in".

OWWA hopes to feature another island restaurant and their favorite seafood dish next year. Visit the festival website for event times and directions.



**Visit OWWA at the North Carolina Seafood Festival
Saturday & Sunday October 2 & 3, 2010**

An Opinion from Ocracoke's Youngest Fisherman

This past winter the fishermen of Ocracoke had to contend with a potential net ban that would have put most of us out of business. The Karen Beasley Turtle Rehabilitation Center in Topsail Beach filed a lawsuit against the Division of Marine Fisheries and the National Marine Fisheries Service, alleging that *incidental takes of sea turtle by large-mesh gillnetters was violating the Endangered Species Act. While it is true that fishermen do catch some sea turtles, the turtle center seemed to look the other way on the fact that according to the NOAA stock assessments; habitat destruction, population growth, and boating strikes are a much bigger threat to sea turtles than commercial fishing. However, it is easy to understand why they would be suing us instead of developers or recreational fishing groups - it has to do with our ability to defend ourselves in a court of law. It is much easier to win a court case against those without the time or resources to defend themselves against well-funded interest groups. Currently, a compromise has been worked out to allow us to fish large-mesh gillnets four days a week (as opposed to seven), with 2,000 yards of net (as opposed to 3,000), with nets a maximum depth of 15 meshes and no floats (as opposed to any type of gear), and with nets only being in the water from one hour before sunset until one hour after sunrise. This is just an interim measure to give the state time to find a suitable plan with which to deal with incidental takes of sea turtles. Unfortunately, the general sentiment among fishermen is that large-mesh gillnets will be banned eventually, due to the fact that well-funded recreational groups have been trying to eliminate us for years so that they will have the water to themselves. Were that to happen many people would be out of work and it would be more difficult to supply fresh seafood to local restaurants and tourists, disrupting the coastal economy. If you care about having access to fresh local seafood, please contact your local representative and tell them so.

Morty Gaskill age 16

*Incidental: legal term for unintentional.



WE NEED YOUR HELP



OWWA wants to hear from their supporters! Visit our website to post comments and submit a short survey. www.ocracokewatermen.org

T-Shirt Quilt Winner

The drawing for **The Fishermen's Quilt** was held

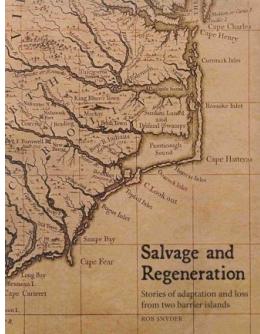


Labor Day weekend, as advertised in spite of Hurricane Earl's No-Show. The quilt was designed and made by Rev. Joyce Reynolds (Left) for Ocracoke's Working Watermen. It is an artwork of vintage and present day T-shirts collected over three years. Every T-shirt design has a story and many are signed by the fishermen. Morty Gaskill drew

the winning ticket; the Klein family from Gretna Louisiana. Their response when contacted by the fish house: "It is a beautiful quilt and a wonderful cause. We love Ocracoke and we will cherish this symbol of it in our family".

Salvage and Regeneration

In January 2010 Rob Snyder and David Tyler with Maine's Island Institute spent a week on Ocracoke. They attended the NCCAT seminar "Island People, Island Culture", traveled to Portsmouth, met with some Ocracoke Watermen and did a fair amount of visiting. Their recollections are captured in the annual publication, Island Journal - "Stories of adaptation and loss from two barrier islands". A pdf is posted on www.ocracokewatermen.org



Mark Your Calendar 5th Annual **Oyster Roast and Shrimp Steam & Van O'Neal's Fish Stew**

Thursday December 30, 2010
At the Fish House 2:00PM-5:00PM

At 5:00PM Dessert and Hot Cider Around the Old Wood Stove
at the Ocracoke Working Watermen's Exhibit
www.ocracokewatermen.org



Photo by Susse Wright



Back to Basics: The Food Economy is the Real Economy!

I have just returned home from another vacation on Ocracoke Island. We've been going for three years, drawn back each year by the local culture, the beautiful beaches and the magic of the island ecology. But mostly we return each year because of the fish – and Ocracoke's Working Watermen. The fish sold by the fish house is the finest I have ever tasted!

The Ocracoke Foundation's "fish house project" is an example of what is right in the United States economy. All over the country people are returning to reliance on local food producers to rebuild regional economies by creating local short and direct supply chains for food and services. The key variable to this economic growth is the presence of regional food processing and distribution centers since they bridge the gap between small-scale direct sales and full-scale wholesale distribution.

With OWWA and other local business and citizen networks Ocracoke Island has a powerful means to support many sectors of the local economy – from the obvious (selling fish to residents, tourists and restaurants) to safeguarding trade relationships with on and off island service providers. These relationships then strengthen community social connections resulting in a stronger and more positive community and economy overall. I'm very impressed with the Ocracoke Foundation, the Ocracoke Working Watermen's Association, the other related community groups, and the people of Ocracoke who have worked hard to construct and maintain these organizations and connections – it's what makes Ocracoke Island far more than just a fun place to visit.

And oh, did I remember to say that the fish is the best I've ever tasted?

Excerpt from Ocracoke Foundation "Perspectives"
Janet Chrzan, Ph.D. Department of Anthropology
University of Pennsylvania



...where do
YOU want to go?

Did you know that Ocracoke's watermen are a featured highlight along a National Scenic Byway?

To read more go on line to
www.byways.org/explore/byways/12834/places/77531



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Watermen's Exhibit Summertime Scenes

Lilly - a sailboat kitty, owned by Gisette Suarez. Welcomes visitors. She is either in the pound net model, sleeping on a table or waiting for fish. Photo (Left): Janie and Harold Welverton and Carol Nimitz from Wilson County, NC. Photo on Right: Craig & Vivian Cooley Black Mountain, NC.



Watermen Enact Profit Sharing - At years end in 2009 Ocracoke Seafood (OSC) was able to provide all local fishermen with a return on their total sales. This is not the traditional formulation of profit sharing but similar. The average OSC margin was 25 cents per pound for almost all fish in 2009. For clams it was 5 cents. It was decided that after paying expenses and leaving enough for cushion, OSC had \$15,000 to give back to the fishermen according to the total pounds a fisherman sold to the fish house. This amounted to 5 cents per pound of seafood and 1 cent per clam.

Seafood Sales Review

The following table shows fish house figures from 2006 through the close of 2009. The column that says "Non Ocracoke" seafood is off island fishermen. We don't have any tuna fishermen for example, but we still buy only NC local.

	Ocracoke fishermen	Non-Ocracoke fishermen	Total Seafood Sales (retail and wholesale)	Total income (Includes retail / wholesale, T shirts, condiments etc)	Total # Fishermen
2005	N/A No fish house available				
2006	263,591.15	31,135.95	294,727.10	383,589.92	31
2007	288,041.55	113,721.88	401,763.43	557,622.61	22
2008	*125,446.58	105,656.30	231,102.88	543,495.24	32
2009	280,402.14	80,303.11	360,705.25	587,733.96	39

* Note – 2008 drop in Ocracoke fishermen sales - Animal grass shut down fishing in the fall.