

# On the way to a cleaner Lynnhaven River

**B**ehold the private sector, especially when it steps in with a great idea. You've heard this story before, but there's a new reason to listen. Three years ago, three Virginia Beach men decided to jumpstart a cleanup program for the Lynnhaven River.

Harry Lester, Andrew Fine and Bob Stanton posed for a picture on the river's shores – Stanton's front yard – and pledged to help make the water cleaner. They formed the Lynnhaven River 2007 organization, focusing on 2007 as the goal for cleaner water in commemoration of the commonwealth's 400th birthday.

And how would the cleanup happen? With lots of help from different agencies as well as a change in everyday habits, from fertilizing the lawn to scooping pet poop.

A program was launched to inundate the Lynnhaven with baby oysters, or spat. Oysters are the wonder filterer and can clean about 50 gallons each on a warm day.

People got interested. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the city of Virginia Beach and about half a dozen private companies have all pitched in.

So has the public. Hardware stores sell floats to residents who want to "grow" oysters and help with the conservation effort. Heck, local teachers are even incorporating it into their curriculum to teach kids hands-on.

Today, the annual LR2007 oyster roast is a tradition attended by a who's who in the city, elected and otherwise. The most recent one was held on a blustery April 16. The featured food is always oysters and the venue is a big tent on Bob and Eleanor Stanton's lawn at Bayville Golf Course.

A lot of effort goes into the event, from the volunteers who shuck the oysters and cook the stew to people like Mary Reid Barrow, who was selling T-shirts on the sidelines. The socializing, educating, benefit auction, beer, wine and barbecue – Mayor Oberndorf doesn't do oysters – all pays off.

The schmoozing gets things moving. There has been progress.

For example, the Lynnhaven River 2007 membership has grown to about 600 members. It costs as little as \$50 to join.

Donations are up, too. The organization got a \$35,000 grant to hire an education director. This is good news because LR2007 has been run on a shoestring by Barry Frankenfield, who splits his work week between his job with the city and as executive director of the nonprofit. Of course, the numerous volunteers are indispensable.

The 2005 General Assembly also pledged a \$50 million "down payment" to

help clean up the bay and rivers. The money will be used to reduce the nitrogen pollution that comes from sewage treatment plants. The legislature also pledged to establish a long-term fund.

In addition, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science has a \$495,000 contract to build a hydrodynamic water quality model of the Lynnhaven River Basin. Part of an overall five-year project, an ecosystem restoration study will follow.

The city, Corps of Engineers, LR2007 and Oyster Reef Keepers of Virginia are also planning a future oyster restoration project.

Meanwhile, eight committees – buffer restoration, clean boating and marina, education, governmental affairs, oyster restoration, public relations and marketing, special events and water quality – keep the wheels turning.

Ann Jennings, Virginia executive director of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, also attended the oyster roast. Huddled in a corner of the tent trying to hear each other over music played by the Eastport Oyster Boys, she told me how LR2007 has made a difference.

"This group is hugely important," Jennings said. "The board signed a resolution calling on local legislators to support funding. They knocked on their doors in Richmond. That's the only way it will happen."

With the help of other volunteers that live along the bay's watershed, the lobbying effort worked and the \$50 million was approved.

Jennings also acknowledged that all the news is not good. Earlier this year, the Virginia Department of Health Division of Shellfish Sanitation condemned almost all of the Lynnhaven River for shellfish consumption.

Analysis of the bacteria in the river showed that roughly 25 percent was from human sources, 30 percent was from pet and livestock, and 45 percent was from wild animals. The city is working to improve aging sewer pipes and the public needs to pick up after its pets.

For more information, log on to the Web site, [www.lynnhavenriver2007.org](http://www.lynnhavenriver2007.org), or call 406-0106. **IB**



Janet Dunphy