

Beach

The Magazine of Virginia Beach Summer 2007



There's No Place Like Home

Friends Indeed
Keeping It Clean
Playing It Safe

CRYSTAL CLEAR VISION

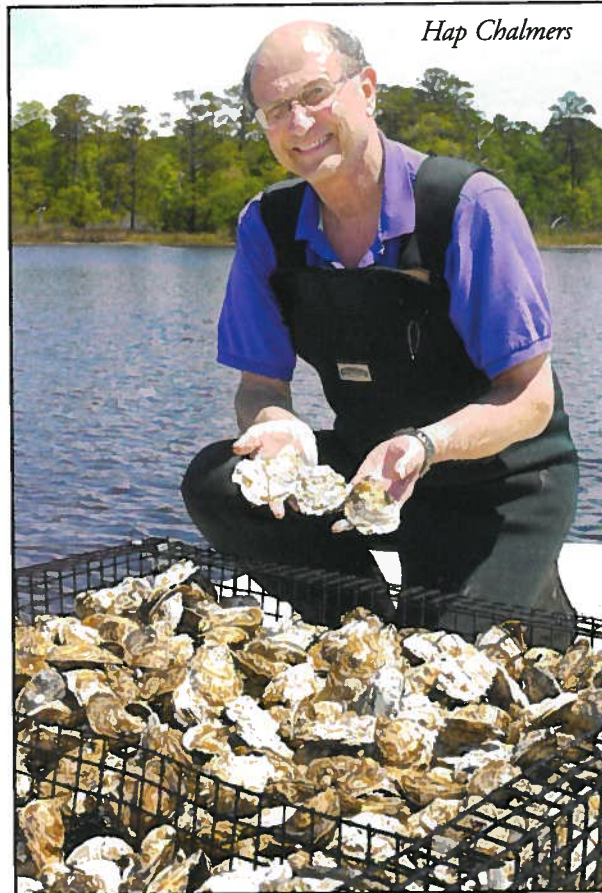
By Lisé Chandler White

As a girl hanging out with her granddad in Ohio, Susan Wenzel acquired a passion for the environment. “I learned from him that as human beings, it’s our responsibility to take care of our planet and everything that lives on it,” says Wenzel, a Red Mill Farms resident who recently retired from the Navy as a sonar technician. “We’re capable of doing the most destruction, but we’re also capable of doing the most good.”

Today, Wenzel is doing a lot of good as a volunteer for the Back Bay Restoration Foundation, which was founded in 1984, and the City of Virginia Beach. She collects water samples in the Back Bay watershed that are tested for dissolved oxygen and solids like fecal coliforms, a sign that animal waste is polluting the waterways. She helps out at fundraisers and workshops that teach others what they can do to preserve and improve the water quality and wetlands of the Back Bay and Lynnhaven River watersheds.

And she recruited Beach residents to plant 3,000 plants during three riparian buffer projects in May.

“When we put the plants there, they create a physical barrier to excess nutrients and pollutants and sediments. We’re using them to repair the waterways,” asserts Wenzel, who’s currently earning a bachelor’s degree in environmental management at the University of Maryland.



Hap Chalmers

Harry Lester decided that they’d seen enough and they founded Lynnhaven River 2007, an organization determined to substantially improve water quality in the Lynnhaven River. With a lofty goal like that, how do you measure success?

“Through the restoration of the oyster,” says Hap Chalmers, one of the organization’s most active members. Today, the organization is called Lynnhaven River NOW, and at an oyster roast in April, 400 citizens feasted on Lynnhaven River oysters.

Just 35 years ago, Lynnhaven oysters were the tops worldwide, explains Chalmers, who spent part of his childhood in the Beach and returned here six years ago after he retired. Oysters are natural cleaners of the water, and just one adult can filter 50 gallons of water a day.

Chalmers has been involved with Lynnhaven River NOW from the start and teamed up with his buddy, Cliff Love, an expert oyster farmer. The pair began an aquaculture business and has seeded more than 200,000 oysters in the Lynnhaven. Today, the “Lynnhaven Fancy” is on its way back.

“We’ve gone from one to seven percent of the water that’s now open for commercial shell-fishing,” exclaims Chalmers, who also serves on the city’s Green Ribbon Committee, a panel established by the City Council to make recommendations on how the water

To the north of the Beach’s “Green Line,” the waters of Long Creek, Broad Bay, Crystal Lake, Linkhorn Bay and their tributaries flow serenely into the Lynnhaven River, once a prime oyster harvesting area known worldwide for the legendary “Lynnhaven Fancy” oyster. Centuries ago, kings and queens in England dined on plate-sized oysters from the Lynnhaven. Over the years, however, the river became so polluted that the state had to halt farming operations in its waters.

Four years ago, Beach residents Andrew Fine, Bob Stanton and

PHOTO BY CRAIG MCCLURE



Susan Wenzel

PHOTO BY CRAIG MCCLURE

Every time it rains, everything we leave in our streets, driveways and lawns washes untreated through our ditches and storm drains into our streams, lakes, rivers, bays and ocean. That's why it's up to everyone to play an active role in keeping our waterways clean.

quality throughout the Beach can be improved. "Lynnhaven River NOW is restoring a legend!"

Chalmers and Wenzel are champions striving to keep our waterways clean, and they want Beach citizens to know that there are many important steps everyone should take to protect the Beach's five watersheds (Back Bay, Lynnhaven, North Landing, Elizabeth River and Owls Creek). See the "Do's and Don'ts" on page 23. For more tips or to get involved, please visit www.BBRF.org, www.LynnhavenRiverNow.org or VBgov.com, or call 385-4621.

The Virginia Beach City Council's long-term vision calls for a quality estuary system and waterways, and the Beach is well on her way. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality recently applauded the city's innovative plan to improve water quality in the Lynnhaven River Watershed as a model for communities across the Commonwealth, and numerous projects to reduce pollution are now underway. At the city's request, for example, the navigable waters of the Lynnhaven were recently declared a "no discharge zone" in which sewage discharge from boats is prohibited.

Continued on page 23