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Premier Edition
INSIDE:

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TALLEST BUILDING IN VIRGINIA

NEPTUNE FESTIVAL TURNS 35

A BRAND NEW DOWNTOWN

2008 - 2009

Lynnhaven River NOW restores historic delicacy.



At the end of the 20th Century the Lynnhaven River was in sad shape. The oyster population was in decline, bacteria levels were high, and water runoff was polluting the river. Lately, the river has taken on a healthier glow. There are new oyster reefs, and more plant buffer zones border riverside home lawns.

The turnaround is due, in part, to the efforts of three Virginia Beach citizens: Harry Lester, Bob Stanton and Andrew Fine who, in 2002, started a community organization called Lynnhaven River 2007. Their goal was to make the Lynnhaven oyster edible by 2007, and in the process restore the river to health. "They were all businessmen, not environmental scientists, but they just really felt the commitment to doing this for the community," explained Karen Forget, the executive director of Lynnhaven River NOW—the current incarnation of the 2002 effort.

It turned out to be just the thing that got the community excited enough to start a cleanup.

"The oysters here, historically, are some of the very best anywhere," explained Forget, "but more important than simply being a food for humans, oysters are a keystone species in our marine environment.



They provide an important habitat for a variety of species, and one oyster can filter 50 gallons of water a day. The oyster population was down to one percent of historic levels. After concentrated restoration efforts for the past decade, we are at about 10% of our historic oyster population."

In addition to the community involvement, the City of Virginia Beach's Department of Public Utilities has completed 42 projects in the Lynnhaven River watershed totalling almost \$46

million, including the expansion of sanitary sewer service to the Little Neck peninsula and an additional \$6.4 million on other environmental enhancement opportunities that range from solar powered lake aerators to constructed wetlands to bacteria monitoring and modeling.

The combined efforts of the City and the community resulted in 29 percent of the Lynnhaven River being opened in November 2007 for shellfish harvest. Some areas had been closed since 1930. The standard for shellfish harvest is rigorous and is controlled by the State Department of Health, Shellfish Sanitation Division. This is an important milestone in restoring the river.

In addition to oyster restoration, Lynnhaven River NOW seeks to educate the public about problems and solutions through its education and outreach programs and organizes monthly river clean-ups. In spring 2008, the organization obtained grant funds and brought together partners to build the Athey Oyster Reef near the Lesner Bridge. Local restaurants saved their oyster shells for the reef's construction through the LRNow Save our Shell Program.

Oyster restoration is just one of many ongoing challenges, according to Forget. "That is just the beginning of restoring this river and restoring this whole ecosystem and protecting it. This is 'forever' work."

For more information visit LynnhavenRiverNOW.org. ■



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Karen Forget
Executive Director
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NOW