



## Growing oysters for a cleaner Bay

<http://www.oystergardener.org/>

### Winter 2024-25

### Calling all Oyster Enthusiasts to The Annual TOGA Membership Meeting: Saturday, February 8, 2025

~ Sue Borra, TOGA President and Karen Hudson, Shellfish Aquaculture Extension Specialist, Marine Advisory Program, Science Advisor and VIMS Liaison to TOGA

It is that time of year again! Mark your calendar to attend the **TOGA Annual Meeting** to be held **Saturday, February 8, 2025, 1:00-5:00 pm**, at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) Gloucester Point Campus, Watermen's Hall Auditorium.

The centerpiece of the meeting will be the reveal of the newly-updated **Virginia Oyster Gardener Guide** with the latest oyster gardening information from Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). In addition, TOGA's Fellowship students at VIMS will talk about their research projects.

More importantly, the TOGA Annual Meeting is a great time to interact with your fellow oyster enthusiasts from the Tidewater area.

We encourage you to participate in-person, but a virtual option is available. Your membership dues can be paid online at the meeting. If you are not a TOGA member, we encourage you to attend to learn more about the organization.

An addition to the Annual Meeting is the opportunity to arrive early to participate in a session of Oyster Gardening 101 from 10:00 to 11:45 am at Waterman's Hall. This educational opportunity will be conducted by Dr. Richard Siciliano, Master Oyster Gardener, and is designed to assist oyster enthusiasts in setting up their new oyster gardens.

**Special Feature: Oyster Gardening 101:** February 8, 2025, 10:00-11:45 a.m. in Waterman's Hall, VIMS.

The OYS-101: *Basics of Oyster Gardening* class provides beginning oyster gardeners and enthusiasts an introduction to setting up your own oyster garden. Conducted by Dr. Richard Siciliano, Master Oyster Gardener, this program covers such topics as tools and supplies for starting and maintaining an O-garden, health and safety, oyster anatomy, and where to find the resources you need to grow and harvest oysters. You can sign up for this special session on the Annual Meeting Registration form.

At the annual meeting, you will hear about TOGA's accomplishments in 2024, as well as our exciting plans for 2025. Members will vote on the slate of candidates for the TOGA Board during the business meeting.

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### TOGA Annual Meeting Schedule

Saturday, February 8, 2025. 1:00-5:00 p.m.  
Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Gloucester Point Campus, Watermen's Hall Auditorium

#### 1:00 – 1:30 pm Check-in

Meet with agency representatives from the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and the Virginia Department of Health, and join in informal Q&A with experienced Master Oyster Gardeners and other oyster enthusiasts

#### 1:30 pm Welcome and Introductions

Sue Borra, President, TOGA; Karen Hudson, VIMS

#### 1:30 – 2:00 pm TOGA Business Meeting

- Treasurer's Report - Brian Ingram, Treasurer
- 2024 TOGA Highlights - Sue Borra, President
- Oyster Gardening 101- A tremendous resource for TOGA Members - Richard Siciliano
- Election of Officers - Carl Zulick, Secretary

- Madison Boyd Award 2024 - Carl Zulick
- 2025 TOGA Goals - Carl Zulick
- Other TOGA Business

## 2025 TOGA Board of Directors Nominees, Slate of Board of Directors and Officers

~Carl Zulick, Nominating Committee Chair,  
[carlz@togaboard.org](mailto:carlz@togaboard.org)

### 2:00 – 2:15 pm Update from Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), and the Master Oyster Gardener Program for 2025

- Karen Hudson, Science Advisor and VIMS Liaison to TOGA

### 2:15 – 2:30 pm TOGA Fellowship Endowment at VIMS Update

- Crystal Booker, VIMS Assistant Director of Donor Relations, Stewardship, and Alumni Engagement

### 2:30 – 3:00 pm Presentations from the 2024 TOGA VIMS Fellowship Endowment Recipients:

- *Investigating Oyster Reef Resiliency in the Chesapeake Bay*, by Madison Griffin, Master's Student, VIMS
- *Workforce Demands In Shellfish Culture for both Virginia and Florida Eastern oyster and Hard Clam Aquaculture Industries*, by Caela Gilsinan, Master's Student, VIMS

### 3:00 – 4:00 pm Education Session: *The Latest Information for Oyster Enthusiasts*

- Presenting: *The New 2025 Virginia Oyster Gardening Guide*

Whether experienced or beginning as an oyster gardener, you will learn the most up-to-date facts you need to know.

**Moderators:** Russell Mait and Carl Zulick, TOGA

Panel Presentation and Discussion with collaborators:

- Adam Kenyon, Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) (invited)
- Adam Wood, Virginia Department of Health (VDH) (invited)
- Karen Hudson, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, (VIMS)

### 4:00 – 5:00 pm Social Hour with Oyster Enthusiast Friends

- Potluck- Please bring an oyster dish, a favorite appetizer, or dessert to share

**REGISTER TODAY:** Plan to attend the meeting and pre-register online:

<https://forms.gle/qfZJoAmhX8adVkyG7>

Or, participate virtually. You will receive a link in the email address entered on your registration form.



The TOGA Board seeks new Board Members throughout the year. Potential candidates can self-nominate or can be recommended to any Board member by November of each year. Following the Bylaws of the Board, TOGA can have up to 20 Board Members.

In 2024, the Board had 17 members after Board member Kent Eanes regrettably resigned due to other commitments in March. In June, Galen Salgado resigned to focus on float building and volunteering. In September, the Board filled one of the vacancies with Laurie Sloane. In February 2025, 2024 Board members Stephanie Antonijuan, Carlton McFaden, and Brian Ingram will step down into active volunteer roles.

In November 2024, the TOGA Nominating Committee recommended to the Board of Directors a slate of candidates for the 2025 Board of Directors. One new candidate for 2025, Jim Dall, was identified as a nominee after a wide search. The nominee and slate of candidates was presented to the Board by the Nominating Committee Chair and unanimously approved. The 2025 slate of the Board of Directors and Officers will be brought to a membership vote at the TOGA Annual Meeting in February. The new Board and officers must be confirmed by vote from a majority of members attending in person, virtually, or by mail/email. On the next page, the slate of candidates for 2025 is shown, along with introductions to new candidate Jim Dall and Board member Laurie Sloane.



## TOGA Board of Directors 2025

Officers		locale	phone	Email address
President	Carl Zulick, MOG	Deltaville		carlz@togaboard.org
Vice President:	Terry Lewis, President Emeritus, MOG	Gloucester	804.815.8899	
Secretary	Jim Dall	Gloucester Point		jdall@togaboard.org
Treasurer	Russell Mait, MOG	Kilmarnock		russellm@togaboard.org
Past President	Sue Borra, MOG	Kinsale		sueb@togaboard.org
<b>Directors at Large</b>	Lou Castagnola, MOG	Gloucester		
	Ken Hammond, MOG	Reedville		
	Richard J. Siciliano, MOG	Heathsville/Waldorf (MD)	240-270-1439	rjsiciliano@yahoo.com
	David Singletary	Newport News		dsingletary@togaboard.org
	Laurie Slone	Hayes		lslone@togaboard.org
	Mike Sanders, President Emeritus, MOG	Lottsburg		
	Doug Schaefer, President Emeritus, MOG	Heathsville		subiceguy@gmail.com
	Vic Spain, President Emeritus, MOG	White Marsh		vicspain@rocketmail.com
	Brian Wood, President Emeritus, MOG	Reedville		brianw@togaboard.org
<b>2024 Board Members Departing</b>	Stephanie Antonijuan	White Stone		santonijuan@togaboard.org
	Carlton McFaden	Dutton		carltonm@togaboard.org
	Brian Ingram, MOG	Cobbs Creek		briani@togaboard.org

MOG=Master Oyster Gardener

### Meet the New TOGA Board Nominees

The Board is pleased to introduce the following new candidates who we believe will bring new skills and expertise while increasing the Board's capability.

#### Board Nominee: James R. Dall, Jr.

Jim Dall spent his formative years in Stuart, Florida, spending most of his time on and in the intercostal and St Lucie waterways. He has a strong mechanical aptitude developed through taking everything that broke (appliances, motors/engines, etc.) apart and figuring out what makes them work and why they failed.



Jim earned a Computer Engineering degree from the University of Central Florida in 1987. Since then, he has been employed by ITT through all their spin-offs, acquisitions, and mergers, retiring 35 years later from L3 Harris. In that time, he has been engaged in DOD, federal, automotive, and commercial design and manufacturing. He participated in all aspects of the business through his primary roles in quality, metrology, and program management. He also has been involved in the businesses he has supported.

Jim retired in February 2024 to his home on the York River (Gloucester Point) where he and his wife started raising oysters on their shared pier. He has diverse interests and talents and a healthy backlog of home, boat, aviation, and automotive projects and is looking to become more involved in the TOGA organization. Originally, Jim and his wife became interested in oyster gardening to add to their repertoire of locally sustainable seafood sources. They have come to appreciate the larger impact on the Chesapeake Bay as a whole. Jim believes it is important to protect the Bay and is looking to inspire others to enjoy oyster gardening and the community of gardeners through his talents and service.

#### New 2024 Board Member: Laurie B. Slone



Five years ago, Laurie Slone and her husband moved to Gloucester, Virginia from New Hampshire. They inherited four oyster floats, which led to her passion for oyster gardening. Laurie has significant experience in social media, website management, surveys, and publications. A social psychologist with a

degree in marketing and management, Laurie specializes in the application of online communications, community collaborations, customer experience, and quality control. During ten years of leadership at the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, she advanced the effective use of technology in the field of trauma and PTSD. She directed the educational website [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov), reaching over two million visitors per year. Her marketing efforts included annual campaigns for PTSD Awareness Month, and curricula for online training. A Commendation Medal was awarded to Dr. Slone by the Vermont National Guard for her efforts creating the [Vermont Military Family and Community Network](#). This work also led to her book *After the War Zone: A Practical Guide for Troops and Their Families*. Laurie joined the Board in August 2024 by unanimous vote of the Board to fill a recent vacancy.



**Recap: Fall '24 Float Sale at Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock, VA**  
 ~Brian Ingram, MOG

TOGA's *Fall 2024 Oyster Float Sale* was held on October 12, 2024, at Camp Kekoka in Kilmarnock Virginia, the site where TOGA builds its oyster floats. Our thanks go to the Alexandria Police Youth Camp (APYC) for their continued support. This year's sale was an enormous success. The weather was perfect, and it was held in conjunction with the class of *OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening*, led by Master Gardener Richard Siciliano, which always helps with attendance.



Photo by Kent Eanes

By day's end, more than 153 oyster devices, exceeding our 2023 fall sale numbers of 141 oyster floats. The final count on the types of devices sold was 39 Taylors, 25 Flip Floats, 4 Bottom cages, 33 Tumblers, 9 Rough Riders, 42 Spat Tubes, and 1 bender. Thanks to all the TOGA members and volunteers who assisted with float construction and a special thanks go out to Bob Eadie and Kent Eanes who pre-constructed many devices to ensure we met all pre-orders.

Two of our local oyster seed vendors, Judy Ambrose of Oystermama's Bay-bies, and Darryl Krolicki of Capt. Tom's Oyster Floats, Oyster Gardening, LLC, were present to sell spat, and they quickly sold out. Special thanks to Brian Wood for obtaining additional "Diploid" oysters to sell after our spat vendors' supplies were exhausted, insuring that no oyster gardener went home without oyster spat.

This event continues to be one of TOGA's primary fundraising activities with all proceeds benefiting our TOGA 501 (C) 3 charity.



Master Oyster Gardener Bob Eadie (left) explains the "Rough Rider" oyster cage to a prospective oyster gardener



## **Upcoming: TOGA Membership and Supporter Appreciation Party: March 22, 2025**

~Terry Lewis, MOG

The 12<sup>th</sup> annual TOGA Appreciation Party will be held on Saturday, March 22, 2025, at Camp Kekoka, located at 1083 Boys Camp Road, Kilmarnock, Virginia, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. If you are a member or supporter of TOGA, please join us for some delicious food and great camaraderie.

Winners of the TOGA Middle School Writing contest will read their winning essays at the party. Previous winners submitted fabulous essays, and their readings were always a highlight of the annual membership meeting. This year, their readings will instead be featured at the Appreciation Party.

As in the past 11 years, TOGA will supply local delicious oysters for your enjoyment. We ask you to bring the fixings for your favorite oyster dish, and you can prepare them for others to share at the party. There are stoves and ovens at the facility. If you don't have a favorite oyster dish, please bring a side dish or dessert to share with your TOGA friends. TOGA will also provide soft drinks. If you prefer an adult beverage, please bring your own. We're fortunate to again have Stacey on-site to prepare some of the best fried oysters on the east coast. She'll also make some delicious gluten-free fried oysters, on request.

We'll have lots to discuss with fellow oyster gardeners in a relaxed atmosphere, and there are some exciting developments in the oyster industry that you might want to share with fellow members.

Mark your calendar now to attend this all you can eat oyster extravaganza. Please RSVP to Terry Lewis no later than March 15 so appropriate supplies can be acquired. Email [lewistmn@msn.com](mailto:lewistmn@msn.com) or call 804-693-2687.

This event is TOGA's way of expressing our appreciation to our many great members and supporters who make this such a successful organization. We look forward to seeing you there for a great time and to help celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Be sure to wear some green and be ready to answer some quiz questions for fabulous prizes.



## **TOGA Supports Booker T. Washington Middle School Oyster Day**

~ Vic Spain, MOG



*"Barnacle Boy" oyster is a hit with students at Booker T. Washington Middle School. Teacher Ms. Williams (left) likes him too.*

On November 21, 2024, Brian Ingram and Vic Spain met with six classes (150 sixth-grade students) at Booker T. Washington Middle School Oyster Day, Newport News, Virginia. They discussed the Eastern Oyster, both wild and farmed, how they benefit the Bay, oyster history, oyster diseases, and the TOGA Youth Writing Competition.



## **Call for Nominations for the Annual Madison Boyd Award**

~Carl Zulick, MOG

The Madison Boyd Award is named for former Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) member Madison Boyd of Mollusk,

Virginia. Madison was a friend, waterman, and visionary leader who worked tirelessly on TOGA conservation and education efforts with the Boys and Girls Club at Camp Kekoka in Kilmarnock on the Northern Neck of VA until his death in 2020.

Madison actively volunteered in support of his community, especially with young people. Inaugurated in 2021, the award reflects TOGA's mission and values. The award may be given to any individual or group whose achievements, contributions, or service result in educating the public about oysters, oyster gardening, or improving the health of the Chesapeake Bay. The non-monetary award is presented by the TOGA president at the annual meeting. Any member of the public or any group is eligible to be nominated by November 15 of each year.

For further details and for a copy of the application form, go to the TOGA website and type "Madison Boyd Award" in the search tool:  
<https://www.oystergardener.org/madison-boyd-award>.

Please send nominations to [CarlZ@togaboard.org](mailto:CarlZ@togaboard.org).



**Recap: Oysters at the Kiwanis Seafood Festival**  
 ~David Singletary

TOGA was well represented Saturday, September 28, 2024, at the annual Kiwanis Seafood Festival held at the Greek Hellenic Center in Newport News. A team of TOGA oyster gardeners were on hand to shuck oysters (600 of them) for the festival goers, and hosted an education display showing TOGA's activities in helping to clean the Bay.

A crew of six TOGA members started shucking at 1:00 and continued until 3:30 p.m. Several festival participants put away a dozen or so oysters. Many others had their first oyster experience. The TOGA crew showed up with shucking tables and all the tools to make it an easy service project. Of course, we claimed the shells for recycling and returned them to the Camp Kekoka sanctuary reef in Pittman Cove.

Festival goers learned about the water-filtering ability of an oyster (as much as a gallon of water filtered per hour), as well as how spent shells

can act as the ideal medium upon which baby oysters (spat) settle ("set"), thus helping to stabilize the shoreline and prevent erosion.

Surprisingly, some festival-goers traveled to the Festival from as far away as Richmond, Northern Virginia, and Virginia Beach.



Oyster shuckers from TOGA hard at work preparing for the throngs of bivalve lovers at the Kiwanis Seafood Festival in Newport News, Virginia. (L-R facing): Vic Spain, Jim Dall, Brian Ingram, and Carlton McFaden

**OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening**  
**Schedule of Classes 2025**

~Richard Siciliano, MOG



- February 3, 2025: 6:30-7:30 pm – Fairfield Vol Firehouse, Reedville
- February 8, 2025: 10:00-11:30 am – VIMS-Gloucester Point
- March 22, 2025: 10:30 AM-12:00 noon- Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock
- March 31, 2025: 5:00-6:30 pm - Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Hague Branch (Coles Point Rd.)
- April 12, 2025: 10:00-11:30 am - Northumberland Public Library (NPL), Heathsville

Register online for this free educational opportunity:  
<https://www.oystergardener.org/oyster-gardening-101>

## VIMS Thanks TOGA for Float-Building Support

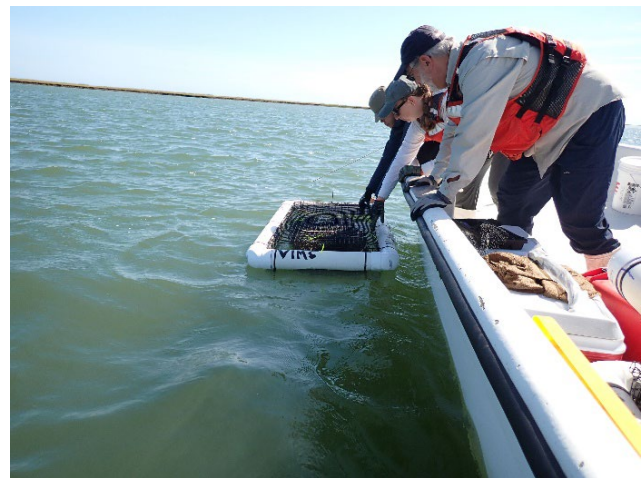
We want to thank the Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association for collaborating with us on a recent project at VIMS. For more than 30 years our lab has investigated the impact of a parasitic dinoflagellate called *Hematodinium perezii* on blue crabs in the region. This parasite does not pose health concerns to humans, but it can lead to severe disease and heavy mortality in juvenile blue crabs, particularly in our high salinity coastal bays on the Eastern Shore.

We have tried many types of field and lab experiments, but in August, 2024, we wanted to try a new field study. We approached TOGA with a specific request: Help us make Taylor floats. We worked closely with TOGA members, specifically Vic Spain and Doug Schaefer, to create Taylor floats for a novel field experiment. In the end we made 12 floats for our deployments! The experiment involved holding naïve (non-infected) juvenile blue crabs, along with oysters and clams, in Taylor floats at field sites with high levels of *Hematodinium*. By retrieving the crabs after 7-10 days and running diagnostic experiments, we can determine the incidence, or transmission rate of infections in these naïve crabs. We can also determine if the filter feeding activity of oysters and clams reduces disease transmission. Our lab completed several deployments at Eastern Shore field sites during September and October 2024 before falling water temperatures slowed the transmission of *Hematodinium* and closed our field season. As we look forward to next season, we continue to brainstorm ways of incorporating our TOGA-made Taylor floats in new experiments. Once again, many thanks to TOGA and its supporters for helping us with this project! Under your guidance we learned how to make Taylor floats to our specific size requirements and we purchased your supplies to help us build them. We greatly appreciated your help and support in our activity.

Sincerely,  
Prof. Jeff Shields, David Jones, Lindsey Smith  
Dr. Megan Tomamichel, Xuqing Chen  
Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences  
Virginia Institute of Marine Science



Doug Schaefer (TOGA) and Lindsey Smith (VIMS) cut PVC for custom Taylor Floats



VIMS Deploys Large Taylor Floats at Eastern Shore Field sites

**The Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) VIMS Fellowship:  
Words from its Recipients...**

Income from the Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) Fellowship endowment is used for graduate student fellowship support for one or more students enrolled in the School of Marine Science of William & Mary at VIMS. The fellowship may support students researching oysters, other shellfish, and Chesapeake Bay ecological restoration. Proceeds derived from TOGA's float sales go toward these fellowships. Published here are what recent recipients of these TOGA fellowships have to say:



**Madison Griffin**

*Hello TOGA members! Thank you so much for supporting graduate students through the TOGA Fellowship. I am a master's student at William & Mary's Batten School of Coastal and Marine Sciences at VIMS. I received a bachelor's degree in biology from Duke University in 2023. In undergrad, I studied a lot of topics, including plastic pollution policies in African countries, the effectiveness of plastic pollution clean-up technology, invertebrate diversity in North Carolina seagrass beds, and even the social development of juvenile baboons! Ultimately, these experiences led me to the*

*Environmental Statistics and Transdisciplinary Data Science lab at VIMS.*

*I think it is important (and fun!) to use huge datasets to answer complex questions about population dynamics and environmental policy. If you were to stop by my office, you would find me deep in my computer! For my graduate research at VIMS, I will investigate oyster reef resiliency in the Chesapeake Bay! I'm working towards building a model that can quantify resiliency and estimate the effectiveness of oyster management. Last year, I used a snapshot of the data to understand oyster population dynamics in the Chesapeake Bay and investigate if the data matches what we've heard from watermen and other shellfish scientists. This year, I hope to utilize the full dataset to try unique methods to estimate population dynamics. Lately, I've been taking statistics classes, building up my modeling skills, and building connections with the Virginia Marine Resources Commission.*

*I am excited to present my research at the annual TOGA meeting next year! I am so grateful to receive a TOGA Fellowship for the 2024-2025 academic year. Thank you.*



**Caela Gilsinan**

*TOGA Members, I would like to start off by thanking you for your support of Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) graduate students via the TOGA Student Fellowship Endowment. I am a master's student at VIMS. As a Gloucester native, the*



Chesapeake Bay has always been in my backyard. My love for oyster aquaculture began when I was 15, during a high-school research project with the Chesapeake Bay Governor's School, where I assessed ecosystem services in the presence and absence of oysters in Chesapeake Bay. I graduated from William and Mary in 2023 with a Bachelor of Science in Marine and Environmental Social Sciences, a self-designed major. In my undergraduate career I expanded my research to other shellfisheries – such as soft clams and surf clams – and had the opportunity to work on a project evaluating market expansion for invasive blue catfish. My passion for the human dimensions of shellfish aquaculture and fisheries has strengthened throughout my graduate career, as I continue to study the socio-economic impacts of shellfish aquaculture in Chesapeake Bay.

For my master's research at VIMS, I will measure workforce demands in shellfish culture for both Virginia and Florida's Eastern oyster and hard clam aquaculture industries. I have visited VA and FL oyster and clam farms to develop surveys and conduct interviews. The surveys ask questions about time spent conducting various farm tasks, work intensity, and challenges at individual shellfish farms. Currently, 12 small-scale farms in VA and FL producing oysters and/or hard clams are participating in the surveys and will provide data every two weeks for one year. This past summer I traveled to FL and conducted 22 interviews with commercial shellfish farmers. The interviews assess employee and employer perceptions regarding labor availability, job satisfaction, stressors on productivity, technology substitutions, and industry growth. In the spring, I plan to interview VA commercial shellfish farmers and to begin my data analyses, where I will assess factors that influence labor demands and intensity. The goals of this research are to inform workforce development, to expand the shellfish aquaculture industry, and to improve sustainability in the sector.

I am thrilled to share more about my research with you at the annual TOGA meeting in February. I am very appreciative to be a recipient of the TOGA Student Fellowship Endowment. Thank you all for your support for my graduate career at VIMS.



## Give the Perfect Gift for Oyster-Loving Families and Friends

If you are hunting for that ideal Christmas or birthday present, or just to say you care, please consider giving a membership to TOGA. For only \$25, you get a year of membership, three newsletters, email oyster gardening tips and notifications of importance, free access to the oystergardener.org website, Oysters 101 training, workshops, invitation to the annual Members Appreciation Parts, and other events held throughout the year.

We are sure someone you know will want to attend our free-to-members training in 2025 to become a *Master Oyster Gardener* and earn the privilege of having "MOG" after their name. The bragging rights are also free. In addition, you will know you have helped our non-profit's ability to meet our goals of education, conservation of the Bay, and getting more oysters in the water. The larger our membership, the more influence and exposure we can have with State and local governments and in our communities.

So jump online to register a loved-one at <https://oystergardener.org/become-a-member> and make your holiday shopping easy!

## TOGA Middle School Essay Contest Deadline Draws Near

~Terry Lewis, MOG, past president

The Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association Middle School Essay Contest deadline is near: **December 15, 2024**. Students are encouraged to show off their writing skills and win substantial prizes.

After very successful Middle School Writing Contests the past eleven years, TOGA is offering prizes of \$500, \$250, and \$100 for first, second and third places respectively for the top essays. A prize of \$200 will also be awarded to the school of the top entry. The theme of the essays is "Consider the Oyster" a wide-open category that must include an essay that has anything to do with oysters.

The competition is open to all Virginia students in

grades 6, 7, and 8. Home-schooled students are welcome to enter.

Winners will be announced at the TOGA Membership Party on March 22, 2025, at Camp Kekoka, in Kilmarnock, Virginia. The three top winners will be published on the TOGA Web site, and may be published in other publications or web sites.

The essays should be written in Microsoft Word format, or saved as PDF, and attached to an e-mail. The submissions can be made by the December 15, 2024 deadline. For more information, to view the entry form, and to see last year's winners and their essays, go to TOGA's website: <https://www.oystergardener.org/youth-writing-competition>



## The TOGA Speakers Bureau

Did you know that many TOGA members like to talk about oysters? Oh yes, we have a group of public speakers, many of whom are Master Oyster Gardeners (MOGs), who are eager and willing to visit your club, group, or community organization and talk about oysters and the Chesapeake Bay. Topics include the basics of oyster gardening (OYS-101), the history of oysters in the Bay, the Potomac River oyster wars, and oyster biology.

TOGA is often invited to speak to many diverse groups throughout the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, and the Lower Tidewater Area, including Williamsburg.

If you would like a TOGA member to talk at your upcoming event, contact Vic Spain at [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com) or (804) 413-1020 or Doug Schaefer at [subiceguy@hotmail.com](mailto:subiceguy@hotmail.com) or (804) 580-1456.



## Are Your Dues Due for 2025?

If you received this newsletter in the mail, please check the year next to your name on the address label. If it is 2024 or earlier, then 2025 dues are due for your membership to remain current.



If you believe there is an

error, contact Vic Spain at

[vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com) or 804-642-6764. Annual membership dues are \$25 (per family) for one calendar year (January through December), not 12 months from the date of your payment.

### TOGA Member Benefits:

- Receive newsletters with the latest oyster gardening information
- Participate in educational events sponsored by TOGA.
- Learn about innovations in oyster gardening techniques
- Benefit from the expertise of hundreds of others interested in growing oysters
- Opportunity to enroll free-of-charge for the live seminar: *OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening*

### To become a member, visit the TOGA website:

<https://www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member>, or use the form at the back of this newsletter to update your membership. You may also use the link or the form to update your information. It is important that your address and email address are correct as that is our primary way of communicating with members. Please share this membership form with a friend.



**Recap: TOGA at the Taste of Middlesex  
Deltaville Maritime Museum,  
October 19, 2024**

~Carl Zulick

Thanks to Terry Lewis, Carlton McFaden, Pat Rabb-Zulick, Joyce Ballato, Sam Bohnstedt of Seaglass Wines, and Richard Siciliano for spending their Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at

the Deltaville Maritime Museum and Nature Park. It was a beautiful fall day, and we talked to well over 100 people, and will likely see 4 to 6 new TOGA members if they follow through with their commitment to joining.

Several people wanted to buy spat and floats, so we directed them to the Good Luck Cellars Oyster Crawl event in November, or to Captain Tom's Oyster Floats, since Judy Ambrose had exhausted her supply of spat. Richard taught four enthusiastic people who attended his class *OYS-101: The Basics of Oyster Gardening*. We had many TOGA members stop by, and it was good to talk to them and for them to see our continuing mission work.



*Pat Rabb-Zulick serves up a tasting of Seaglass Pinot Grigio while Carlton McFaden talks oysters.  
Photo by Kent Eanes*

The free **Seaglass Wine** tasting station worked its magic and drew hundreds of happy folks to the TOGA display. People sampled six red and white varieties from TOGA's largest corporate sponsor, while Pat spoke of the virtues of not only each wine, but also putting oysters in the bay.



*Carl Zulick demonstrates the Tidal Tumbler oyster float to a new oyster gardener at the Taste of Middlesex event at the Deltaville Maritime Museum, October 19<sup>th</sup>.*

## **Recap: Northern Neck Sixth Graders Learn About the Importance of Oysters to the Water Quality of the Chesapeake Bay**

*-Sue Borra, MOG*

It was a warm, sunny, and breezy fall day on Friday, November 1st at Belle Isle State Park, and TOGA conducted interactive oyster education sessions for 48 Sixth graders from Richmond County Middle School. TOGA Master Oyster Gardeners Doug Schaefer, Richard Siciliano, and Sue Borra conducted hands-on educational sessions to help students understand the importance of oysters to the Chesapeake Bay.

The students heard about the life cycle of the oyster, examined live oysters, crafted notes on oyster shells to be deposited in an oyster reef, tried their hand at oyster tonging and played a game of Oyster Jeopardy.

Part of a larger program called "Think Outside the Sink," this event was coordinated by the Northern Neck Soil & Water Conservation District with the goal to provide meaningful watershed education experiences to Northern Neck sixth graders.



**Recap: Deborah Pratt Holds Court at  
Urbanna Oyster Festival Education Day,  
October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024**  
~Richard Siciliano, MOG

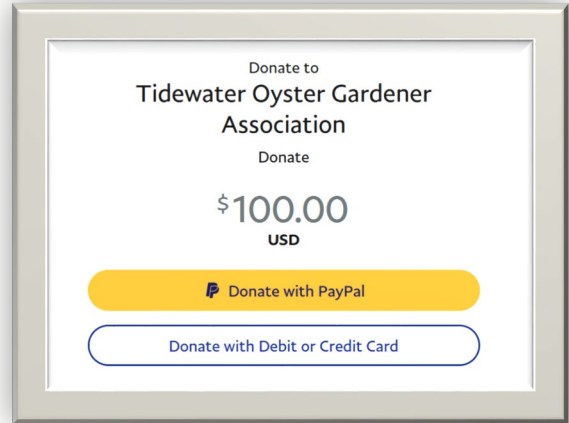


Champion Oyster Shucker Deborah Pratt taught Middlesex County students the fine art of oyster shucking at TOGA's exhibit during this year's edition of the 2024 Oyster Festival Education Day on the Thursday before the annual festival in Urbanna, Virginia. This event was another successful Education Day, according to Clark Laster, Urbanna Oyster Festival Marine Legacy Program Coordinator, with 15 exhibit stations serving more than 400 students from the 4th and 7th grades in Middlesex County public schools.

The featured speaker at the event was Deborah Pratt, world champion oyster shucker, who taught youngsters how to shuck oysters at TOGA's oyster gardening exhibit. Also showing the youngsters the contribution that oysters make to the health of the Chesapeake Bay were Master Oyster Gardeners Doug Schaefer, Sandi Petty, Mike Ballato, Jim Dall, and Richard Siciliano.



**Donate to TOGA before December 31<sup>st</sup>**



Close out the year 2024 by sending a tax-deductible donation to TOGA so our volunteer Master Oyster Gardeners can continue to provide valuable resources to ecology-minded oyster enthusiasts. In the past year, TOGA has supplied more than 300 oyster cages, floats, and other oyster gardening gear at cost to our membership. In addition, TOGA's volunteer Master Oyster Gardeners met with and conducted educational programs to hundreds of elementary, middle, and high school students throughout the Northern Neck and Tidewater region, from Kinsale to Hampton. MOGs have conducted personal consultations with dozens of beginning oyster gardeners, free of charge, including in-person site visits to answer their questions about oyster gardening. TOGA, in its effort to meet the needs of all oyster gardeners – from novice to expert – offers a 90-minute course for oyster gardeners entitled *OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening* to interested clubs and associations throughout the year, free-of-charge to current TOGA members.



TOGA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and all donations are tax deductible. All proceeds from TOGA's float sales go towards TOGA/VIMS Endowed Fellowships that support graduate students who are researching shellfish and Chesapeake Bay ecological restoration at William & Mary's School of Marine Science at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). To donate to TOGA so the organization can fulfill its mission, we urge you to go to the TOGA website and make your pledge before December 31, 2023:

[https://www.paypal.com/donate/?cmd=\\_s-xclick&hosted\\_button\\_id=7CMYLUAVKLRP2&source=url](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=7CMYLUAVKLRP2&source=url)

## Volunteer to be a TOGA Oyster Float and Cage Builder

~Vic Spain, MOG

This past year, TOGA members and volunteers, including students and teachers from Hampton High School Maritime Academy and the Hampton Floating Classroom project, built over 300 floats/cages for sale to fellow oyster gardeners, by far the most ever for the organization. Many thanks to the hard-working TOGA volunteers and to all the float builders who worked tirelessly to accomplish this feat. As a result, the TOGA/VIMS Fellowship Endowment and other important projects are supported as never before, and thousands of bivalves can have homes in oyster gardens throughout the Tidewater and Northern Neck of Virginia.

If you are interested in joining the float-building team, contact: [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com)



## Hey TOGA Members! Are you on Social Media?

Please LIKE/FOLLOW our updated [Facebook](#) Page, and TOGA is also now on [Instagram](#)!

- more oyster-related news for your reading pleasure
- updates and reminders for events!
- *help spread the word for a cleaner Bay!*

## **Too many oysters? Too many shells? What to do?**

Oyster Gardeners: If you find that you have grown more oysters than you can consume, or you have run out of float space, consider donating your live oysters back to TOGA so they can re-populate Pittman Cove, our sanctuary reef in Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock. And while you're at it, turn in any spent shells you may have accumulated. Drop off those excessive bivalves (and shells) at one of TOGA's float sales or education outreach events. Or, call for a local pick-up of your over-stock. For details, contact Richard Siciliano: [rjsiciliano@yahoo.com](mailto:rjsiciliano@yahoo.com) or Carl Zulick: [czulick@gmail.com](mailto:czulick@gmail.com)

## Newsletter News: Call for Articles and Photos



The TOGA Newsletter is published three times a year and is mailed to all TOGA members. Full-color copies of this edition and past newsletters are available on the website at

<https://www.oystergardener.org/newsletters-1>

The deadline for articles for the Spring '25 newsletter is March 1, 2025. TOGA members who wish to submit articles may do so by the deadline date. Articles will be printed as space allows. Email your article to Vic Spain at [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com), or Richard Siciliano at [rjsiciliano@yahoo.com](mailto:rjsiciliano@yahoo.com)

**Thanks** to our past and current members of our Board of Directors, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), our partners, including Seaglass Wines, and all TOGA members who made this newsletter possible.



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## Remembering the First VIMS TOGA Advisor, Michael James Oesterling (Mike) of Potomac, Maryland (1949-2024)

~Vic Spain, MOG

On October 23, 2024, the TOGA BOD received a sad message from Karen Hudson, Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMMS) liaison to TOGA, about the passing of her predecessor, Mike Oesterling. The following was included in her remarks, "Mike started the Master Oyster Gardener Program and worked with Jackie Partin to set up the public oyster tastings at TOGA events, among other things. He was a TOGA champion. Saying he will be missed is an understatement. The TOGA endowment was in honor of Mike and Jackie."



Beginning in 1998, Mike organized and led six Master Oyster Gardener courses, allowing amateurs to learn about oyster aquaculture from ground-breaking marine scientists. That tradition was carried on by Karen Hudson, and as of 2022, a total of 11 MOG courses have provided training to approximately 300 oyster gardeners. Over 100 are still active TOGA members.

In 2011, following his many accomplishments, Mike retired from VIMS and became the first Executive Director of the Shellfish Growers of Virginia (SGV) where he served until 2022. Upon his retirement in November 2023, the Virginia General Assembly passed a joint resolution commending him for his work in promoting and advocating for the shellfish industry in the Commonwealth:

<https://www.richmondsunlight.com/bill/2023/hj670/fulltext/>

Mike was also a co-founder of TOGA and inspired, taught, and supported the volunteer organization until his retirement in 2011. We remember Mike as a leader, teacher and friend.



*June 2012 - Members of the Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association announced the establishment of the TOGA Fellowship Endowment at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. (L-R): VIMS Dean and Director John Wells, recently retired VIMS fisheries specialist and TOGA Advisor Mike Oesterling, TOGA co-founder and President Emerita Jackie Partin, and TOGA President David Turney. The endowment is in honor of Mike and Jackie who have served TOGA so well for 14 years.*

## TOGA Winter 2024-25 Events

(as of December 8, 2024)

For an up-to-date calendar: <https://www.oystergardener.org/schedule/>

- **December 10, 2024:** 10:00 – 11:30 AM, **TOGA Board of Directors Meeting** Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Davis Hall Room 101, 1370 Greate Rd, Gloucester Point, VA 23062
- **December 15, 2024: Middle School Writing Contest Essays due.** Event Coordinator: Terry Lewis, [lewistmn@msm.com](mailto:lewistmn@msm.com). See TOGA's website: <https://www.oystergardener.org/youth-writing-competition>
- **February 3, 2025: OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening**, 6:30-7:30 pm, Fairfield Volunteer Firehouse, Reedville, VA For more information, contact Richard Siciliano: [rjsiciliano@yahoo.com](mailto:rjsiciliano@yahoo.com)
- **February 8, 2025: OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening** class, on the morning of the *TOGA Annual Meeting*: 10:00-11:30 A.M., Watermen's Hall, VIMS. Sign up for this free in-person class on the same online form for the annual meeting registration. For more information, contact Richard Siciliano: [rjsiciliano@yahoo.com](mailto:rjsiciliano@yahoo.com)
- **TOGA Annual Membership Meeting Live and Virtual (free-to-all oyster lovers)**
  - **Where:** Virginia Institute on Marine Science (VIMS), Waterman's Hall, 1370 Greate Rd, Gloucester Point, VA 23062
  - **When:** Saturday, February 8, 2025, from 1 to 5 PM.
  - **More details** will be posted on the TOGA website in December 2024 and January 2025.
  - **Pre-Register** online to select how you would like to attend the annual meeting -- in-person or virtual ([See page 1 of this newsletter](#))



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# TOGA Membership Form

P.O. Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061

**We prefer that you join and pay online:** <https://www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member>

If joining online, your payment will be processed via PayPal.

(A PayPal account is not required; a credit card may be used instead)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Please check one:  New Member  Renewal

Annual Dues (Check one):  \$25 (1 yr.)  \$50 (2 yrs.)  \$75 (3 yrs.)

Check here if you use this form only to update your information (and not to pay dues)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

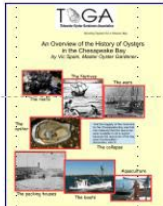
City, State, and Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email (please print clearly) \_\_\_\_\_

Body of water where oysters will be grown: \_\_\_\_\_

Growing site (street address) where oysters will be grown: \_\_\_\_\_

## Be a Proud TOGA Volunteer



## Sign up to Volunteer

<https://www.oystergardener.org/volunteer>

Tell us what you enjoy doing so we can let you know of volunteer opportunities.



PO Box 2463  
Gloucester, VA 23061

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Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association

*Growing oysters for a cleaner Bay*