

control engineer and manager for a large chemical company,” he explained.

He helped build plastics factories. In his sometimes self-deprecating but engaging manner, he said his retirement passion for oysters is making up for his chemical career, although he quickly adds that we would have a hard time living without plastics.

Later he came to the DC area to work as a contractor for NASA in process control and development and later at the Applied Physics Laboratory. While there, he and his wife moved to Chesapeake Beach. “My wife and I always wanted to live on water. And, so we surveyed the Chesapeake Bay from up north down south and looked at most every street and when we came



Students help measure Fishing Creek's water quality.

down the hill on Route 260, we said, ‘This has got to be the place’.” They found a cottage on the water, fixed it up and settled in.

When he retired from the Applied Physics Laboratory, he did some work around the house, until his wife deemed him a “P.I.A.” and told him to find something to do. At that time then Chesapeake Beach Mayor Bruce Wahl was interested in the town getting involved in oyster cultivation.

“So, I went to the first meeting and listened to all about it and I’m signed up to be a part of it. And all of a sudden, I became the chairman of it,” he explained. There was a group in Solomons doing the same thing and the Chesapeake Beach effort basically mimicked what they were doing. They started growing oysters off the town’s boardwalk on Fishing Creek.

“I started to learn about the fact that the Chesapeake Bay was not in the best of shape from an environmental standpoint. And, I had been working in the chemical industry for a long, long time and it was time to think about giving something back to society. So, I learned about the oysters. More selfishly I wanted to improve the Chesapeake Bay, that I look at every day,” he said.

What has evolved in Chesapeake Beach is part of a state-wide effort called Maryland Grows Oysters (MGO) involving waterfront landowners raising oysters on their own docks “We are just a small part of it,” Bacon said.

Bacon explained, "The situation is that because we're such a small part, we thought, well, okay, it only takes a couple of days a year to put the oysters in our creek and take the oysters out of our creek and run them out in the Bay." So, the thought process evolved from how to keep the CBOCS volunteers engaged throughout the year.

Beach Elementary School Principal Dr. Michael Shisler had the answer. His students were



A load of CBOCS' oysters.

learning about oysters in the fifth grade with a program developed by CHSPAX. According to Calvert County Public Schools, "CHESPAX is the environmental education program for the Calvert County Public School System. CHESPAX is a unique program in which the Board of Education staff work closely with local, state and regional partner agencies to provide hands-on environmental education experiences for the students of Calvert County." It is

headquartered at Kings Landing Park.

What the school system's environmental education program was missing was the hands-on experience. Shisler suggested to Bacon that his group provide that.

Bacon said he thought when the program started they were going to teach the kids about oysters. "And, they came and we started to explain what the oysters do and how many gallons they filter and all of the things about oysters that we had learned. And they were shaking their heads, yes, yes, yes. We know all about that."

"They had been sitting in the classroom, they had been working with their smart boards and their papers and all of that and that's all they had been learning there. They hadn't touched an oyster. They hadn't measured water quality. And so, it's the hands-on experience that comes at the end of the program, which ties it all together," Bacon said.

The County Times visited on Nov. 8 with Bacon and CBOCS education director Ron Draper, also a retiree, as they gave two fifth grade classes from Sunderland Elementary School that hands-on experience. Students go through a series of stations and at each one an educator from the Calvert County Department of Natural Resources gives the students hands-on demonstrations on marine life that live in oyster beds, viewing and measuring oyster spat (which are oyster larvae growing on oyster shells), water quality sampling and water depth gauging. While waiting for a station the kids are sent on a scavenger hunt to find marine life and natural vegetation.

CBOCS receives shells from a state oyster hatchery after the shells are populated with larva the size of poppy seeds. They attach to the shells and start to grow as spat. Those shells are then placed in cages dangling from the boardwalk. Next spring, they will be of the size to transplant out into the Bay, which will be CBOCS' ninth transplanting effort.

Before going to the stations, Draper tells the students that what they are measuring is important because it tells them if there are any changes to the environment that could affect the growing of oysters.

Draper also tells the students of an historic incident that epitomizes the fate of the Bay's oyster crop. He said in 1970 an oyster reef off Chesapeake Beach was opened to harvesting and within 10 days they had harvested 75,000 bushels and it was depleted. He quickly tells the students, however that most of the Bay's watermen today are as interested as they are in seeing oysters rebound.

Bacon talked about the importance of their reef in the Bay because it is there that those growing oysters will be doing their job of helping to filter the Bay: Those oysters will never be harvested. He explains there are two kinds of oysters, ones that reproduces faster, and the other which grow slower and are better filters. The reef has the latter kind of oysters.

Abner's Restaurant, which sits right across the boardwalk from where CBOCS is raising their oysters, has been growing the faster-growing oysters off its dock and relocating them on their own reef in the Bay. Now after just two years they are ready for their restaurant customers.

"The reef out there is in 20 feet of water and it's got about 800,000 to 900,000 oysters on it right now. And that's from zero eight years ago.' He added, "So that's an awful lot of filtering that's going on out there in the Bay. And then you multiply that by the numbers of oysters that other groups are putting in."

But Bacon puts things in perspective: "So that means we're doing a better job. A better job is not enough. If you really want to know the answer, in my opinion, we need more and more and more and more oysters going into the Bay and the states working on it. Then the federal government's working on it and volunteer programs working on it and so the objective is to go from one percent of what it used to be to 10 percent over the next 10 years and if we can do that, that'll be spectacular because the pollution is coming. You know, we got one of the things that has to happen in this world to stop the pollution."

In Chesapeake Beach's little microcosm of the pollution problem, more volunteers are needed to carry on the work, Bacon said. "Initially we had 106 people sign up and over the years the levels have dropped off and we have a core of about 12 to 15 who do all the work, except when we are moving oysters in and out of the creek." To find out more about CBOCS including how to volunteer, go to: <http://www.chesapeakebeachmd.gov/cboocs.htm>

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