



## Growing oysters for a cleaner Bay

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

### Fall 2023

#### Upcoming: Fall '23 Oyster Float Sale: October 14, 2023

~ Vic Spain, Brian Wood, MOGs

TOGA's annual fall float sale and educational event will be held on Saturday, October 14<sup>th</sup> at **Camp Kekoka**, at 1083 Boys Camp Rd, Kilmarnock, VA 22482, from 9 am to 12 noon.



*Aerial photo of Camp Kekoka by Kent Eanes*

TOGA will provide educational materials and personal consultation with Master Oyster Gardeners (MOGs) who will work with both prospective and experienced oyster gardeners. In addition, Richard Siciliano, MOG, will conduct classes of *OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening* at 10am and 11am.

The sale includes Taylor Floats, Flip Floats, Tidal Tumblers, Rough Riders, and Bottom Cages, along with spat tubes, wire benders, and spat bags. Hats, shirts, aprons, and other TOGA logo items will be on sale, as well. Check TOGA's website for descriptions:

<https://www.oystergardener.org/devices-and-designs/> **Orders must be placed by October 1, 2023.** For the price list, go to page 17 of this

newsletter. TOGA accepts checks or cash, and payment is due at pickup.

Vendors will be on hand selling triploid and diploid spat. In the past, demand for floats has been very high. As a result, this year vendors will be on hand to sell their floats and equipment. This is intended to help walk-ups, members who missed the order deadline, and those looking for different style floats, tools, and supplies TOGA does not sell.

This event is one of TOGA's primary fundraising activities, with all proceeds benefiting TOGA, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. All proceeds beyond material costs go to the TOGA/VIMS Student Fellowship Endowment and to other needs determined by the TOGA Board of Directors.

To order, go to the TOGA online order form link at <https://www.oystergardener.org/fall-float-sale>. Purchasing a TOGA float requires current membership. You may order up to three wire floats plus two spat tubes total, including build-your-own purchases. If you are unsure about your membership status, check the address label on the back of the mailed newsletter. Otherwise, inquire when you fill out the "Become a Member" form at <https://www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member>, or when you use the float order form, either online or on the mail-in form. You may also contact Vic Spain at [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com).

The preferred online order form creates a record in our files and returns a copy of your order to you by email. Pay (by check or cash) when you pick up your order. If you cannot be at the sales event, ask us to hold your float for you, and let us know when and where you will pick up your purchase. Otherwise, the float(s) you ordered may be sold. So, please pick up your pre-ordered floats by 11 a.m. Unclaimed and unreserved floats will go on sale to walkups.

If you choose to order floats by mail, rather than online, please use the order form [at the end of this newsletter](#) (or download a manual order form for “pre-built” or “build your own” floats from the TOGA website: <https://www.oystergardener.org/fall-float-sale>). Submit a completed form by mail to the address on the form, or email a copy to: [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com)

*Also available at the event (no need to pre-order)...*

Mesh Bags (small or medium mesh)	\$10
Crab pot Line	\$0.10/foot
Float Wire Mesh, 4 feet wide	\$5/foot
TOGA hats	\$20
TOGA T-shirts	\$15

**Build-Your-Own Float Day: Saturday, October 7, 2023, Camp Kekoka, 10am to 1pm:** TOGA members who help build their own floats before the sale, and in return get a \$10 discount on items they build, may sign up on either the online or mail-in order forms. Contact Vic Spain for details: [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com)



### **Recap: TOGA Provided Interactive Oyster Education for 155 Local Middle School Students**

*~Sue Borra, MOG*

This spring, TOGA provided two sessions of hands-on Oyster Education for 95 sixth graders from Richmond County Middle School and 60 middle school students from Ware Academy. The field trips were held at Belle Isle State Park and at Baliles Center at Hull Springs in April 2023.

The students learned key oyster facts while playing *Oyster Jeopardy*, had the opportunity to inspect oysters and the animals that live with them in an oyster float, and experienced an oyster tonging exercise. In addition, the energetic students learned the importance of oysters and oyster reef habitats to the Chesapeake Bay, along with the anatomy and lifecycle of the oyster and their role as filter feeders.

The sessions were conducted by TOGA Board Members and Master Oyster Gardeners Doug Schaefer, Richard Siciliano, and Sue Borra.

The educators’ review of the sessions included comments such as, “very engaging and informative,” “great presentation,” and “sincere thanks to each of you for sharing your passion for saving Mother Earth by inspiring the next generation!”

All the middle school teachers were also encouraged to have their students enter TOGA’s Middle School Writing Contest on the topic, “Consider the Oyster.”

For additional information, and if you would like to volunteer for future programs, contact Sue Borra ([sue.borra@gmail.com](mailto:sue.borra@gmail.com)), Doug Schaefer ([subiceguy@hotmail.com](mailto:subiceguy@hotmail.com)) or Richard Siciliano ([rjsiciliano@yahoo.com](mailto:rjsiciliano@yahoo.com)).



*Spat vendor Judy Ambrose of “Oystermama’s Bay-bies” (Mathews, VA) sells baby oysters for stocking floats and cages at TOGA’s Deltaville event.*

### **Recap: Oyster Gardener Event at Deltaville’s Holly Point Market**

*~Carl Zulick, MOG*

This past spring, TOGA held an educational event and oyster spat sale at the [Deltaville Maritime Museum](#), located at 287 Jackson Creek Rd, Deltaville, during the museum’s Holly Point Market on Saturday, May 6, 2023.

TOGA Master Oyster Gardeners provided informational materials and advice for new oyster gardeners or those with questions about maintaining their oyster gardens. A variety of equipment, such as cages and floats, tumblers, spat bags, and high-velocity water cages were

displayed. Local spat vendors were also on hand to sell triploid and diploid spat (baby oysters).

As an added bonus, *OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening*, a one-hour course taught by Master Oyster Gardener Richard Siciliano, covered how to legally start and maintain an oyster garden next to a homeowner's private pier.



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

O-Gardeners: If you've grown more oysters than you can consume, or you've run out of float space, consider donating your live oysters back to TOGA so they can re-populate our sanctuary reef in Camp Kekoka. 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. For details, contact Richard Siciliano: [rjsiciliano@yahoo.com](mailto:rjsiciliano@yahoo.com) or Carl Zulick: [czulick@gmail.com](mailto:czulick@gmail.com)

**Recap: TOGA MOGs Wow a Huge Crowd at Deltaville Maritime Museum Turner Lecture Series**

~Carl Zulick, MOG

A panel of TOGA Master Oyster Gardeners (MOGS) delivered presentations to 115 attendees at the Deltaville Maritime museum's Turner Lecture Series on March 12, 2023. TOGA President Sue Borra introduced presenters and reviewed the TOGA mission and activities. Richard Siciliano arranged a fun Oyster Jeopardy game as a crowd icebreaker which received a huge response from competitive members of the audience. Vic Spain presented a *History of Oysters*, covering topics from Native American uses of oysters to the impact that the diseases Dermo and MSX had on the oyster population. Carl Zulick discussed Bay ecology and how oysters improve the health of the bay. Siciliano then covered how to make an oyster Garden, including evaluating your site, getting a permit, choosing floats and containment devices, and selecting triploid or diploid seed oysters. Terry Lewis discussed health, safety, and maintenance of oyster gardens. The information he shared about *Vibrio* bacteria generated great interest. The

presentations were followed by an active question and answer period and discussions about the many devices on display.

Among those in attendance were many who wanted to start their own O-gardens. This presentation set a record for the largest number of attendees at any prior lecture in the annual Turner series.



(above): Carl Zulick Presents Bay Ecology to Turner Lecture Series Attendees



**TOGA Receives Grant from River Counties Community Foundation  
*Virginia Oyster Gardening Guide, 2023 edition to be published***

~Carl Zulick, MOG

TOGA recently received a \$2,500 grant from River Counties Community Foundation (RCCF) for the printing of a new edition of the *Virginia Oyster Gardening Guide*, a guide that has not been updated since 2013. The new edition will contain additional information on the Bay's watershed and ecosystem, new designs for oyster floats and cages, updated oyster and bay statistics, new guidance on site selection, permits, and health, and success stories from members of the oyster gardening community. *The Guide* is the primary tool used in TOGA's *OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening* training course.



RCCF supports 65 nonprofits in Lancaster, Middlesex, and Northumberland counties, awarding 68 grants in 2023 totaling nearly \$1.2 million. RCCF's mission is to cultivate philanthropy by connecting people who care with causes that matter, providing superior stewardship for their donors, and creating a better quality of life. Their

mission clearly meshes with the TOGA mission, with both organizations believing that a strong nonprofit sector is required to meet the challenges of Bay communities and the role of oysters in the Chesapeake Bay itself.

The RCCF grant was awarded in the environmental stewardship category, one of five areas of focus for the foundation. TOGA greatly appreciates the RCCF support and encourages community support of the foundation.



**TOGA Community Outreach Events at Local Fairs, Farmers Markets and more...** Do you like to share your experience as an oyster gardener? Then join us at any of our TOGA outreach events scheduled each year throughout the Tidewater region from February through November: <https://www.oystergardener.org>. Contact TOGA President Sue Borra at [sue.borra@gmail.com](mailto:sue.borra@gmail.com).



**Recap: TOGA Outreach at the Heathsville Farmers Market “Earth Day,” April 16, 2023; Upcoming: September 26, 2023**

~Doug Schaefer, MOG

As part of the Heathsville Farmers Market “Earth Day Celebration,” TOGA set up its education tent, and a team of volunteer oyster gardeners spoke with dozens of market-goers about how easy and rewarding it can be to start an oyster garden right at their own piers or along their shorelines.

TOGA was represented at its education outreach tent by several Master Oyster Gardeners (MOGs) who spoke about oyster gardening and growing oysters for a cleaner Bay.

TOGA volunteers will be part of the next Heathsville Farmers Market on Saturday, **September 16, 2023**, in celebration of “Living History Day.” TOGA members, especially Master Oyster Gardeners from the class of 2020, are encouraged to volunteer to help out with answering questions of market-goers at this event. Contact TOGA Event

Coordinator: Doug Schaefer at: [subiceguy@hotmail.com](mailto:subiceguy@hotmail.com). The Market takes place at Historic Rice's Hotel / Hughlett's Tavern, 73 Monument Place, Heathsville, VA 22473, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.



**Upcoming: Good Luck Cellars Fall ‘23 Oyster Crawl: November 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>**

~Doug Schaefer, MOG

TOGA is planning to have a “shelluva good time” at Good Luck Cellars, 1025 Goodluck Rd, Kilmarnock, with oyster dishes, wine by the glass and bottle, live music, and local crafters all in store.... And, let's not forget RED WINE OYSTER SHOOTERS!

TOGA will be setting up its outreach education tent both days, and on Saturday, November 11<sup>th</sup> there will be a lecture/discussion on starting an oyster garden on your own waterfront property, a garden that could supply you with enough oysters to feed your family and friends. Contact Doug Schaefer: [subiceguy@hotmail.com](mailto:subiceguy@hotmail.com) to either volunteer to assist, or to sign up to attend OYS-101.

Saturday activities on November 11<sup>th</sup> are from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (with winery glass and bottles sales available). Salty Bob's Oyster & Seafood Co (food truck) service will be on site. Enjoy the music from The Windbags (“feel good, toe-tappin” music from the 60s to current) performing. And on Saturday from 1-4 p.m. master oyster gardener (MOG) Richard Siciliano will present a one-hour lecture/discussion entitled: *OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening*.

On Sunday, November 12<sup>th</sup>, the hours are 12 noon until 4 p.m. Winery glass and bottles sales will be available. The food truck services of Salty Bob's Oyster & Seafood Company also will be on site. The musical group *Tidewinders*, featuring hard-driving bluegrass, poignant ballads, and classic favorites, will perform from 1 until 4 p.m.

Virginia oyster gardeners, this is probably your last opportunity this year to get your supply of oyster necessities. TOGA has invited vendors of spat, floats, and oyster gardening equipment to sell, likely the last available spat until next spring 2024.



## Upcoming: TOGA again invited to Urbanna Oyster Festival's Education Day: November 2, 2023

~Richard Siciliano, MOG

TOGA will again take part in Urbanna, Virginia's *Oyster Festival Education Day* on Thursday, November 2, 2023, in conjunction with the annual Urbanna Oyster Festival to be held that weekend. Middlesex High School students, along with elementary and middle school students, will visit the TOGA exhibit for hands-on learning activities focusing on Bay ecology and will learn about oyster aquaculture and how important oysters are to the health of the Chesapeake Bay. If you are a TOGA member and would like to volunteer to help at the exhibit tent, contact Richard Siciliano: [rjsiciliano@yahoo.com](mailto:rjsiciliano@yahoo.com)

Education Day is hosted by the Marine Science Legacy Program of the Urbanna Oyster Festival, whereby students from area schools take their learning out of the classroom and have the opportunity to immerse themselves in hands-on activities relevant to the community where they live.



### Middle School Students Encouraged to Write an Essay to Win Fabulous Prizes

~Terry Lewis, MOG

The Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association is offering Middle School Students an opportunity to show off their writing skills and win substantial prizes.

After very successful *Middle School Writing Contests* the past ten 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 something 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 annual membership meeting on January 27, 2024.

The three top winners will be published on the TOGA Web site, and may be published in other publications or web sites, including the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association website.

The poster is for the TOGA Middle School Writing Competition. At the top, it says 'Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association and C&F Bank'. The main title is 'Middle School Writing Competition' in large, stylized blue letters. Below that, it says 'Open to all Virginia Middle School Students (Grades 6-8)'. There is a photo of a young girl smiling and holding an oyster. The essay theme is 'Consider the Oyster'. Prizes are listed as \$500, \$250, and \$100, with a \$200 prize for the school of the first place entry. The contest deadline is December 15. It directs people to go to [www.oystergardener.org](http://www.oystergardener.org) for more information. At the bottom, it says 'Great chance to have your writing published!!' and features the TOGA logo and a small image of oysters.

### Tidewater Oyster Gardeners

#### Middle School Writing Contest General Competition Guidelines

1. Open to all Virginia Middle School students, including home schooled students.
2. Nonfiction only, with the theme "Consider the Oyster." Writers will create their own title for the article—other than using the words of the theme listed above. Student's name, grade/school, and home town must be printed in three lines at the top right hand corner on each page of the entry.
3. Length: a firm 500-750 words which must be typed, double-spaced.
4. Electronic submissions are encouraged; send as a Microsoft Word or plain text attachment to the competition coordinator listed below.
5. Send essays with the completed submission form found on the Tidewater Oyster Gardeners website: [www.oystergardener.org](http://www.oystergardener.org)
6. By submitting the article to the competition, permission is granted by the parent(s) and student for TOGA to post or publish the article in publications or web sites as deemed appropriate by the TOGA Competition Judges, with compensation being limited to writer credit to the student author in order to reward and recognize writing excellence, and to promote the competition throughout the year.
7. Submissions not meeting the competition guidelines and criteria will be disqualified.
8. **Submission deadline: December 15.**
9. Send the submission form and essay via email (preferred) to:  
[lewistmn@msn.com](mailto:lewistmn@msn.com)  
Subject: Middle School Writing Competition Submission

Or print form, complete and send with article as specified via postal mail to:

Terry Lewis  
Middle School Writing Competition  
11339 Water View Place  
Gloucester, VA 23061



If you have questions please call 804-693-2687.  
**Good Luck!**

The essays should be written in WORD format and attached to an e-mail. The submissions can be made between now and the December 15, 2023 deadline. For more information, to view the entry form, and to see last year's winners and their essays, go to [www.oystergardener.org](http://www.oystergardener.org) and click on [Youth Writing Competition](#).



## Upcoming: TOGA Membership and Supporter Appreciation Party Set for March 16, 2024

~Terry Lewis, MOG

It's our version of an infamous "Toga Party," and it doesn't involve wearing bedsheets or sandals. This will be our eleventh annual TOGA party, but this is an Appreciation Party on Saturday, March 16, 2024, at the Freeshade Community Center, 1544 Regent Road, Syringa, VA (near Topping), from 1 to 4 p.m. The TOGA Board decided (and voted unanimously in favor) to invite all TOGA members and supporters to what had been listed as our volunteer appreciation party in the past. If you are a member or supporter of TOGA, we hope you will join us for some delicious food and great camaraderie. This event will be one day before St. Patrick's Day, so be free to wear some green and be ready to answer some quiz questions during *Terry's Trivia Contest* for fabulous prizes.

As usual, TOGA will supply plenty of local and delicious un-shucked and shucked 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, bring a side dish or desert to share. TOGA will also provide soft drinks. If you would like 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 will also make some delicious gluten-free fried oysters if requested. Also in the kitchen will be Howard Delano, an original TOGA member and superb oyster chef (see page XXX for a featured recipe).

We will have lots to discuss with fellow oyster gardeners in a relaxed atmosphere. Plus 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 1, 2024, so appropriate supplies can be acquired. Email [lewistmn@msn.com](mailto:lewistmn@msn.com) or call 804-693-2687.



*Vic Spain, hard at work shucking at this past year's Membership Appreciation Party, March 18, 2023.*

This event is TOGA's way of expressing our appreciation to our many members and supporters who make us a successful organization. We look forward to seeing you there for a great time and to help celebrate St. Patrick's Day.



*Terry Lewis (above left) acts as emcee for contestant Doug Schaefer during a trivia quiz contest at this past year's Membership Appreciation Party held on March 18, 2023.*



## Feature: TOGA Continues Work with the Hampton City School Oyster Restoration Project

~Betsy McAllister, Hampton City Schools STEM Coordinator and TOGA member

Students in Hampton High School's Maritime Academy were thrilled to have the opportunity to work again with TOGA members Vic Spain and Brian Ingram last spring as they learned how to construct oyster cages for teachers in the Hampton

City Schools Oyster Restoration Project. The students were mentored as they took turns rotating through each stage of the construction process, learning the complete process for building the specially designed cages that are smaller and easier for teachers to work with. The Maritime Academy students had previously worked with Vic and Brian to build tidal tumblers for TOGA's spring float sale.

On Tuesday, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 10 extremely curious Hampton City School educators benefited from the combined oyster wisdom of Vic, Brian, and Kent Eanes who co-facilitated an Oyster Gardener Training for Educators. The purpose of the training was to prepare teachers new to oyster gardening to raise spat over the course of the year with their students. The TOGA trio helped teachers learn about the history and care of the Eastern oyster, as well as oyster resources available to them through the TOGA website. The teachers particularly enjoyed it when Vic opened several oysters to compare wild and aquaculture oysters. Teachers will bring their oysters into their classrooms several times during the year to provide a relevant and hands-on way to teach Virginia and Hampton history; practice the scientific skills of random sampling, measurement, and graphing; to learn about Virginia resources, ecosystems, animal adaptations and physiology; and to inspire writing. TOGA's help in involving students in oyster restoration efforts helps them to understand that their decisions and actions can make a difference to the health of the Chesapeake Bay and our planet by preparing environmentally literate citizens.

Finally, Brian, Kent, and Vic worked with teachers to prep their oyster floats for tumbling action by adding a 2-liter bottle before adding the tiny spat (donated at cost by Oystermama's Bay-bies) to the floats. For spat small enough to fall through the openings on the oyster float, teachers first placed them in modified crawdad cages and then placed these in their floats. At the end of the day, there were 10 new oyster mothers and 11,000 spat eagerly added to their new home in the Back River.

Thanks to TOGA, 18 classroom teachers from 11 schools are raising oysters with their students.



*(Above): TOGA-designed mini spat cages built by Hampton High School Maritime Academy*

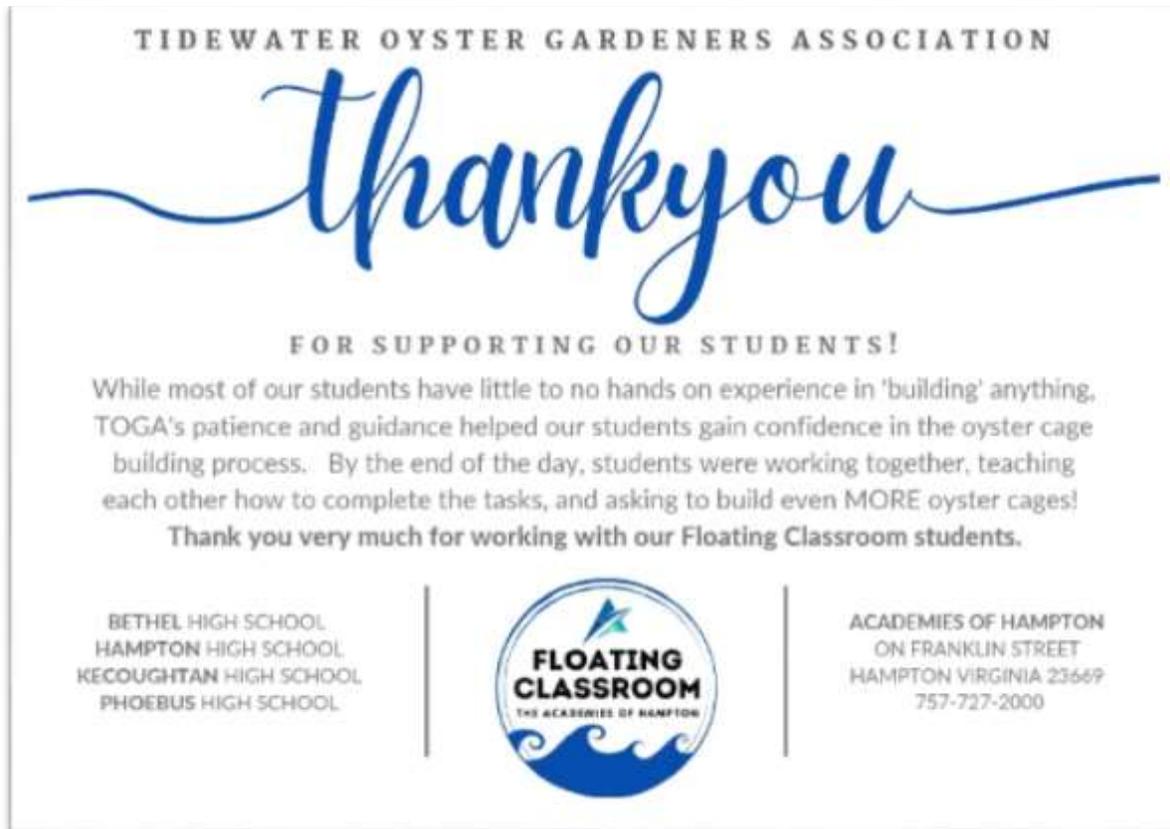


*Hampton City School teachers identifying critters from oyster cages. From left to right: Loranda Jenifer, Julia Brockman, Karen Chang and Rita Corbett.*



*Alyssa Dowling attaches an empty bottle so the cage becomes a float that tumbles with the tide change.*

TOGA currently is involved with three separate, but somewhat coordinated, projects with Hampton City Schools: the original restoration project for elementary students/teachers, Hampton HS Maritime Academy, and the Floating Classroom for other Hampton HS students/teachers. Below is a copy of a letter of thanks sent by teacher Karen Chang to TOGA for our work on the [Floating Classroom Project](#).



During the week of July 24, 2023, TOGA donated float supplies to the [Hampton City Schools Floating Classroom Project](#), and helped the high school students get started building oyster floats to start their own restoration program. This innovative project is located right next to the Virginia Air & Space Science Center in downtown Hampton. The thank-you card was sent by teacher Karen Chang and greatly appreciated.



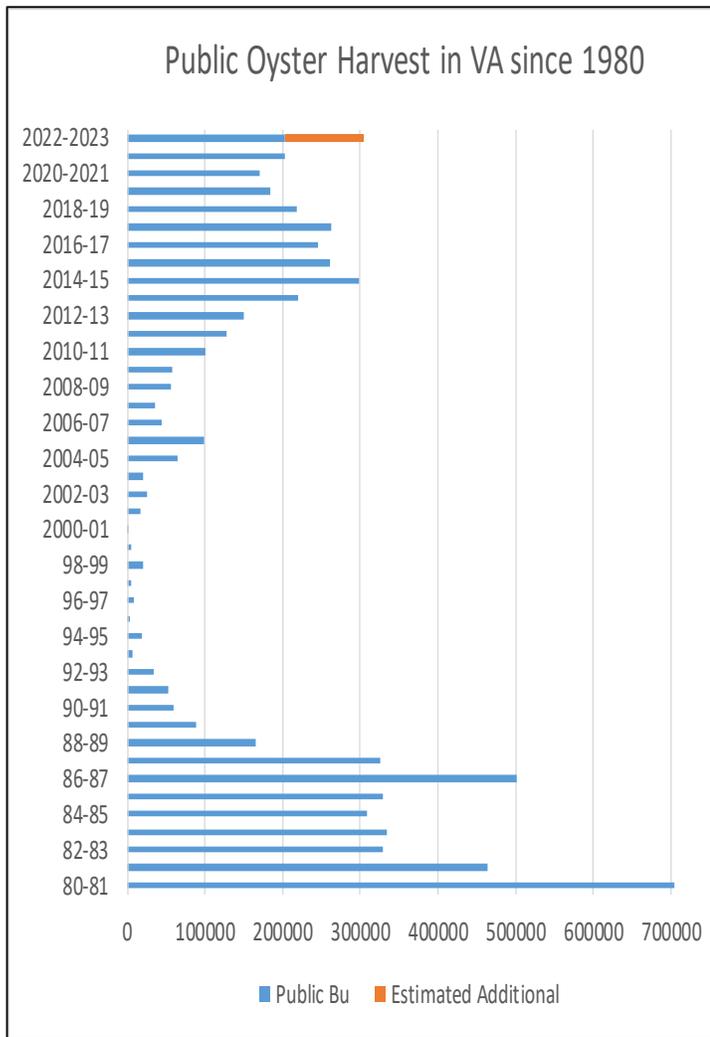
**Save the Date: January 27, 2024.**  
**The Annual TOGA Meeting at VIMS, Gloucester Point, Virginia**

~Richard Siciliano, MOG

At press time, the annual 2024 TOGA Conference/Meeting is in the early stages of planning. Details will be the centerpiece of the *Winter '23 TOGA Newsletter*, due in December, but mark your 2024 calendars now. You cannot miss this informative, rewarding, entertaining, and always memorable in-person meeting. TOGA members and prospective oyster gardeners get together to talk about the bivalves they have been tending to over the years. Learn new information about oysters and be prepared to share your experiences as a Virginia oyster gardener. The meeting is on the Gloucester Point campus of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science.

## Feature: Wild Oysters on the Comeback in Virginia

~Vic Spain, Carl Zulick, MOGs



comments, the 2022-2023 bar has an estimated 100,000 bushels more than the 2020-21 total. The 2014-2015 season was another good one, but we are now seeing a 35-year-high.

Many old timers remember when all the oysters on the banks of our rivers quickly disappeared. VIMS Pathologist Dr. Ryan Carnegie showed in 2021 that the well-known disease Dermo evolved into a much deadlier variant in the mid-1980s; see <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8213716/>. This started the severe downhill slide shown in the graph.

In the 1990s, VMRC, Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF), Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) and many more agencies and groups got busy. VMRC, led by Dr. Jim Wesson, upped the repletion efforts, CBF fought for the adoption and enforcement of the “Blueprint for the Chesapeake Bay,” and VIMS began its highly-successful development of disease-resistant aquaculture oysters. Man-made oyster reefs were built, many of which died out, but the agencies and volunteers did not quit.



Water cannons spray fossilized shell on working oyster grounds on the James River. Harper, Scott. “Oysters' future rests on shells of ancient bivalves.” *Norfolk Pilot*, July 10, 2013.

“Virginia oyster harvest, on cusp of 35-year high, gets a two-week extension” were the headlines in a March 2, 2023 article in the *Bay Journal*.

Andrew Button, [Virginia Marine Resources Commission \(VMRC\)](#) Deputy Chief of Shellfish Management, stated: “We are on track to harvest for the first time since 1987-88 over 300,000 bushels, likely.”

Button provided the data on public wild oyster harvests to TOGA Secretary Carl Zulick that are plotted in the graph above. The private oyster sector is also doing well now, but those data include farmed oysters, and this is about how Mother Nature (with help from many organizations and volunteers) is bringing back our natural wild heritage. All data from the 2022-2023 season have not been compiled, so based on Button’s

For the last 10 to 15 years, wild oysters have been showing up and are very visible at low tide along many water bodies in Tidewater, Virginia. The diseases MSX and Dermo are still there and killing many juvenile oysters before reaching harvest size, especially Dermo, but reproduction is improving and overall mortality is down compared to 20 years ago.

Researchers at [Cooperative Oxford Laboratory](#) on Maryland’s Eastern Shore and at VIMS agree that wild oysters are developing resistance or tolerance to the diseases by natural selection. See: <https://chesapeakebaymagazine.com/bay-oysters->

[may-be-building-up-resistance-to-two-deadly-diseases/](#).



*(Photo by Kent Eanes, TOGA Board Member) An abundance of wild oysters set on the bank of Mill Creek in Heathsville.*

It's not over. It's not even as good as the early 1980s after the oysters were ravaged by MSX, but we can celebrate a small victory and a lot of hard work by the agencies and volunteers that are restoring the Bay and bringing back the wild oysters.



### **O-Gardeners: Do You Have Any Unused, "Dormant," or in Need-of-Repair Floats or Cages?**

*~Carl Zulick, MOG*

As you may know, TOGA's mission includes education as well as putting oysters in the water to improve the health of the bay. To those ends, we design, build, and sell devices that help oysters grow and prosper.

Those devices are built to get years of service; however, sometimes those cages and floats are no longer used. If you or a neighbor have taken your cages out of the water, please consider getting them back in and starting new spat. If they need repair, we can help.

If you are unable to restart your oyster garden, consider donating those unused or repairable floats and cages back to TOGA so we can get them back to filtering the Bay. Our master oyster gardeners work with schools, partner organizations, museums, parks, and people that would love to put them back in service. Contact Carl Zulick at [carlz@togaboard.org](mailto:carlz@togaboard.org) or text 703-424-6001 for arrangements or information.



### **Featured: Profile of an Oyster Gardener and His Garden**

*~Terry Lewis, MOG*

We moved to our current property, and what would become our oyster garden on the Piankatank River, some 13 years ago. Like many folks in the area, we moved from the Washington, D.C. area, where I worked for the U. S. Department of the Interior. Previous to that, I worked in Wyoming, Utah, and California for a few years, then took a job in D.C., hoping to spend two years, get my "ticket punched," to help move up the ladder quicker, and head back out west. Nearly 20 years later I was still in D.C. Every time we were ready to move, I got an offer I couldn't refuse.

When I knew it was time to retire I wanted to move to South Dakota, and my wife wanted to move somewhere on the water. Needless to say, it's easy to see who wears the pants in this family.

When we bought our property, the previous owner left an oyster float, which fascinated me. The most informative website on the internet about growing oysters was by an outfit called TOGA. Seeing they were going to have a "build a float workshop," I couldn't help but attend. Plus, I thought it would be a chance to join a wild TOGA party and relive some of my carefree college days. I came away from that workshop with two more oyster floats, a few grow out bags, two bags of spat, lots of knowledge, and some disappointment that most of the folks there were old duffers like me who probably couldn't stay awake long enough in the evening to enjoy a wild TOGA party.

Since then I've gotten hooked on growing oysters. I not only joined TOGA but within a year was asked to take a slot on the Board. That led to being Vice President, which was a role I never fulfilled because of the tragic death of the incoming

President. Some four years later, the loss of almost all the hair on my head (and there wasn't that much to lose), I acquired numerous fellow oyster gardener friends and the deep admiration and respect for all the past and present TOGA Board members and officers.

Now I have about 10,000 oysters in the water. Folks often ask if I sell oysters. No, I don't, but I have more friends than I've ever had. Folks also ask if it's a lot of work. I grew up in a dairy farming community in northern Wisconsin, so compared to dairy farming, it's almost no work. At my age, if it was a lot of work I wouldn't be doing it.

You don't have to feed or water oysters, but there is some husbandry involved. This time of year I spend a few weeks hauling my cages in, sorting oysters by size, and cleaning floats. By pure dumb luck, our property has a beautiful sand beach. I wade out next to our pier, or use a boat hook, and drag the cages on to the beach. If you've never grown oysters, you'd be amazed at how filthy the cages can get. Folks at VIMS (Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences) call that a beautiful ecosystem. You'd have to be a scientist to appreciate that. Anyway, I take all the oysters out and give them a temporary clean home in the river in containers meant for holding four gallons of milk. I scrape the numerous barnacles, seaweed, sponges, squirts, mudcrabs, and numerous other critters into the water near the beach, haul the floats up to a concrete pad, and give them a thorough power wash. That done, I repair any damage to the cages, replace or repair damaged ropes, and the oysters get a new spick and span clean home for about the next year.

Of course, I check my floats fairly often to try to keep blue crabs out (a true threat to your oyster garden), and even though I buy the excellent rope sold by TOGA, that is the one thing I replace the most. I currently have three tidal tumblers, one down-under, a flip float, several Taylor floats that TOGA sells, and at least six very large Taylor floats (some up to eight feet long and with no lids). These are my favorite floats because they hold so many oysters and are relatively easy to clean. But of course they would be impossible to manage if I didn't have a sand beach to haul them out.

We save all our oyster shells because I'm trying to start a natural oyster reef. It seems to be working because this year we've had tremendous strike in every float so far cleaned.

Members of TOGA grow oysters for many different reasons. I grew up in northern Wisconsin and am of Irish/Welsh stock. Northern Wisconsin is not a Mecca for oysters, but every Christmas Eve, no matter the cost or the difficulty in finding them, my great grandparents, then grandparents, then parents, had oyster stew, usually made with fresh oysters. They were not money-wealthy people, but that was a priority. My kids and grandkids can now have fresh oyster stew on Christmas Eve. That's the main reason I grow oysters -- to continue family traditions.



*Terry Lewis (right) shows a TOGA- built Tidal Tumbler to Tahirah Elliott and son. Terry tends to his oyster garden that holds 10,000 of the bivalves.*



## **Upcoming: TOGA is Heading to Petersburg, VA for "Oysters, Barbeque... Battersea!"**

*~Carlton McFaden, MOG*

We are excited to share that we will have a TOGA tent at "Oysters, Barbeque... Battersea!" in Petersburg, VA on Saturday, November 4, 2023, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. The event supports the [Battersea Foundation](#), a nonprofit dedicated to the restoration and preservation of Battersea, the 1768

home of Colonel John Bannister, Petersburg's first mayor and a signer of the Articles of Confederation.

The event will feature:

- Live music by Kristi Kream & the Sugar Daddies
- Delicious oysters (usually from Gwynn's Island), BBQ, sides, and desserts
- Select beer, wine, and non-alcoholic beverages
- Classic British car display
- Open house and tours of the Villa

At the TOGA tent, we will:

- Educate attendees on oyster gardening
- Collect oyster shells from the roast and return them to the water
- Register new TOGA members
- Explain to attendees how their actions affect the watershed leading to the Chesapeake Bay



*Battersea, the 1768 home of Colonel John Bannister, Petersburg, Virginia*

Tickets for "Oysters, Barbeque...Battersea!" must be purchased in advance and will not be available on the day of the event. They are \$50 per person and include two drink tickets. They can be purchased online at [www.batterseafound.org](http://www.batterseafound.org) via Eventbrite beginning September 1, 2023. If you will be in the area on November 4<sup>th</sup>, please consider attending this oyster roast that supports historical preservation...and stop by to visit with us at the TOGA tent.



## **Recap: Spring '23 Float Sale at Deltaville Maritime Museum and Holly Point Market Event, May 27<sup>th</sup>**

*~Carl Zulick, Sue Borra, MOGs*

TOGA held its spring '23 oyster float sale and educational event at the Deltaville Maritime Museum during the museum's Holly Point Market on Saturday May 27 from 9am to 12pm. The Museum is located at 287 Jackson Creek Rd, Deltaville, VA 23043.



Big congratulations to everyone involved in the Float Sale. It was an extremely successful event with over 150 floats and 100,000 oyster spat sold in just a couple of hours. Twenty-two new oyster gardeners took advantage of the Oyster Gardening 101 class with Richard. And Sam was very busy offering SEAGLASS wine tastings. Thanks to Kent, we have a terrific aerial photo of all the action!

This event was a true group effort and could not have been accomplished without the extraordinary assistance provided by Carl Zulick, Vic Spain, Bob Eadie, Mark Besore, Brian Ingram, Brian and Ann Wood, Terry and Mary Ann Lewis, Ken Hammond, Lou Castagnola, Richard Siciliano, Doug Schaefer, Carlton McFaden, Kent Eanes, Mike Ballato and the many other TOGA Members who showed up to help.



### **Are your Dues due for 2023?**

If you received this newsletter in the mail, please check the year next to your name on the address label. If it is 2022 or earlier, then 2023 dues are due for your membership to remain current. If you believe there is an error, please contact Vic Spain at [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com).



TOGA 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 planned web-based continuing education course OYS-101: Basics of 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.



**Donate to TOGA**



**To make a tax-deductible donation, go to TOGA’s website, click on “About Us”, then click on “Become a Member,” then scroll down the**

**page to the link to Donate:**

<https://www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member>

This past year, TOGA supplied over 350 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, Middle Peninsula, 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, has conducted courses for oyster gardeners entitled OYS-101: The Basics of Oyster Gardening, in the spring 2023, and continuing throughout the year, all sessions 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 the TOGA/VIMS Endowed Fellowship that supports 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.



**Volunteer to be a Regular TOGA Float Builder**

*~Vic Spain, MOG*



*Volunteers putting the finishing touches on a Taylor float at TOGA’s worksite in Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock*

The hard work of many TOGA volunteers resulted in more support for our TOGA/VIMS Fellowship Endowment and other important projects. Although a big accomplishment for us, it put a strain on the folks who struggle to keep up with the unprecedented demand. We want to learn from the experience and with your help vow to become better O-Float builders in 2024.



TOGA member and Master Oyster Gardener Bob Eadie (center) explains the ins and outs of float building, as well as how he maintains his successful oyster garden, during “Build Your Own O-Float Day” at Camp Kekoka (Kilmarnock) on May 13, 2023. The next “BYOOF-Day” at Camp K is set for October 7, 2023. Anyone interested in participating in either training or being on the float-building team may contact Vic Spain: [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com)

We ask that trained and experienced float builders become part of a regular float-building team. You need not commit to every event, but we would like you to come when you can and perhaps build some floats at home. We already have several home builders, and we supply the tools and supplies needed. Home builds contributed a large portion of the floats sold in 2023.



### Newsletter News

Published three times a year, TOGA’s newsletter is mailed to all TOGA members. Full-color copies of this edition and past newsletters are linked on the website: <http://www.oystergardener.org/newsletters>.



The deadline for articles for the winter/spring 2024 edition of the TOGA newsletter is **November 20**,

**2023.** Any TOGA member who wishes to submit an article for the newsletter may do so prior to the deadline date. Articles will be printed as space allows. Email your stories to Vic Spain at [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com) and Richard Siciliano: [rjsiciliano@yahoo.com](mailto:rjsiciliano@yahoo.com).

### Feature: Recipe for a Fond Memory

~ Howard Delano, TOGA member

As a small boy, I enjoyed oysters every winter. I remember oyster stews on weekends that cheered the cold gray days of winter. When I was a teenager, my mother would open the stairway door and shout “your oysters are getting cold.” I would hurriedly jump from my warm bed and rush downstairs to find that they hadn’t even made it to the sauce-pan yet. I knew enough then not to protest the cook.

I would remember when I stood as a small child, barely taller than the table, as I watched my father shuck oysters on the back porch. When he opened a shell and a perfect beauty of an oyster was discovered, he would say “boy, this oyster is too pretty to put in the bowl with those other oysters.” I would open wide and enjoy the delight of another fresh raw oyster. That was 80 some years ago and I cherish that childhood memory.

I never got many chances to attend enough oyster roasts as a boy, but they are still in my memory. The oyster roasts in the 1930s and 1940s were outdoor events, and the men did the cooking. The weather was often not the best, and you needed strong young men, shelter for tables, and a location suited to have a fire. Brawn, and not the talents of a chef, is better suited here.



Two low walls about 16 inches high would have to be built from flat sandstone or cinder blocks and located about three feet or a little more apart to contain the fire. A heavy gauge steel plate approximately 36 inches by 48 inches would have to be made ready to pull onto the walls over the hot coals.

On the day of the oyster roast, a fire would be made between the knee walls using available split hardwood logs. When a good bed of coals was produced, two young men would pull the steel “boiler-plate” up and onto the knee walls and over the hot coals. As the plate was heating, a pot of cold water was situated near the fire to soak a couple of burlap bags.

When the plate was hot enough to make a drop of water dance, half of oysters from the bushel of oysters were dumped from its burlap bag onto the steel plate. It is much better here to use a shovel to thin the oysters to a single layer to allow for uniform cooking. One or two water-soaked burlap bags would then be layered on top of the oysters, being sure that all of the oysters are covered.

After eight minutes, using a rubber-gloved hand, I would peek under the burlap blanket to see if one or two of the oysters had opened. A customary cry of “are they ready yet?” to which an answer of “almost” is the most frequently heard. When one or more oysters open, quickly remove the burlap and shovel the oysters into two one-peck buckets and hurry to the waiting crowd at the tables. Repeat as necessary.

The re-cycling of dripping water onto a hot plate to steam and re-condense on the wet burlap to be dripped again to hot plate to re-steam makes this method one that has endured over 100 years.



**About the Author:** Howard Delano has been a TOGA member from the start. A retired engineer, Howard has designed oyster gardening devices (e.g., The Delano Rig) and shared with TOGA both the designs and the devices themselves since organization’s beginnings. Howard is shown here in the kitchen of the FreeShade at the most recent “Volunteer Appreciation Party” in March 2023. Howard cooks “some really nice oyster dishes,” according to Vic Spain, and “He’s one of the nicest people you could meet.”



*Registration at the 2023 Annual Membership Meeting, this past January at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Gloucester Point, VA.*



## Marine Resources Commission VGP3 Oyster Gardening Updates

Savannah Longest, VMRC

Since the last annual meeting of TOGA in January, The Virginia Marine Resources Commission **VMRC** has made a handful of updates to the VGP3 process. A summary of these changes as well as some important reminders follow:

### Updates:

- There is a brand new VGP3 application form at: <https://mrc.virginia.gov/forms/2023/VGP3-Application-July-2023.pdf>
- The new form includes all information necessary to enroll applicants into VDH's local water quality updates notification system.
- VMRC is no longer relying on current permittees to send in a letter requesting extension of their permit. There is now a permit reissue application form that will be sent to each permittee about two months before their permit expires.

### Reminders:

- \* Permits are required for all oyster gardening projects.
- \* Permits are good for 5 years.
- \* Permits are issued to upland property owners for oyster gardening projects in the riparian area of their own waterfront property.

If you have any questions regarding the permitting process, please contact Savannah Longest: [savannah.longest@mrc.virginia.gov](mailto:savannah.longest@mrc.virginia.gov) or at (757) 247-2262.

## Scenes from TOGA's Outreach Events: Heathsville Farmers Market, April 15, 2023



Above: Richard Siciliano presents OYS-101 at the Turner Lecture Series, Deltaville Maritime Museum, March 12, 2023

photos by Kent Eanes

September 2023

## Oyster Float Sale Order Form

**Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock, VA October 14, 2023**

1083 Boys Camp Road, Kilmarnock, VA. 22482

This form is an alternative to online ordering. To ensure an accurate order, we recommend that you use the online order form: <https://www.oystergardener.org/fall-float-sale/> Otherwise, complete and mail a copy of the form shown below to TOGA, P.O. Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061. Or, email a scanned copy to Vic Spain: [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Orders MUST BE RECEIVED BY October 1, 2023, for TOGA to have sufficient materials available.**

### Pre-Built Floats and Devices

*For specifications of the types of Pre-Built Floats and Devices, go to the TOGA website:*

<https://www.oystergardener.org/devices-and-designs/>

Prices shown are for TOGA members. Non-members, please join TOGA by October 1<sup>st</sup>. See <https://www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member>

Payment in the form of a check or cash (sorry, no credit cards) for floats and devices will be collected when they are picked up. Pick up your floats by 11am, or notify Vic Spain: [vicspain@rocketmail.com](mailto:vicspain@rocketmail.com).

Qty	Cost each TOGA members	Description	Qty	Cost each TOGA members	Description
	\$135	Taylor Float with Top		\$90	Flip Float
	\$75	Bottom Cage		\$75	Tidal Tumbler (wire lids)
	\$65	Rough Rider		\$35	Spat Tube (small mesh)
	\$35	Spat Tube (med mesh)		\$55	Bender 42 inch
	\$60	Bender 50 inch			

### Build Your Own Floats

3 Float limit for total order, \$10 discount per float

Take advantage of discount prices on floats and cages by signing up for Build-Your Own Day (Saturday, October 7, 10am-1pm.) at Camp Kekoka, 1083 Boys Camp Road, Kilmarnock, VA. 22482.

I would like \_\_\_\_\_ (quantity) Taylor Float with Top at \$125 per float.

I would like \_\_\_\_\_ (quantity) Flip Floats at \$80 per float.

I would like \_\_\_\_\_ (quantity) Bottom Cages at \$65 per cage.

I would like \_\_\_\_\_ (quantity) Tidal Tumbler at \$65 per float.

I would like \_\_\_\_\_ (quantity) Rough Rider at \$55 per cage.

## UPCOMING TOGA 2023 EVENTS

- September 12, 2023: 10:00 – 11:30 A.M., TOGA Board of Directors Meeting Deltaville Maritime Museum, 287 Jackson Creek Rd, Deltaville, VA 23043
- September 16, 2023: 9 A.M. - 1 P.M. Heathsville Farmers Market Living History Day, Event Coordinator: Doug Schaefer subiceguy@hotmail.com, Historic Rice's Hotel/Hughlett's Tavern, 73 Monument Place, Heathsville, VA
- September 30, 2023: 1 - 4 P.M. Northern Neck Land Conservancy Boots and Barbeque event, Event Coordinator: Doug Schaefer subiceguy@hotmail.com , Mount Zion Farm, 245 Lewissetta Road, Lottsburg, VA 22511
- October 7, 2023: 10:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M., TOGA Build Your Own Float Day, Event Coordinator—Vic Spain vicspain@rocketmail.com, Camp Kekoka, 1083 Boys Camp Rd, Kilmarnock, VA 22482
- October 10, 2023: 10:00 – 11:30 A.M., TOGA Board of Directors Meeting Virtual Google Meet, Contact Carl Zulick, czulick@verizon.net for access.
- October 14, 2023: 9 A.M. - Noon, Camp Kekoka Oyster Float Sales and OYS-101 “Beginning Oyster Gardening” course; Event Coordinator: Vic Spain, vicspain@rocketmail.com, Camp Kekoka, 1083 Boys Camp Rd, Kilmarnock, VA 22482
- October 21, 2023: 11 A.M. -4 P.M., “Taste of Middlesex” TOGA Education Table, with Free Seaglass Wine Tasting; Event Coordinator: Carl Zulick, czulick@verizon.net, Deltaville Maritime Museum, 287 Jackson Creek Rd., Deltaville, VA 23043
- November 2, 2023: 9 A.M. - 3 P.M., Urbanna Oyster Festival Marine Legacy (Youth Outreach Event): Coordinator: Richard Siciliano, rjsiciliano@yahoo.com, Urbanna Town Marina, 210 Oyster Road, Urbanna, VA 23175
- November 4, 2023: 1:00-4:00 P.M., Oysters, Battersea, and Barbecue, Event Coordinator: Carlton McFaden, carltonm@togaboard.org Battersea Foundation, 1289 Upper Appomattox St, Petersburg, VA 23803
- November 11-12, 2023: 11 A.M. - 4 P.M., (both days) Good Luck Cellars Spring Oyster Crawl – Event Coordinator: Doug Schaefer, subiceguy@hotmail.com, Good Luck Cellars, 1025 Goodluck Rd, Kilmarnock, VA 22482
- November 14, 2023: 10:00 – 11:30 A.M., TOGA Board of Directors Meeting Indian Creek Yacht & Country Club, 362 Club Drive, Kilmarnock, VA 22482, Commodore’s Room
- December 12, 2023: 10:00 – 11:30 A.M., TOGA Board of Directors Meeting Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Davis Hall Room 101, 1370 Greate Rd, Gloucester Point, VA 23062
- January 27, 2024: 1:00 - 4:00 P.M. TOGA Membership Annual Meeting, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Waterman’s Hall, 1370 Greate Rd, Gloucester Point, VA 23062



# TOGA Membership Form

P.O. Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061

Join online: <https://www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member>

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Please check one:  New Member  Renewal Annual Dues: \$25

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

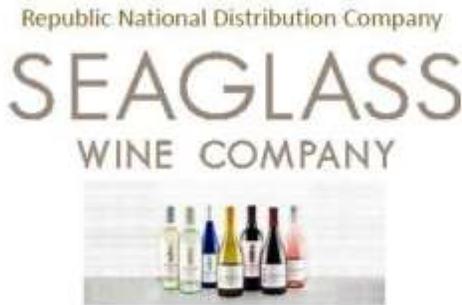
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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



The Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund grants TOGA a portion of revenue generated from the sale of a Friend of the Chesapeake License Plate.



Please support our sponsors

## Be a Proud TOGA Volunteer

Please fill out the TOGA volunteer form at:  
<https://www.oystergardener.org/volunteer/>

Or, scan the QR code on the right with your smart phone. Tell us what you enjoy doing so we can let you know of volunteer opportunities.



**PO Box 2463  
Gloucester, VA 23061**

**Return Service Requested**

Non Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage **PAID**  
Yorktown, VA  
Permit # 33



*Growing oysters for a cleaner Bay*