



Growing oysters for a cleaner Bay

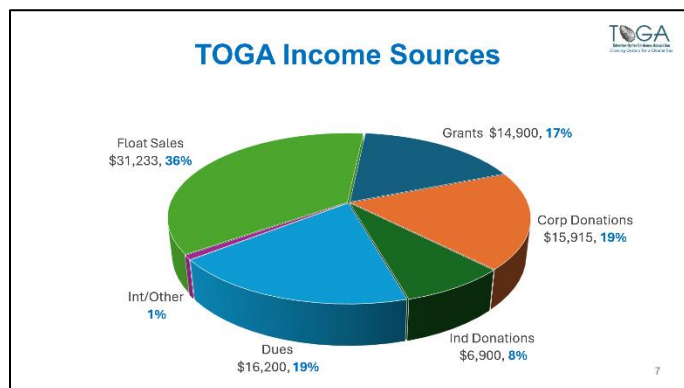
www.oystergardener.org

Spring 2026

Recap: The Annual TOGA Membership Meeting at VIMS

~ Carl Zulick, TOGA president

The Board of Directors held the TOGA Annual Meeting on February 21, 2026 at VIMS' Waterman's Hall in Gloucester Point. Karen Hudson of VIMS and President Carl Zulick opened the meeting with a warm welcome and an ambitious agenda. A Virginia Department of Health manager was present before the meeting to address closures, answer questions about habitat and permits, discuss water quality, and refer members to their helpful information and website. Treasurer Brian Ingram and Treasurer-elect Doug Schafer summarized the financial health of the organization, announcing the highest income ever: \$85,832, largely due to successful float sales and higher than expected corporate donations and grants from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund, Seaglass Wines, Cara Moss (Urbanna '26 Oyster Festival Queen Candidate), and the River Counties Community Foundation.



Funds received supported float building, printing educational materials, the TOGA Fellowship for VIMS graduate students, the TOGA newsletter, and other business expenses. The annual audit concluded that TOGA managed its \$92,174 in total

assets, including maintaining a checking account balance for daily expenses, as well as a Certificate of Deposit (CD) and reserve fund which can be used to bridge any unexpected financial downturn for a year or more.

President Zulick presented TOGA's 2025 accomplishments, reporting progress on five main goals and citing initiation of the new Master Oyster Gardening Class along with impressive growth in float sales, education, and outreach events.

Secretary Jim Dall conducted the annual election of Board members, getting unanimous approval of the slate of candidates. Jim welcomed new Board member Rob Riddle of Mathews and sadly thanked long-time Treasurer Brian Ingram as he stepped off the Board and into a volunteer position.

(Annual Meeting continued – page 3)

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Upcoming: Spring '26 Oyster Float & Spat Sale, and OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening Seminar set for Deltaville

~Richard Siciliano, MOG

Mark your calendar for Saturday, May 23rd, at the [Deltaville Maritime Museum and Nature Park](#), 287 Jackson Creek Road, Deltaville. That's the date and location for TOGA's annual spring oyster float sales event. From 9 am to 12 noon, you can purchase all the materials necessary for an oyster garden. Master Oyster Gardeners (MOGs) will be on hand to help if you're just starting out or have some questions about your oyster garden. In addition, **OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening** will be held from 10:15 -11:45 am, in the Museum's Board Room. Online registration for this free class is recommended since space is limited: www.oystergardener.org/oyster-gardening-101

Orders placed online by May 1st, may be picked up at the entrance. Also available with no pre-ordering needed are small and medium spat bags, crab pot line, float wire mesh, shell bag material, TOGA-logo hats and T-shirts. Purchasing a TOGA float or cage requires current membership.

Payment is due when you pick up pre-ordered floats, before noon. If you cannot be at the sales event, ask us to hold your float and let us know when and where you can pick up your purchase. Otherwise, unclaimed and unreserved floats will be sold to walkup customers.

At the Spring '26 Float & Spat Sale, vendors will sell triploid and diploid spat, along with their own floats and equipment. TOGA members and others who missed the order deadline can shop for different style floats, tools, and supplies not available from TOGA.

The Annual Float Sale is one of TOGA's primary fundraising activities as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. All proceeds beyond material costs go to the [TOGA/Virginia Institute of Marine Science \(VIMS\) Student Fellowship Endowment](#), and to other projects that foster oyster gardening and the health of the Bay.



Are your Dues due for 2026?



www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member

TOGA annual membership dues are \$25 per family for one calendar year -- January through December (not 12 months from the date of your payment).

If you received this newsletter in the mail, please check the year next to your name on the address label. If it's 2025 or earlier, then update your membership status online so it's current. Questions? Contact Vic Spain at vicspain@rocketmail.com.

TOGA members get these benefits:

- Receive by mail printed newsletters with the latest oyster gardening information
- Participate in educational events sponsored by TOGA.
- Learn about innovations in oyster gardening techniques
- Learn from the expertise of hundreds of others interested in growing oysters
- Enroll free of charge for the class *OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening*
- Purchase equipment at TOGA float sales
- Get free admission to the Member Appreciation Party and Oyster Potluck Dinner for your household
- Meet great friends
- Help improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries

To become a TOGA member, visit our website: www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member to update your membership information or renew. A mail-in version of the membership form is available: [see page 19](#). Make sure your mailing address and email address are correct. It is the way we contact you.





2025 Accomplishments

Oyster Gardening Resources

- **Built and sold** 350 oyster floats
- **Supported vendors** providing oyster spat
- **Replaced** old equipment and displays
- **Improved** the Newsletter
- **Helped** gardeners on their sites
- **Responded** to 231 Online Questions
- **Researched, tested, built** new cage devices
- **Lowered the cost** of several cages
- **Received** \$15,000 in grants
- **Increased** Membership
- **Maintained** great website
- **Provided** financial stability to the nonprofit

Adult Oyster Gardening Education and Master Oyster Gardening Class

- **Conducted** 13 oyster 101 Classes reaching 337 oyster gardeners
- Collaborated with VIMS to plan and initiate an **Online Master Oyster Gardening Class**
- **Built/maintained** 12 Oyster Education Exhibits at:
 - Reedville Fisherman's Museum, Deltaville Maritime Museum, Kinsale Museum, Westmoreland and York River State Parks, Yorktown Watermen's Museum, Williams Wharf/Mathews Land Conservancy
 - Upgraded and printed 4 travelling exhibits
- **Conducted** over 85 Oyster Gardener Outreaches
 - At farmers markets, oyster festivals, community events, wine festivals, museums, and more
- **Distributed** the *Virginia Oyster Gardener Guide*



2025 Accomplishments



YOUTH OYSTER EDUCATION

- Annual **High School Youth Writing Contest – Consider the Oyster** Entries from 8 High Schools from NOVA to Richmond to Gloucester
- **Oyster Education Programs with Youth:**
 - Urbanna Oyster Festival Education Day
 - School programs: Hampton Schools, Richmond County, Booker T Washington Middle School, Wake Academy, Northumberland HS.
 - Kinsale Museum sessions
 - Virginia Living Museum
 - Camp Kekoka YMCA/Boys and Girls Club Think Outside the Sink Watershed Education for 6th Graders and the Chesapeake Bay Governor's School and Belle Isle State Park

Reached estimated 1,000+ youth in Tidewater Area

Special OYSTER PROGRAMS/PROJECTS

- TOGA/Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences **Student Fellowship Endowment**– Current Fund over **\$200,000**.
- Partnered with the Alexandria Police Youth Assn at Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock, VA to maintain an **Outdoor Oyster Education Classroom, oyster garden, and oyster reef**
- **Supported 2 Eagle Scout Projects building oyster cages**
- **Improved our TOGA volunteer program**
- **Held Build-Your-Own cage building sessions**

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(...Continued from page 3...)

President Zulick presented the 2025 Madison Boyd award recognizing significant contributions to oyster aquaculture, biology, gardening, advocacy, education, youth development, and service to Terry Lewis, Brian Ingram, and Richard Siciliano who brought home a handsome plaque and an adult beverage donated by Sam Bohnstedt and Trincherro Family Estates wines of California.

Vice President Lewis thanked our many corporate and private donors for their generosity: the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund, River Counties Community Foundation, Cara Moss, Seaglass Wine, and Sam Bohnstedt. Lewis thanked TOGA's many volunteers who helped build floats and run so many of TOGA's events in 2025. On a somber note, Lewis announced the passing of three friends and important former TOGA board members: TOGA founder Jackie Partin, Klaus Boese, and Russell Mait.

President Zulick discussed plans for 2026, noting that the Board would be continuing the successes of priorities from 2025. He reminded members to review the schedule of events throughout the year at www.oystergardener.org/schedule. Members were encouraged to pick up a copy of the new *Virginia Oyster Gardening Guide* before they left the Hall and to encourage other members not in attendance to get theirs.

A motion to adjourn the business meeting passed, and the education sessions began after a short break. VIMS staff member Celia Cackowski gave the audience a look ahead at upcoming plans for the VIMS aquaculture program, campus, renovations to Watermen's Hall, new building projects, and their mission focus on marine research, K-12 education, public outreach, and advisory services.

Transformative gifts from Jane Batten (\$100 million) and R. Todd Stravitz (\$50 million) are funding enhanced academic programs, support for students, tuition for undergraduates, and re-branding to William and Mary's Batten School of Coastal and Marine Science and VIMS.

Director of VIMS development Crystal Booker introduced the TOGA Fellowship, noting gifts totaling \$27,197 in 2025, for a total endowment book value of \$248, 547. To date, 24 fellowships have been awarded to 18 students. Acknowledging that the TOGA Fellowship is one of the largest

available to graduate students in the Batten School and VIMS, Booker noted the successes of former recipients who are working in high-level positions across the country. She then introduced two of the current Fellowship recipients, who each gave a lively presentation of their research: Ashley Rose who is studying ribbed mussel restoration in living shoreline marshes, and Elena Hoang who is mapping restored reef complexity and effects on juvenile oyster growth



2026 Student Recipients of the TOGA Fellowship

High School Writing Contest Science Winner Estella Mayhew of Christ Church School presented a summary of her eye-opening ecological essay on Microplastics in the Rappahannock River. Dr. Richard Siciliano summarized his offerings of *Oysters 101*, *Basic Oyster Gardening* classes and announced upcoming classes. Dr. Jim Wesson, formerly of VMRC, presented the keynote on the "The Current State of Oysters and Issues in the Chesapeake Bay." Dr. Wesson's talk focused on the aquaculture industry, reported observed results of oyster restoration efforts by the Commonwealth, and the plight of wild oysters in the Bay that saw significant mortality after three years. Wesson expertly answered tough questions and praised the work of TOGA.

After the meeting, a lively social reception was held in Watermen's Hall with delicious samplings of members' favorite foods.



Recap: TOGA Membership Appreciation Party: A Resounding Success

~Terry Lewis, TOGA vice president

More than 130 people showed up at the YMCA/APYC Camp Kekoka near Kilmarnock on Saturday, March 21, 2026, to enjoy great camaraderie with their fellow oyster enthusiasts and to partake in some wonderful food and beverages at the TOGA Membership Appreciation Party.



Members & Supporters Appreciation Party, at Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock, March 2026

TOGA provided three bushels of fresh oysters in the shell and six gallons of shucked oysters to say thanks to our dedicated members and supporters. One of the highlights of the party was the delicious fried oysters prepared by Stacie Foley, who makes perhaps the best fried oysters (including her gluten-free oysters) in the whole Atlantic Seaboard area. Add to this plenty of special recipe oysters prepared by several TOGA members, and the wonderful side dishes brought for the potluck. No one walked away hungry.

An extra special bonus for this year's party was Sam Bohnstedt of SeaGlass Wines, who provided an outstanding wine tasting of their supremely tasty variety of wines. Sam wore his special green gear to help Terry Lewis emcee the Irish-themed party in honor of St. Patrick.

For the second year, the crowd was awed by the readings of the winning essays of the TOGA High School Essay Contest. Five essayists did a masterful job of presenting their outstanding essays. Because of the diversity of the essays, the judges this year created new categories of *Best Scientific Paper* and *Most Creative Paper*. Students

from eight high schools and home-schooled students participated. This year also saw the first raffle at the party, raising nearly \$700 from tickets sold that go toward funding the Writing Contest prizes. Please stop in and thank the raffle prize donors when you get a chance.

As in the past, Lewis and Bohnstedt kept the party goers groaning with their corny jokes and Irish trivia questions. But almost everyone stayed to the end of the party so they could endure the hilarity (or maybe was it to see if they won the raffle?). Plus, a special shout out to Joe and Jay Crandall for providing samples of their absolutely delicious home-brewed Oyster Stout beer.

"We wanted to say a super big thanks for the many hours donated by our TOGA volunteers, who are really the heart and soul of this organization," said TOGA president emeritus and party organizer Terry Lewis. "Without these people and their interest in promoting oyster gardening, there would simply not be a Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association, so it's important to come together at least once a year to swap stories, learn about oystering from each other, and just relax and have a good time."

A special thanks to the businesses who supported the TOGA raffle, and those who bought tickets. Please support these generous organizations and businesses.



Andrew "Drew" Wajciechowski, first place winner.
TOGA High School Writing Contest-2025
10th Grade/ Patrick Henry High School, Ashland, VA

“Reflections of an Oyster”

~Andrew Wajciechowski

I used to be young once. Now, after many years of working day-in and day-out, I have finished my purpose. What have I accomplished over my life? Well, that’s quite a story. You have taken care of me by cleaning where I live, and in return, I’ve worked tirelessly to clean your waters. My work may have been quiet and unnoticed, but without it, the world around me wouldn’t be the same. When I was just a tiny speck in the water, I didn’t know what my life would look like. I floated aimlessly, drifting with the currents, waiting for the right moment to settle. It wasn’t until I found the perfect spot, a hard stonefront to latch onto, that I began my true work. From that moment on, I became an oyster, rooted into this place, surrounded by the water that would shape my life. At first, my days were simple: I fed on the nutrients that drifted by, slowly beginning to filter the water around me. As I was still young and naïve, I didn’t realize that what I was doing wasn’t just for me. It was for the environment I lived in.

Every oyster is a natural filter. I wasn’t just eating; I was purifying. I consumed plankton, algae, and other particles from the water, leaving the environment cleaner with each passing day. A single oyster might not seem like much, but over time, the cleaning adds up. If you could see the water before and after I filtered it, you’d notice the difference immediately. The murkiness would clear, the sunlight would reach deeper, and the bay would begin to breathe again. As the years went by, I began to notice changes. The water became clearer, the tides shifted, and the creatures that shared my home flourished. Seagrasses began to thrive, providing shelter for fish and crabs. The clarity of the water allowed the ecosystem to come to life in ways that had been impossible before. All of this was a direct result of the work I had done—quietly, consistently, and without fanfare. I remember the first time I felt a storm come. The wind howled, and the waves grew fierce, but I held fast to my spot, steady in the chaos. There were times when the currents would pull hard, and I vaguely felt my shell groan under pressure; but I was built to endure. Through the storms and the silt, I continued my work. Filtering. Cleaning. Supporting. And though no one could hear my silent efforts, I knew that, in some small way, I was making the world around me better.

I’ve worked for decades, but now, my time here is drawing to a close. My life wasn’t marked by grand achievements, but by small, steady contributions. I’ve helped clean your waters, provide habitats for marine life, and maintain the balance of this ecosystem. I’ve lived as part of a larger system, one that is constantly in motion, but always working toward harmony. Once I am gone, my shell will break down, and I will return to the bay, feeding the very waters that sustained me. In this way, I am part of something much larger than myself—an ongoing cycle of life, death, and renewal. As I look at the water one last time, I am proud of what I’ve done. I’ve done my part to make this world better and healthier. The bay is a better place because of the work I did. And now, it’s your turn. This is a responsibility that falls to you, just as it once fell to me. At this late stage in my life, I asked myself: “What have I accomplished?” My work wasn’t loud or visible, but it was essential. Now, as my story ends, I leave behind a better world; one that I hope you will continue to care for.

Works Cited

- <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/virginia/stories-in-virginia/oyster-restoration-in-va/>
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/facts/oysters>
- Bell, David Owen. *Awesome Chesapeake: A Kid’s Guide to the Bay*. 2nd edition, illustrated by Marcy Dunn Ramsey. Schiffer Kids/Schiffer Publishing, 2021.
- https://www.vims.edu/research/units/centerspartners/abc/the_oyster/



Winning High School Writers, 2025 (left to right):

- Estella Mayhew. [The Rappahannock's Deeper Story: Unveiling Microplastic Levels](#), Best Scientific
- Lee Martin. [Fresh Oysters](#), Creative award
- Drew Wajciechowski. [Reflections of an Oyster](#), 1st place
- Elena Contreras. [Back to the Bay](#), 3rd place, tied
- Lexi Spangler. [Oysters: Value Beyond the Plate](#), 3rd place, tied
- *Not pictured:* Siyoon (Alice) Kim, [Consider the Oyster, Consider Us](#) 2nd Place www.oystergardener.org/youth-writing-competition-winners/

Chesapeake Bay Oyster Wars

Vic Spain, TOGA president emeritus, came to Ware Academy in March 2026, to meet with Jackson Miller, an 8th grader, to discuss the topic of “Oyster Wars,” based on John R. Wennersten’s *The Oyster Wars of Chesapeake Bay*. Miller had developed a keen interest in the subject, which Spain speaks about often to civic groups and classes. Urged on by his science teacher, Natalie Fleet, Miller sought out Spain’s assistance with his final project relating to the Chesapeake Bay.



Master Oyster Gardener Candidates (MOGs): Class of 2026



Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Gloucester Point, Virginia: May 2026

- Stephen Angell
- Sara Benham
- Jim Dall
- Robert Eadie
- Jay Fox
- Anthony Gaiani
- Mark Hogan
- Michael Hyde
- Darnell Jayne
- David Jayne
- Gregory Jesseman
- Gene Kendall Jr.
- Thomas LaMartina
- Bill Liebherr
- Grant Mathews
- Betsy McAllister
- Brian Moran
- Mark Russell
- Ray Ruth
- John Tinsley
- Maggie Vaughan
- Ed Walker
- Gregory Walsh
- Tiffany Wood Mahler

TOGA Board of Directors 2026

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	Doug Schaefer, President Emeritus, MOG	Heathsville		subiceguy@gmail.com
Past President	Sue Borra, MOG	Kinsale		sueb@togaboard.org
Directors at Large	Lou Castagnola, MOG	Gloucester		
	Ken Hammond, MOG	Reedville		
	Robb Riddle*	Mathews		
	Richard J. Siciliano, MOG	Heathsville/Waldorf (MD)	240-270-1439	richs@togaboard.org
	David Singletary	Newport News		dsingletary@togaboard.org
	Laurie Slone	Hayes		lslone@togaboard.org
	Mike Sanders, President Emeritus, MOG	Lottsburg		
	Vic Spain, President Emeritus, MOG	White Marsh		vicspain@rocketmail.com
	Brian Wood, President Emeritus, MOG	Reedville		brianw@togaboard.org
2025 Board Member Departing	Brian Ingram, MOG	Cobbs Creek		

MOG: *Master Oyster Gardener*

**New candidate*

OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening-- a Free Educational Opportunity for All Oyster Enthusiasts

~Richard Siciliano, Master Oyster Gardener

This 90-minute class, taught by a seasoned oyster gardener, is intended for beginning oyster gardeners with waterfront property in Virginia's Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, or Gloucester region, and who want to grow oysters for personal enjoyment. Following a step-by-step process, the class shows how to raise oysters successfully:

1. Analyzing and Evaluating Your Site
2. Choosing an Oyster Containment System
3. Gathering Seed Oysters (spat), Tools, and Supplies
4. Setting-up, Maintaining, and Harvesting
5. Applying for a Virginia Oyster Garden Permit
6. Seeking Help through Resources

This year, classes are taught monthly through November 2026. To register for this free class, go to the TOGA website and search for ***oyster gardening 101***.

Featured: Profile of an Oyster Garden+Living Shoreline: Lessons of a “Living Shoreliner” Turned Oyster Gardener

~Maura Burke Weiner, MOG



Figure 1: Our point of land before mitigation: Spring 2019
(photos by M. Weiner)

Do you remember the first time you really thought about oysters? I was 7. My dad read aloud Lewis Carroll’s *The Walrus and the Carpenter*. I was sad that all the young oysters had been tricked into being eaten, but realized that oysters must be pretty delicious, if the Walrus and the Carpenter had gone to all that trouble. Five years later, I ate my first fresh oyster -- and understood. Today, I am a proud oyster gardener.

In October 2018, my husband, Ed, and I bought a home on Hull Creek near Heathsville in the Northern Neck. Our point of land at “Osprey” is open to the northeast onto the Potomac and the Chesapeake Bay. During visits before we settled, I noticed floating cages at our neighbor’s dock. I’d never heard of oyster *gardening*. Oysters only grew in reefs, right? I was intrigued. Learning about growing oysters went in high on the “to do” wish list.

Hurricane Michael struck the week we closed on Osprey. Five Virginians died. While we were lucky, some of our neighbors were not; 70-foot trees, upended by 24 hours of torrential rain and high winds, hit houses and took chunks of nearby shorelines in their root balls. The creek looked like milk chocolate for weeks. I would later learn the awful impact of the silt and waves on the oyster population. But, for us personally, Hurricane Michael was a wakeup call. Our point of land, shaded by at least 20 large trees, was crumbling (*figure 1*). We quickly reprioritized -- forget repainting and new appliances, forget oysters. We needed help with our eroding shoreline...

From the fall of 2018, until construction was over in May 2021, we had achieved the following: 1) learned about different approaches to shoreline mitigation (e.g., riprap, bulkhead); 2) learned about the multistep-permitting process for Northumberland County (Wetlands Board) and the Commonwealth (Virginia Marine Resource Commission-VMRC); 3) struggled to find a shoreline design consultant and contractor who were available to start work before 2050 -- but ultimately did; 4) accepted the designer’s plan for a 150-foot bulkhead around our point; 5) had total sticker shock when we received the estimate from the contractor; 6) met Philip Marston, Northumberland County’s very accessible and informative Zoning Administrator, and explained that we felt a huge bulkhead would look harsh and unnatural (like the one directly across the creek from us) but had been told that it was the best option; 7) took Philip Marston’s recommendation to consult with Mike Vanlandingham, a shoreline conservation expert with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; 8) learned from Mike Vanlandingham and Jeff Madden, Senior Environmental Engineer at VMRC, more about shoreline erosion and possible “mitigation” solutions, including “living shorelines”, as well as the VCAP reimbursement possibilities¹; 9) wished that we had done #6 - #8 first (which would have saved us time and money); 10) lost our designer, who “preferred bulkheads and riprap” to the “more complicated” living shoreline alternatives; 11) met Joey Scott of [SalTerra Solutions](#), who designed a plan which included riprap on the weakest part of the point and rock “sills” on either side²; 12) had sticker shock again, when we got the contractor estimate; 13) received approvals from County and State permitting agencies for a plan combining riprap and sills; 14) applied to the [Virginia Conservation Assistance Program \(VCAP\)](#) for cost sharing approval. [Lowery Becker](#), Education Conservation Specialist with the [Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District](#), helped guide us through the process. She explained that annual funding for VCAP is finite, and that even the worthiest

projects might be wait-listed or declined due to funding limitations; 15) received VCAP approval for cost share reimbursement; 16) delayed construction start due to being waitlisted for VCAP funding until February 2021 and our contractor's busy schedule; 17) rejoiced when the contractor completed riprap work in February 2021, and sill construction in April 2021 (see *figures 2-3* below); 18) planted 2,200 plugs of smooth cord grass between April 2021 and May 2024 (see below: *figure 8*).

Since 2021: 19) Lowery Becker and Mike Vanlandingham have conducted annual monitoring visits. They are always helpful with answering questions and sharing advice. Participation in VCAP requires owners to commit to 10 years of maintaining their living shoreline; 20) we were reimbursed for 80% of the cost of the sills and the initial cord grass. None of the riprap construction was eligible for VCAP reimbursement.



Rip rap complete. Top planted with native river oats (January 2021)

The cord grass has spread beautifully and has softened the harshness of the stone. Each spring, we clean up the debris in the new/existing marsh areas to allow the new cord grass to emerge. We battle against the invasive phragmites, which can choke out the native grasses.

Despite those challenges, animal life has increased. Fish and crabs use the shallow areas behind the sills as nurseries. An otter family made a den near the east sill. Great Blue Heron and bald eagles visit daily (ospreys, too, though far fewer during the past two summers). Through the big storms of the last three years, we've lost no trees or land from our point. In 2020, I was able to turn my attention back to oyster gardening. Here are some highlights:

Today, we have eight floats at our dock -- three Taylor floats and one flip float with diploids, three flip floats with triploids, and one "mystery" float from before I knew better than to mix dips and trips. Yes, those oysters are five years old!

The floats are nestled in a cove protected by the west sill on our point. They are well secured to the dock and zipped tied closed, because the otters use the floats as dining tables to eat crabs.

Vic Spain, TOGA president emeritus, and others with TOGA have been patient and informative in response to all the newbie questions. I arrived to pick up my first flip float from Vic in a convertible with my 14-year-old dog. I was so excited to get the float I didn't even think whether or not it would fit in my car. It did—after lots of embarrassment and laughter.

In 2021, I was thrilled to visit the nursery of Dr. Lynton Land to purchase diploids. It was like visiting an alchemist in his laboratory. It was incredibly helpful to see the entire growing process.



Lynton Land managing an upweller for growing spat at his oyster garden lab in Northumberland County. Dr. Land retired from his aquaculture business in 2022.

After Daryl Krolicki, owner of Oyster Gardening LLC, patiently answered my questions, and Keith Rogers, owner of Baywatch Oyster Seeds LLC, gave me a tour of his operations, I wanted to learn more.

In 2022, I took the Master Oyster Gardener Course taught by Karen Hudson and Celia Cackowski at VIMS. Despite the course being held via Zoom due to Covid, the instructors and subject matter experts enthralled us. If you are an oyster gardener in Virginia with at least one year of experience ready to deepen your knowledge of aquaculture, then become a MOG. [Virginia Master Oyster Gardener \(MOG\) Course | Marine Advisory Program | Virginia Institute of Marine Science](#)

How can I explain that one of my happy places is balancing on a jet-ski launch in 95° heat, while power washing oyster poop and barnacles off a Taylor float? But... you belong to TOGA, so you probably understand.

Endnotes

¹ The Virginia Conservation Assistance Program or VCAP (<https://vaswcd.org/vcap>) is a reimbursement, cost-share program, run through Virginia's 47 participating Soil & Water Conservation Districts, including the Northern Neck Soil & Water Conservation District. VCAP provides financial incentives and technical and educational assistance to property owners who install eligible "best practices" to improve water quality by reducing rain and snowmelt runoff. These practices include: conservation landscaping, rain gardens, permeable pavements, rainwater harvesting, and living shorelines. Living Shorelines can be reimbursed at 80% of total costs with a maximum payment of \$30,000. To date, the Northern Neck Soil & Water Conservation District has installed over 7,000 linear feet of living shoreline and over \$1,000,000 of cost-share throughout the Northern Neck. For more information on VCAP, check this out: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e0bec84e18794ece856ac275c524bcab>

² "Rock toe sills, with a 6.5 foot base width, aligned a maximum 8 feet channel ward of mean low water. Additional work to include placement of approximately 100 cubic yards of beach quality sand and 220 square feet of suitable wetland vegetation, adjacent to the property." In other words, we were approved to build a pyramid-shaped rock wall off our shoreline, backfill it with sand (nourishment), and plant it with cord grass. Another type of living shoreline can be seen at Camp Kekoka: bagged oyster shells.

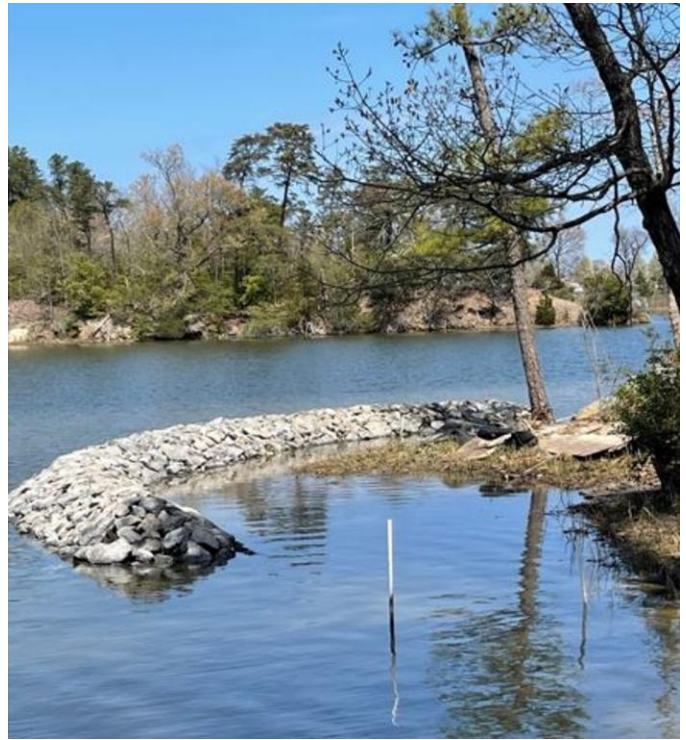


Figure 3: Construction of West Sill completed (April 8-12, 2021)



Figure 2: Building up sand nourishment on the West Sill



Figure 4: 2200 plugs of *Spartina Alterniflora* planted May 2021 to May 2024



Figure 5 (above): The Point and Sills, August 2025

Figure 6 (below): Oyster Floats West Sill at High Tide

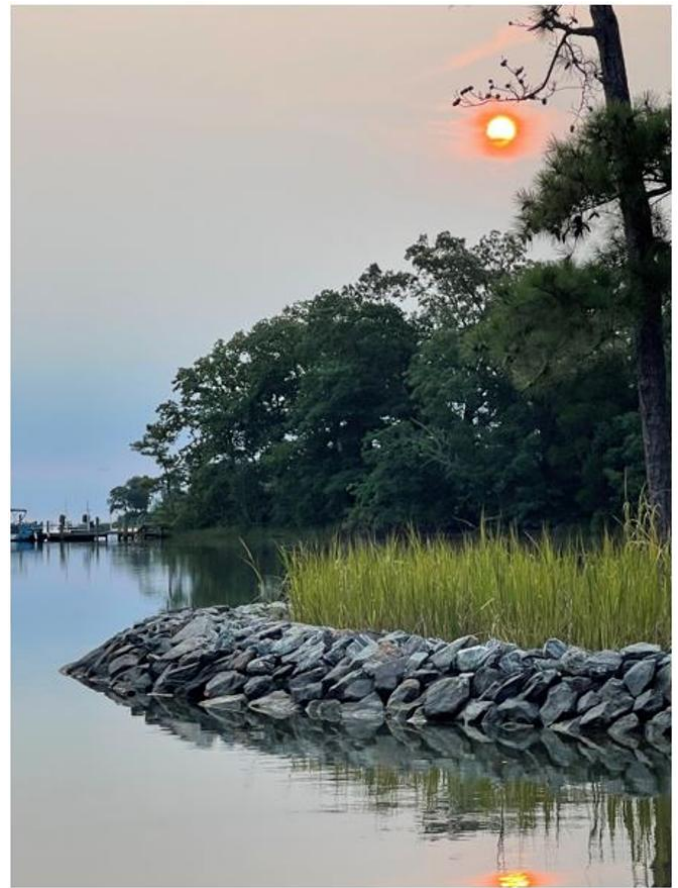


Figure 7: West Sill at Sunrise, May 2025

About the *TOGA Newsletter*

Published three times a year: Winter, Spring, and Fall, the *TOGA Newsletter* **deadlines** for articles or photos are November 20, April 1, and August 20, respectively. Mailed to all current TOGA members, the *TOGA Newsletter* is available to download electronically in full-color at oystergardener.org

Email your articles or photos to Richard Siciliano, editor: richs@togaboard.org,

For more information about managing your shoreline, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science offers a wealth of online resources on its webpage for the [Center for Coastal Resources Management](https://www.vims.edu/ccrm/topics/shoreline/) (CCRM):
<https://www.vims.edu/ccrm/topics/shoreline/>



HOME / ... / COASTAL LIVING GUIDES / MY SHORELINE

Managing My Shoreline

IN THIS SECTION

Deciding how to manage your shoreline is easier with the right information and tools. Look here for shoreline guidance based on the Center's **fifty years** of in-house research. Learn how to figure out what your shoreline needs and the steps to take for creating a living shoreline.



Included in this VIMS resource is a step-by-step guide for planning a living shoreline project, including: 1. Understanding shared jurisdiction, 2. Gathering information for your area, 3. Permitting process, and 4. Getting answers to your specific questions about your location and its suitability for a living shoreline project.

So, if you're thinking about protecting your shoreline while you also helping to save the Bay by being an oyster gardener, consider the benefits of doing both.

One place to start in your research is a study published by VIMS in 2021, entitled **Living Shoreline Design Guidelines for Shore Protection in Virginia's Estuarine Environments**, and available as a free download:

<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/entities/publication/afe0b281-c3b7-4fab-8213-804bf27c955c>

(Click on **Living_Shoreline_Design_Version_3.0.pdf** in Files).



In Memoriam

Klaus Boese (Böse), aged 86, died peacefully at home in Washington D.C., on 28 January, 2026. He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Janet; their children, Kirsten (Ben Self) and Alexander (Beverley Walton); granddaughters, Astrid Self and Pippa Self; and step-grandson, Charlie Curzon (Danielle); and great-grandsons, Kingston and Rory Curzon; and a sister, Angela Boese.

Klaus was born in Bremen, Germany on 8 January 1940, under the shadow of World War II. The horrors of the war and the kindness of family and friends who helped his family rebuild in its aftermath had a profound impact on shaping Klaus' values and commitment to service. Klaus was a world traveler, who spoke two languages fluently and had a working proficiency in several others. He had a life-long interest in international politics.

He attended Hamburg University in Germany for two years and transferred to Yale University in New Haven. After graduating from Yale and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, he embarked on a career in finance. He was proud to spend the latter part of his career at the International Monetary Fund (IMF). While at the IMF, Klaus also served on the board of the Bank-Fund Staff Federal Credit Union, including as its President. Upon retirement, Klaus continued his service as Board Chair of the IMF Retirees Association. He joined the Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA), earning the certification of Master Oyster Gardener. He enjoyed travel, reading, and gardening, among other activities. He loved animals, and the feeling was mutual.

He is remembered by an extended family of cousins, nieces, nephews and friends who mourn his death but are grateful for Klaus' dependable and loving presence in their lives.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests a donation to a local animal rescue group, the World Central Kitchen, or [TOGA](#) in Klaus' name.

TOGA Outreach Programs: Volunteers for the Tidewater Oyster Gardening Association help build oyster floats and cages for its members, teach best practices in oyster gardening, and help educate youngsters from throughout Virginia's Tidewater region about how oysters are a keystone species essential for the health and survival of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. From Oyster Float Building Days at Camp Kekoka, to area Farmers Markets, to education outreach events with area schools, TOGA is there.



Students are Raising Oysters and Raising Awareness, With Support from TOGA and Hampton City Schools

~ Betsy McAllister, MOG

Hampton City School STEM Teacher Specialist
Educator in Residence, National Institute of Aerospace
(NIA), Center for Integrative STEM Education (CISE)
<https://nasaclips.arc.nasa.gov/>

With the ongoing support of TOGA, 15 teachers from 10 schools across Hampton City Schools (HCS) dove headfirst into an authentic environmental stewardship experience, bringing with them the curiosity, commitment, and care of hundreds of students. This work began with a day of immersive learning on July 29, 2025, at the Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC). Teachers learned about oyster care techniques and oyster gardening equipment from TOGA members Vic Spain, Jim and Peggy Dall, Vic Chapman, Dave Singletary, and Bob Eadie. The TOGA team helped the teachers place the 8,000 spat, graciously donated by the organization, into their mini tidal tumblers before placing them in the Hampton River.

Over the course of the year, teachers brought their oysters into the classroom for students to measure and observe, tracking oyster growth over time and developing skills in data collection and analysis, while building a deep understanding of environmental systems. The students discovered that a single adult oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day (in optimal conditions) and explored the rich biodiversity of oyster reefs, home to more than 300 species. Through this work, students didn't just learn about ecosystems—they became active participants in protecting them.

This year alone, the teachers and students have raised approximately 10,000 oysters (the Chesapeake Bay Foundation provided teachers with spat on shell), quietly transforming the Hampton River. As these oysters filtered and improved water quality, students were enhancing their own understanding of critical concepts in a way that brought science and math to life through meaningful, real-world applications.

That sense of purpose came full circle during field experiences held April 29–May 1, 2026, hosted by the Elizabeth Lake Estates Civic Association and supported by TOGA. Students watched as the oysters they had carefully raised were placed onto

a sanctuary reef in the Hampton River—a powerful, tangible reminder that their efforts mattered. The field experience also featured a hands-on learning station led by TOGA members Vic Spain, Brian Ingram, Jim Dall, Dave Singletary, and Maggie Vaughan. More than 550 students and 60 adults deepened their understanding of oysters, water quality, and the shared responsibility of protecting Hampton's waterways during the experience. WTKR News 3, HCS TV, and several Hampton City Council members had an opportunity to participate and see the impact of the program on students, teachers, and the community.

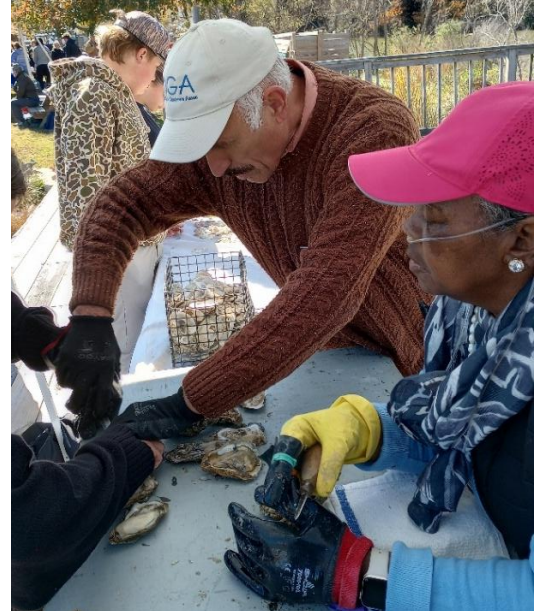
This impactful program has been made possible through strong community collaborations like that of TOGA. In addition to spat, TOGA donated the materials that were used by CTE students at Hampton High School to build the cages used in the program. Thanks to the generosity of TOGA and other organizations, HCS has added well over 170,000 oysters to local waterways over the last 10 years -- an extraordinary testament to sustained commitment and environmental leadership.



"Is that the oyster's heart?"



The 2026 class of Master Oyster Gardener candidates (MOGs) hard at work in William & Mary's Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Gloucester Point, Virginia:



During the Urbanna Oyster Festival Education day in November 2025, TOGA member Mike Ballato tries his hand at demonstrating Middlesex elementary school students the fine art of oyster shucking, as champion oyster shucker Debra Pratt looks on.



TOGA volunteer Eric Hentges peaks out from behind a newly-constructed stack of Taylor Floats at a TOGA float building day, Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock

TOGA Oyster Float, Cage, and Spat Sale

Deltaville Maritime Museum, 287 Jackson Creek Rd, Deltaville, from 9 am to 12 noon, May 23, 2026

Purchasing TOGA-built floats is a membership benefit. Join TOGA or update your dues for 2026. If you are unsure of your dues status, check the address label on the back of the last newsletter you received in the U.S. Mail. You should see 2026 or 2027, if dues are up to date. Contact vicpain@rocketmail.com, if you have a question. To join or update your membership status, see www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member

Payment for floats and devices is due when floats are picked up. Checks or cash are preferred, but Visa and MasterCard will be accepted. Pick up your floats by 12 noon on the date and location of the sale, or notify Vic Spain: vicspain@rocketmail.com to make arrangements for pickup.

Qty.	Cost each for TOGA members	Description		Qty.	Cost each for TOGA members	Description
	\$145	(Old) Taylor Float with Top			\$80	Flip Float
	\$115	(New) Taylor Float with Top			\$65	Rough Rider
	\$85	Bottom Cage			\$75	Tidal Tumbler
	\$35	Spat Tube (small mesh)			\$60	Bender 42 inch
	\$35	Spat Tube (medium mesh)			\$20	Minnow Trap Spat tube
	\$10	HDPE molded float (each)				

Build-Your-Own Floats at a TOGA Float Build Workdays

3 Float Limit, **\$25 discount*** per float or cage. (*Spat tubes are not eligible for BYO discount*). The next BYO Float workday is for the October 2026 Float, Cage, and Spat Sale at Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock.

Oyster cages and floats produced by TOGA are designed and built for various site-specific applications, capacity, and ease of handling. Cages are sold at TOGA’s Spring Float & Spat Sale on May 23, 2026, at the Deltaville Maritime Museum and Nature Park, in Deltaville, VA. Pre-orders for the Spring ’26 are no longer possible, orders may be made for the Fall Float & Spat Sale scheduled for October 17, 2026, at Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock, and can be completed online.

NOTE: Prices for floats and cages have been *reduced* since the last float sale. In 2025, a generous \$5,000 grant from the River Counties Community Foundation in White Stone, Virginia propelled our research into new designs and materials to improve TOGA devices, materials, tools, and construction techniques used to build them. We made several improvements that reduced costs and we will be passing those savings along to our members.



TOGA Events (through September 2026)

May 2026

- 23 Saturday, 9am–noon: **TOGA Spring Float and Spat Sale**, Deltaville Maritime Museum, 287 Jackson Creek Rd, Deltaville, Contact Carl Zulick carlz@togaboard.org
- 23 Saturday, 10:15-11:45am: **OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening**: Deltaville Maritime Museum, 287 Jackson Creek Rd, Deltaville. [Register/Contact Richard Siciliano: richs@togaboard.org](#)
- 30 Saturday, 10am-4pm: **TOGA Exhibit at NatureFest** - College of Southern Maryland, 8730 Mitchell Rd, La Plata, MD, Contact Richard Siciliano richs@togaboard.org
- 30 Saturday, "VIMS Marine Science Day" at VIMS, Gloucester Point, contact: Carl Zulick, carlz@togaboard.org

June 2026

- 9 Tuesday, 10am-noon: **TOGA Board of Directors Meeting**, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Davis Hall Rm 101, 1370 Greate Rd, Gloucester Point, Contact Carl Zulick carlz@togaboard.org for access
- 10 Wednesday 10am–3pm: **Oyster Education Day with Campers ages 6-12** at [Camp Kinsale](#), The Slips Marina and the Kinsale Waterfront Fund, 285 Kinsale Road, Kinsale, VA, Contact Sue Borra sueb@togaboard.org. ([More on Camp Kinsale](#)) a week long program in June, July and Aug.)
- 20 Saturday, 10-11:30am: **OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening**: Northumberland Public Library Meeting room, 7204 Northumberland Hwy., Heathsville. [Register/Contact Richard Siciliano, richs@togaboard.org](#)

July 2026

- 8 Wednesday 10am-3pm: **Oyster Education Day with Campers ages 6-12** at [Camp Kinsale](#), The Slips Marina and the Kinsale Waterfront Fund, 285 Kinsale Road, Kinsale, Contact: Sue Borra sueb@togaboard.org. ([More on Camp Kinsale](#)) a week long program in June, July and Aug.)
- 14 Tuesday, 10am-noon: **TOGA Board of Directors Meeting**, Deltaville Maritime Museum, 287 Jackson Creek Rd, Deltaville, Contact: Carl Zulick carlz@togaboard.org for access
- 25 Saturday, 10:30am - noon: **OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening**: Gloucester County Library, Community Room, 6920 Main St, Gloucester. [Register/Contact Richard Siciliano richs@togaboard.org](#)

August 2026

- 5 Wednesday 10am–3pm: **Oyster Education Day with Campers ages 6-12** at [Camp Kinsale](#), The Slips Marina and the Kinsale Waterfront Fund, 285 Kinsale Road, Kinsale, Contact Sue Borra sueb@togaboard.org. ([More info on Camp Kinsale](#)) a week long program in June, July and Aug.)
- 11 Tuesday, 10am-noon: **TOGA Board of Directors Meeting**, Virtual Google Meet, Contact Carl Zulick, carlz@togaboard.org for access
- 15 Saturday, 10-11:30am: **OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening**: Lancaster Community Library, 1st floor meeting room, 16 Town Centre Dr, Kilmarnock. [Register/Contact Richard Siciliano, richs@togaboard.org](#)

September 2026

- Thursdays, 9am–noon: TOGA Volunteer **Float Build Days for Fall Float Sale**, Join us to help build at Camp Kekoka, 1083 Boys Camp Rd, Kilmarnock. Contact: Jim Dall jimd@togaboard.org. First-time volunteers, contact Jim before attending this event
- 8 Tuesday, 10am-noon: **TOGA Board of Directors Meeting**, River Counties Community Foundation, 834 Rappahannock Dr, White Stone. Contact: Carl Zulick carlz@togaboard.org for access
- 8 Tues (date & time TBA): **OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening** class: RCCF*, White Stone, Register/Contact Richard Siciliano: richs@togaboard.org
- 17 Thursday, 12noon - 2pm: **OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening**: Northumberland High School, 201 Academic Lane, Heathsville, Contact Richard Siciliano: richs@togaboard.org



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TOGA Membership Form

P.O. Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061

Mail this form to the address above, or 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 Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) is a non-profit organization established in 1997 to promote the environmental health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, through oyster cultivation and by other means, and as a way of enjoying Virginia oysters. Because they are filter feeders, oysters remove bacteria and sediments from the water, making the local environment cleaner habitats for marine life, and the improved water quality encourages seagrass growth, which creates better habitats for fish. Our main goal is to educate interested citizens of all ages in oyster aquaculture methods. Join TOGA today. Learn how you can grow oysters and help the Chesapeake Bay.

Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association
PO Box 2463
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