



Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association

Growing oysters for a cleaner Bay.....www.oystergardener.org

SPRING

NEWSLETTER

2016

Annual Meeting "Rocks"- January 9, 2016

January's Annual Meeting was well attended and, by all reports, was a great time. The business agenda was mercifully brief: Treasurer Charles Yarbrough presented a realistic operating budget and the incumbent slate of officers, listed below, was reelected for 2016.

- President - Mike Sanders
- Vice President - Terry Lewis
- Treasurer - Charles Yarbrough
- Secretary - Jennifer Palazzo
- Board Members at Large:
 - Bob Morgan
 - Vic Spain
 - Ben Smith
 - Mark Erbe

The following non-elected positions were recognized:

- Past President - Brian Wood
- President Emeritus - Jackie Partin
- VIMS Advisor - Karen Hudson

Then two very impressive graduate students, recipients of grants from TOGA's VIMS endowment, described their research projects. Both Linda Bienlien and Melissa Karp did an excellent job of translating scientific jargon into layman's terms.

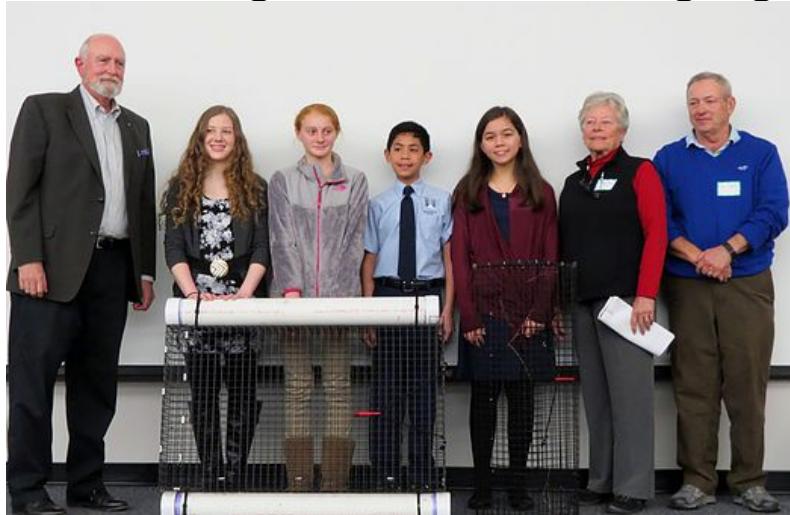
Staci Martin of the Virginia Tourism Commission gave the keynote talk, addressing the objectives and strategies of the recently inaugurated Virginia Oyster Trail. In particular, she discussed the benefits and incentives for organizations, such as TOGA, to create and operate sites along the Trail.

By popular acclaim, however, the highlight of the program was the middle school students who read their award winning essays from TOGA's writing contest. The results of the contest are covered in a separate article in this newsletter.

The food at the social following the meeting was even better than last year. Thanks go to Ann Wood who organized the potluck extravaganza.

--Mike Sanders, President

Youth Writing Contest Winners Highlight TOGA Annual Meeting



TOGA members who attended the annual meeting at the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences were wowed by the extraordinary Middle School Students who won the TOGA essay contest this year. Because there were so many exceptional essays submitted from across the State, the judges decided to recognize four winning essays. Each of the four young writers attended the meeting with their families and teachers and did a fantastic job of reading their winning essays in front of the some 130 TOGA members in the auditorium.

In the photo, L to R, Terry Lewis (judge and contest organizer), Hannah Rosenburg, Connie Johnson, Parker Cruz, Catherine Tadlock, Judy Spain (judge), Vic Spain (judge)

Winners of the contest were:

Catherine Tadlock, 8th Grade, Joyce Kilmer Middle School, Vienna - 1st Place

Hannah Rosenburg, 8th Grade, Friends School, Virginia Beach - 2nd Place

Parker Cruz, 6th Grade, St. Mary Star of the Sea School, Hampton - 3rd Place

Connie Johnson, 7th Grade, Thomas Hunter Middle School, Mathews - 4th Place

To read these outstanding essays, go to oystergardeners.org, click on the Annual Youth Writing Contest, and then click on "And the 2015 Contest Winners Are."

"This contest grew tremendously this year, and we hope to have even more participation next year as the word gets out," said Mike Sanders, TOGA President. "It was truly rewarding to see these very proud yet composed youngsters read their essays in the VIMS auditorium. This contest epitomizes what TOGA and our members are all about -- encouraging young people to learn about oysters and the environment we all share," he said.

TOGA will run the Third Annual Middle School Essay Contest again in 2016. Three prizes of \$150, \$100, and \$50 will be awarded for first, second and third places respectively. The theme of the essays is "Consider the Oyster"-- a wide open category that must include an essay based on oysters. The competition is open to all Virginia students in grades 6, 7 and 8. Home-schooled students are welcome to enter.

Prizes will also again include oyster cages, which was a real hit with the winners this year who intend to use them with their schools. Winners will be announced and awards presented at the TOGA annual membership meeting at the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences in January, 2017.

The local newspapers of each of the winners this year ran stories with photos of the winning entrants. "That was great recognition of the winners and the kind of good publicity that TOGA couldn't afford to buy," said Terry Lewis, contest organizer.

For detailed contest rules and more information about this year's winners, please check out www.oystergardener.org.

Special thanks to Vic and Judy Spain and Terry Lewis for reading this year's numerous essays many times, having lots of discussion and making the very hard decisions to select the winning essays.

--*Terry Lewis, MOG*

The Winning Essay

Chesapeake Oysters: A Personal History

Catherine Tadlock

8th Grade, Joyce Kilmer Middle School

Vienna, VA

Chesapeake Bay oysters have been a major part of my family for generations. My great-great grandfather began the R.E. Dobyns Oyster business in the early 1920s. The business was successful and had a large customer base. R.E. Dobyns' oysters were shipped all around the East Coast. He was the first person in Lancaster County to ship his oysters to North Carolina by truck. Before bridges made transportation by land possible, oysters were shipped by ferries and steamboats. He also shipped oysters to Norfolk, Baltimore, and as far as New York City. A week or two before Christmas every year, a customer in New York City would place an order. The oysters were sent by steamboat to Baltimore, and then make the remainder of the journey by train. The oysters would arrive in New York in less than 24 hours from when they were packed.

His oyster business was successful even after R.E. Dobyns passed away in 1939. Jennie Mae Dobyns, my great-great grandmother, continued running the business all through World War II, and provided oysters to the government that would later be shipped to the soldiers. However, she stopped running the oyster business after the war because of other obligations, including raising her children and serving as the Postmistress of Monaskon.

Oystering at that time was very labor-intensive. Men would take small, easy-to-maneuver boats called skiffs out into the river and scoop up oysters with giant tongs. They had to use these small boats because the water was shallow. Oystering was primarily done in the colder months end in the letter, "R". Oystering was done mainly in the winter months because oysters were perishable and because they were thought to be larger and more flavorful.

My great-great grandfather had a buyboat that would sail up and down the river so that he could buy the oysters from watermen. After the oysters were purchased, they would be put into bushel baskets and be taken to the oyster house to be processed. There, the oysters were shucked with oyster knives and put into gallon-sized tins. They were then put on ice to be sent to eager diners by ferries and steamboats.

Nowadays, the current oyster population is less than 1% of what it used to be. This is because of changes in salinity, water temperature, and new parasites. Because oysters are filter feeders and are immobile in their mature stage, they are very susceptible to environmental changes. Over-harvesting is another cause of the oyster population's

decreasing numbers. Because of the rapid decline of the oyster population, my grandparents have been working to rebuild it. They constructed two floating cages off their dock on the Corrotoman River that are currently filled with the oysters. Each of these cages has about 325 oysters in them. They are about 2 years old and 3-4 inches long. They also built another cage with about 600 spat that they have been raising since June that are already 2 inches long. Other people in the Tidewater Region are not only raising oysters to bring their population back up, but to eat them and to purify the water. Conservation efforts have been started by other organizations as well, and hopefully the oyster population will rebound to its previous numbers, although it will take years to rebuild.

Every time I eat an oyster, whether it is fried, stewed, or in a casserole, I think about the Bay's rich history. I suppose that you can say that oysters have been a family tradition for me. There's oyster liquor in my blood -- it's a part of who I am and who I will be forever.

The 2015 Taste by the Bay at The Tide's Inn

The Tide's Inn in Irvington, Virginia, hosted the 2015 Taste by the Bay on Saturday, November 21. The event featured oysters from raw on the half-shell to tastily fried, wines from numerous wineries, and an assortment of vendors selling everything from fancy chocolates to llama clothing. TOGA was represented with a display on the main lawn and a beautiful view of Carter's Creek overlooking the docks below. The weather was great, the venue was great and the traffic by our display was great.

The event was very well attended, and the TOGA display received many visitors. At least 200 visitors came by to ask questions and view the oysters cleaning the water in the tank. Some of the visitors who stopped by the display were current oyster gardeners who were curious about protecting their crop over the winter, had questions about cages, and were interested in other products. We had many visitors who were interested in learning more about oyster gardening for themselves. We answered their questions and encouraged them to sign up to be TOGA members on the website. We invited them to attend the workshops and events scheduled for 2016, also listed on the TOGA website. Two of our prize oysters were even featured in the Rappahannock Record the following week (although the caption said something about being dinner later that night)!

Manning the TOGA display were David Singletary, Nancy Smith and Ben Smith. Brian Wood helped Ben load the equipment on Friday night. Vic Spain came by Saturday to help set up the canopy and the display along with several very nice young ladies from the Lancaster High School. Vic also came by in the afternoon to assist David, Nancy and Ben with the removal of the equipment. Ben was recovering from recent surgery, so all help was greatly appreciated.

We are looking forward to receiving the information for the Taste of Spring event scheduled for April 16, 2016, again being hosted by The Tide's Inn. If you are willing to volunteer for this event and enjoy a great day of beverage tasting with an oyster or two, please contact Ben Smith at Ben_Smith@verizon.net or at 804-239-5586. Volunteers receive a goody bag with a sampling glass and tickets to taste the beverages. We have already been invited back for the 2016 Taste by the Bay at The Tide's Inn event in November! Reservations are also being accepted for assistance at the fall event.

--Ben Smith, MOG

SPRING OYSTER FAIR

The **TOGA-sponsored Annual Spring Oyster Fair** will be held April 16 at the Gwynn's Island Civic Center, 1996 Old Ferry Rd, Hudgins, VA 23076. Directions and the program follow.

Directions- Many mapping services do not accurately direct you to the Civic Center. When you cross the bridge to Gwynn's Island, you will be on Cricket Hill Rd. Keep straight onto Old Ferry Road for 1.6 miles, then turn right, still on Old Ferry Road and after 150 yards, the Civic Center is the white building on the right with a horseshoe driveway in front.

9:00 AM – Registration begins with coffee, fruit, breakfast rolls, etc.

9:00 to 10:00 – Vendors of **oyster gardening equipment, spat and supplies** are invited to display their wares for sale. Spat availability is uncertain at this time due to the cold winter. Normally, spat are larger this time of year because they were spawned in the previous fall. This is also a good time to question Master Oyster Gardeners about your gardening issues.

10:00 to 10:10 – Remarks by TOGA President Mike Sanders including a preview of upcoming events.

10:10 to 10:25 Klaus Boese will give a presentation of the Oyster Club project TOGA is sponsoring at the Boys and Girls Club in Kilmarnock. The aim of the project is to teach the children all about oysters through classes, demonstrations, and hands-on field experience. The final goal is to build a living oyster reef and study its development.

10:25 to 11:45 – Panel and audience discussion of oyster gardening techniques, problems, experiences etc. The panel will consist of experienced and novice oyster gardeners and other oyster experts. A number of questions have come up over the past year, the answers to which should be helpful to many gardeners. Your participation is encouraged.

Examples: Why do the shells of my oysters have yellow streaks, blisters filled with mud, and break when I shuck. When should I start new spat? Should I purchase sterile or fertile spat? How do you make an oyster float and a wire bender? Should I build my own oyster reef? How to get a heavy oyster float up on the dock? How do I know if I'm overloading my floats? How do I encourage wild strike? How to clean oyster floats and how often? How do I know if my oysters are in condemned waters? Do condemned water maps change over time? Where to get supplies and spat? How to protect from predators? What are those pesky things that look like grapes? How to protect my oysters from freezing? What is the best line to secure my floats with? Where can a bottom cage be used? How to make my oyster cages less visible? Is my site suitable for oyster gardening? Do I need a permit for an oyster garden?

11:45 to 12:45 Learn how a modern aquaculture hatchery works. Aquaculture in the Bay is possible because of selective breeding of disease resistant strains of oysters and the invention of Triploids (sterile oysters) at VIMS, and the development of hatcheries to spawn and market these aquaculture strains. Oyster Seed Holdings is a state-of-the-art producer of oyster larvae and small seed and is located on Gwynn's Island. Manager Mike Congrove and other OSH employees will lead tours through the facility which is just a few miles away from our meeting place. Mike has asked that we break into groups of about 10 for the tours. While tour groups are waiting, informal discussions of oyster gardening issues are encouraged. Of course, anyone wishing to help clean up the place will be welcome (but not to miss the tour).

Messages from vendors

Eastfield Farms (Peter Perina)-- Oyster bags (all sizes), oyster floats, oyster float kits, individual foam floats and shellbag netting

PO Box 275, Mathews, VA 23109, 804-725-3948, eastfields@rivnet.net

Lynton Land-- diploid seed in several sizes up to 5/8"

Capt. Tom's Oyster Floats (Tom Noffsinger)

Will have 2'x2'x1'and 2'x4'x1' Taylor Floats. Both feature coated wire, 4"pvc flotation, stainless steel hog rings, reinforced corners. 1st and 2nd stage growing bags, hinged predator- proof top w/tie downs and 16' dock lines w/anti chafing tubing. I will also have our 1'x1'x1' Floating Oyster Caddy for 3-4 dozen oysters for grilling. Oyster gloves and knives. Oyster Gardening Manuals. Will be taking orders for triploid and diploid spat.

Deltaville, VA 804-815-1423, Chesapeake, VA 757-558-9753

tom@oystergardening.com, www.oystergardening.com

Chesapeake Bay Oyster Company (Jon Quigley)- We will have gear (both floating and bottom cages), grow out bags (4mm and 9mm) and 2015 carry over seed available for sale.

<http://www.bayoyster.com/>, 804-338-6530

John Vigliotta of Ward Oyster Company wants TOGA members to know that he will sell spat in quantities of 20,000 or greater to groups or individuals. He will not be present at Gwynn,s Island, but you may contact him at 804-693-0044 (office) or 804-694-7685 (cell), www.wardoyster.com.

-- *Vic Spain, MOG*

TOGA Volunteer Party Set For April 9 - Save the Date



The third annual TOGA Volunteer Appreciation Party has been set for April 9 at the Piankatank Community League building near Gloucester, VA. If you have volunteered to help TOGA in the past, or if you are planning to volunteer this year, please plan to attend!

This year, as in the past two years, TOGA will supply plenty of unshucked 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, please bring a side dish or dessert to share with your TOGA volunteer friends. TOGA will also provide soft drinks and adult beverages.

A special highlight this year will be TOGA partnering with some local brewers who have offered to make "oyster stout" before the party so we can all enjoy it on April 9. Additionally, they'll have a demonstration on how to brew this special beer at the party -- so if you like it, you can do it at home.

Address of the Piankatank Community League is 11888 Harcum Road, Gloucester, VA. The party will start at 1pm and end about 4pm. The date of the party was changed from what was announced at the

annual meeting because of unforeseen conflicts.

So mark your calendar now to attend this special party. Please RSVP to Terry Lewis no later than April 3 so he has time to acquire appropriate supplies. His email is lewistmn@msn.com or call 804-693-2687.

We look forward to seeing you there. We've had a great time at the past two parties and this one will be even better. Thanks for volunteering. – **Terry Lewis, MOG**

Why Donate Time and Money to TOGA?

By reviewing TOGA's accomplishments since the year it was founded in 1997 in partnership with VIMS, and by brainstorming to get members thinking about how we can do better educating people about oyster aquaculture and increasing Bay oysters, we have proposed and performed many initiatives. This brainstorming continues as TOGA attempts to fulfill its mission as an educational charity.

School-aged children enjoy our presentations, and now some have become presenters at TOGA's Annual Meeting, through the middle school writing contest "Consider the Oyster." TOGA members travel from Belle Isle to Mathews to the Urbanna Oyster Festival and many other places to meet with them. Time spent with the 'Boys and Girls Club' and 'Camp Kekoka' is very important to a lot of TOGA members. Working with teachers, TOGA has a resource for the SOL Program and has provided equipment/supplies/spat, and now the teachers are including oyster education in their teaching plans. TOGA members enjoy this interaction with the young minds of tomorrow.

TOGA sponsors many events each year to educate our membership and anyone else who desires to learn more about increasing oyster numbers. Our Annual Meeting, Oyster Fairs, Float Workdays, Float Workshops, and partnership with Stratford Hall are such events. In addition, The MOG Course and MOG Refresher Course provide opportunity for members to gain a larger knowledge about oysters, oyster aquaculture and some very interesting facts and history. These events require equipment and time; so the need for current presentation tools (laptops, projectors, screens, microscopes, to name a few) costs money. Minimal course fees cover good food but only a small part of what it costs to put on these educational events.

TOGA's outreach program is at many events throughout eastern Virginia each year. It is easy to find TOGA at an event because our outreach tents with logos attract people. Visitors marvel at the tank display showing how oysters clean the water. TOGA distributes a lot of literature throughout the year and printing costs continue to rise. Of course, our members manning the outreach tents get to enjoy the event.

TOGA is not all work and no play. Our volunteers have fun with what they are doing. From interacting with school age children to adults, outreach events to TOGA-sponsored events, our members get to enjoy what is going on surrounding the event. I hope you have tried the good food and refreshments at the Annual Meeting or have tasted different kinds of seafood at outreach events or tasted the wine and oysters at Stratford Hall. We even rode the children's train around the Stratford Hall event area. There is a great social side to TOGA from getting together for a meal to enjoying the TOGA Volunteer Appreciation Party. A lot of our members have found new friendships with other TOGA members.

Why make donations of time and money? You can have a lot of fun while doing worthwhile things. Volunteering with TOGA opens up a lot of opportunities to meet people and to visit local fairs and events. Your financial assistance helps TOGA create these opportunities, provide education, expand oyster aquaculture knowledge, and introduce the young minds of tomorrow to oysters. So give us a few hours and dollars and let good things happen.

--Charles Yarbrough , MOG

LIST OF TOGA EVENTS FOR 2016

The following events are planned as of this printing. Expect updates in the fall newsletter. (* indicates a major TOGA-sponsored or co-sponsored event)

***April 9 TOGA Volunteer Thank You Party-** Event Coordinator: Terry Lewis, lewistmn@msn.com
Piankatank Community League, 11888 Harcum Road, Gloucester, 1pm-4pm

***April 16 - Spring Oyster Fair-** Event Coordinator: Vic Spain, vicspain@rocketmail.com
Gwynn's Island Civic Center, 9am- 12:45pm

April 16-Taste of Spring- Event Coordinator: Ben Smith, Ben_Smith@verizon.net
Tides Inn, Irvington, 11am. – 5pm

April 20-21 - Think Outside the Sink- Event Coordinator: Nick Ferriter, Ferriter@aol.com
Belle Isle State Park, 8:30am-2:30pm

April 21- Earth Day at Fort AP Hill- Event Coordinator: Bobby Morgan,
bobsue_morgan1970@yahoo.com
Fort AP Hill, 10am-2pm

May 15 -GoWild!- Event Cordinator: Brian Wood, awood45858@aol.com
Rappahannock Wildlife Refuge Hutchinson Tract, Tappahannock 11am-4pm, www.rwfriends.org

***July 12- MOG Refresher Course -** Event Coordinator: Joni Carter, marketingsource@verizon.net
VIMS, 9am-5pm

June 18- Rivahfest- Event Coordinator: Brian Wood, awood45858@aol.com
Old Town Tappahannock, 9Am-8pm

June 25- Gwynn's Island Festival- Event Coordinator: Lou Castagnola, clouis710@cox.net
Gwynn's Island Civic Center, 9am-3:45pm

August/September TBD- Work days for Float Building – Event Coordinator: Charles Yarbrough_caspery@verizon.net, Location and time TBD

***September TBD- Fall Oyster Fair-** Event Coordinator: Mike Sanders, snrsmich@gmail.com
Location and time TBD

***September 17-18- Stratford Hall Wine and Oyster Festival-** Event Coordinator: Brian Wood, awood45858@aol.com
Stratford Hall Times: 9am-6:30pm on Saturday and 9am-5:30pm on Sunday, www.stratfordhall.org
September 23-24 Guinea Jubilee- Event Coordinator: Terry Lewis, lewistmn@msn.com
Location: Abingdon Ruritan Club, Guinea Road, Gloucester, 3pm-6pm Fri. and 9am-5pm Sat.

***October 1 – Float Workshop-** Event Coordinator: Charles Yarbrough, caspery@verizon.net
VIMS, 10am-2pm

October TBD Rosewell BBQ at the Ruins- Event Coordinator: Vic Spain, vicspain@rocketmail.com

The Rosewell Foundation, Gloucester, 1pm-4pm

***October TBD- Half Shell Oyster Tasting-** Event Coordinator: Brian Wood, awood45858@aol.com
Location and time TBD

November 4- Urbanna Oyster Festival- Event Coordinator: Lou Castagnola, clouis710@cox.net
Urbanna, 8am-2pm

November 19 Taste of Fall- Event Coordinator: Ben Smith, Ben_Smith@verizon.net
Tides Inn, Irvington, 11am-5pm

January 14 – 2017 Annual Meeting- Event Coordinator: Mike Sanders, sndrsmich@gmail.com
VIMS, 2pm-4pm

Enjoy the VIMS Marine Science Day with your family and friends, May 21, 2016.

The following was borrowed from the VIMS website-- <http://www.vims.edu/public/msd/index.php>.

VIMS' annual open house is a fun-filled event for the whole family. Join us in Gloucester Point for exhibits, children's activities, seining on the York River, lab tours, a seafood cooking demonstration, mini-lectures, and much more. All activities are free, as is parking. The event proceeds rain or shine.



Photo by Kris Brandt

**TOGA Mid-Year Educational Event and
Master Oyster Gardener (MOG) Refresher Course**
SAVE THE DATE JULY 12, 2016

TOGA and VIMS will be hosting an Educational Event and (MOG) Refresher Course for current TOGA members.

The course will be held July 12, 2016, in Classrooms A and B in the Watermen's Hall at the VIMS Gloucester Campus and will be an opportunity for members to learn about the latest research available on oysters and Chesapeake Bay ecology presented by subject experts. A detailed class agenda will be posted on www.oystergardener.org prior to the registration date. You need not be an MOG to attend, but current TOGA membership is required. To join TOGA or update your membership, please see page 10.

Class check-in will begin at 9:00 am with class from 9:30 am-4:00 pm. The fee for the course is a \$25.00 donation, lunch included.

We ask that members pre-register for the event. Registration will begin April 1 and remain open until June 24. Please use the registration form below or visit www.oystergardener.org for more information and additional forms. If you have questions, please call Jackie Partin at (804) 694-4407.

**TOGA Mid-Year Educational Event and
Master Oyster Gardener (MOG) Refresher Course**

REGISTRATION FORM

Please complete form below and mail before May 20, 2016, along with class fee of \$25.00 (payable to TOGA).

Mail to: Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association, PO Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061

Are you a current TOGA member Yes No

Have you completed a MOG Course Yes No

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____



Our newsletter was paid for by funds generated from the sale of Chesapeake Bay license plates. These funds also help pay for the Spring Fairs and the MOG course.

See <http://dmv.virginia.gov/exec/vehicle/splates/info.asp?idnm=CB>

Dues are due for 2016!

If you received this newsletter in the mail, please check the year by your name on the address label. If it is 2015 or earlier, then 2016 dues are now due. If you believe there is an error, please contact Vic Spain at vicspain@rocketmail.com or 804-642-6764. Annual membership is \$15 per family.

Please use the form below to update your membership. You may also use it simply to update your information. It is important that your **mailing address and email address** are correct as that is our primary way of communicating with members. **And for your benefit, please open your TOGA email.** You may also share this membership form with a friend.

Members...

- 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
- Membership is \$15.00 for one year, individual or family. This ensures that you will receive regular newsletters and notice of upcoming events.

Please fill out membership form below and send to **TOGA, PO Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061** with a check for \$15.00 membership dues, payable to TOGA. If you want, you can make an additional donation to support TOGA's educational activities. You may include it in the same check.

Or you may go to <http://www.oystergardener.org/#!join-toga/c1rtd> and join online and pay dues using PayPal.

TOGA Membership Form, Please Print Legibly

Please enclose dues (\$15 per year per family) and return to

TOGA, PO Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061

Amount submitted \$ _____ Comment _____

Check : New member, Renewal, Update Info Only, Additional Donation

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City, State, and Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Body of water where oysters are grown _____

Comment _____

The best source of TOGA information is at www.oystergardener.org