A Sea Change at VIMS

By Don Wright

Over the past few years, VIMS has advanced in many exciting ways: we have recruited a dozen outstanding new faculty members; research productivity reached an all time high last year; we now have state-of-the-art video conferencing facilities; the bond bill that will be voted on in the referendum this November includes almost $25 million for a new marine research complex; and we now have a VIMS Foundation. Other highlights have been reported in this and other recent issues of The Crest. Simultaneous with the successes summarized above, the downturn in state revenue has presented us with some of the most serious budgetary challenges in recent memory. On September 20, VIMS, like other state agencies and state-supported units of higher education in Virginia, submitted plans for severe budget reductions. But excellence continues to prevail and many new challenges and opportunities are on the horizon. We now seek new ways to preserve our excellence and pursue the opportunities. We must leverage new federal dollars, attract economic development and partner with industry to provide seed money for new research, and look to other non-traditional sources of funding.

To make possible the essential sea change, we now need uncommon help from a nationally prominent scientific leader who can bring new vision, increased name recognition, high-level federal connections, and bold and inspired guidance to VIMS. In May of this year, I asked Provost Cell to initiate a national search for such an individual to succeed me as Dean and Director. I will continue in my current role until that search is completed and my successor assumes office, at which time I will return to my former life as a scientist and educator on the VIMS faculty. The search for the new Dean and Director is being led by Steve Kuehl and is now well underway. I have very much enjoyed my tenure as Dean and Director, but the time has come for an orderly “changing of the guard.” Under new leadership, VIMS will set new standards of scientific excellence and I plan to remain a part of that exciting process as one member of a great community of scientists.

VIMS Acquires New Code for Model

VIMS has been one of the leading institutions committed to the development of numerical models for estuarine and coastal sciences. Private funds enable the Institute to acquire an UnTRIM code for expanding the capability of the second-generation HEM3D (Hydrodynamic Eutrophication Model, Three Dimension) model. The model represents the best technical tool to address issues by providing “what-if” scenarios in an efficient, comprehensive and cost-effective manner. The UnTRIM code also is better able to deal with intertidal environments such as Virginia’s tidal marshes. Dr. Harry Wang, Dept. of Physical Sciences, explains, “The beauty of the second-generation HEM3D model is that chemists and biologists can write their own subroutines and run scenarios. This flexibility makes the model very useful for VIMS.” Utilizing the new model, researchers have already generated approximately $400,000 in new work over the next three years.