

A Healthy Bay for Healthy Kids: Cooking with Virginia's First Lady

(April 30, 2012) Virginia's First Lady Maureen McDonnell and noted Kingsmill chef Peter Pahk helped a group of local second graders learn about the link between human health and the health of Chesapeake Bay during a visit to the Virginia Institute of Marine Science for the most recent *Healthy Bay for Healthy Kids* event on April 26th.

The brainchild of VIMS scientist Dr. Kirk Havens, the event helps Virginia schoolchildren gain a hands-on understanding of the connections between clean water, Chesapeake Bay's marine life, and their own health by preparing and eating a meal of local, sustainably harvested seafood. This year's event featured a tasty Virginia blue crab salad.

Also participating in this year's affair were former First Lady Susan Allen; President of the Virginia Watermen's Association Ken Smith; and Ryan Manning, a chef with Colonial Williamsburg's Apprenticeship program. Joining them were Principal LaQuiche Parrott of Abingdon Elementary in Gloucester, School Chef Vega Brown and Registered Dietitian Pam Dannon of Matthew Whaley Elementary in Williamsburg, and a number of parent chaperones.



Healthy Kids: From L: Virginia First Lady Maureen McDonnell and former First Lady Susan Allen with Bayleigh Andersen and Nijaliya Billups of Abingdon Elementary in Gloucester.

The event began with Havens—Director of the Coastal Watersheds Program at VIMS and member of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee—teaming with VIMS researchers Kory Angstadt and David Stanhope to share facts about the Bay's blue crabs and some of the threats they face from poor water quality and derelict, so-called "ghost" crab pots.

The second graders— Ally Paxton of Deer Park Elementary in Newport News, Trinity Piggott and Adriana Salvador of Matthew Whaley Elementary, Lacy Parrish and Collin Scarborough of Yorktown Elementary, Bayleigh Andersen and Nijaliya Billups of Abingdon Elementary, and Brenna Hendrix and Madeline Peebles of Ware Academy in Gloucester—then decorated a chef's hat in preparation for their stint as assistant cooks.

First Lady McDonnell talked about the importance of growing up with a healthy diet, sharing her experiences as a mother of five children and the benefits of eating locally harvested seafood, saying "you know exactly where it comes from and what's in it." She noted that isn't the case with many prepared and fast foods.

Pahk, who began as Senior Executive Chef at the Kingsmill Resort in Williamsburg in 2010, reiterated the importance and benefits of purchasing and eating healthy, sustainable seafood. He says his motto is "Buy local

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when you can. When you can't, make sure what you're buying is fished sustainably." It's an approach he's championed since the early 1990s, including during his 14-year stint with Napa Valley's Silverado Resort, where he was known as a leader in sustainability, composting, and recycling.

Pahk continues to explore the benefits of sustainability in Kingsmill's five restaurants, using local favorites such as Chesapeake Bay blue crabs and Little Neck oysters. In addition to their environmental benefits, Pahk says these foods "simply taste much, much better."

The children seemed to agree. After donning their chef hats and aprons to assist in meal preparation, they happily sat down to eat their very own crab salad. When asked how she liked the food, all one eight-year-old could reply was "Mmmmm!"

Susan Maples, event organizer and outreach coordinator at VIMS, says that in addition to departing with their chef's hat, a souvenir apron, and a healthy Virginia seafood recipe, she hopes the students also left with a desire to share their new-found knowledge with fellow students, friends, and neighbors. "We see the students, parents, and school officials as emissaries for sustainable seafood in their communities," says Maples.

She adds that the recipe and a short video from the *Healthy Bay* event will also be available on-line through VIMS' web site, providing unlimited access for others to participate at school or at home.

The 2012 event marks the third occasion for *Healthy Bay for Healthy Kids* at VIMS. It builds on a consistent interest in children's health and nutrition among Virginia's first ladies. The inaugural event, during the administration of now Senator Mark Warner, involved former First Lady Lisa Collis. The second event, during the administration of former governor Tim Kaine, featured First Lady Anne Holton.



From L: Dr. Kirk Havens, Chef Ryan Manning, Virginia's First Lady Maureen McDonnell, former First Lady Susan Allen, Renee Smith, Executive Chef Peter Pahk, and waterman Ken Smith.
Photo by Kathleen Scott.