

Gloucester, Did You Know?

OYSTERS: MORE THAN JUST YOUR AVERAGE MOLLUSK

by Jessica Lawson

Gloucester Living is excited to offer opportunities to share about the community to the community. "Gloucester, Did You Know?" is where community sources provide information to help educate the residents of the community on varying topics.

This issue features two community members who bring their knowledge of oysters to the table.

Oysters might be known as a local favorite addition to your family's classic dressing recipe at Thanksgiving (Need one? Find it on page 9!), but there is more to this mollusk than meets the eye. Two local sources offer some pearls of wisdom as they share their knowledge about the community to the community.



Dr. Jessica Small is a community source on oysters through her work at VIMS. Photo submitted by Dr. Jessica Small (VIMS)

MEET THE SOURCE: DR. JESSICA SMALL

Associate Research Scientist and Associate Director of Aquaculture Genetics and Breeding Technology Center at Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS)

When asked about what makes Gloucester a successful location for oystering, Dr. Small shares, "Gloucester County has numerous rivers and usable habitat/ground, where oysters can be grown. For example, there are oysters grown by businesses as well as private individuals in the York River, Mobjack Bay and Ware River, just to name a few! In addition, these growers have the benefit of a few local hatcheries who can also supply them seed to grow."

Dr. Small runs a large oyster breeding program through VIMS and explains how that program helps support the local area. "It helps provide top-performing oysters for the oyster aquaculture industry, not only for Gloucester oyster farmers but for farmers along the East Coast. These oysters are resistant to many of our local diseases, have a nice shape, high meat quality and they grow quickly. Our program encompasses many things, including hatcheries, a nursery, numerous field

sites, laboratories and partnerships with other oyster businesses. It takes many, many people to make the program run," says Dr. Small.

Her pearl of wisdom for Gloucester is, "There are so many things that are great about oysters! Not only do they provide ecosystem services such as helping to remove nitrogen and phosphorus from our water, but oyster reefs provide valuable habitat for marine life. Oysters are an AMAZING food! Oysters have many nutritional benefits, being rich in vitamins and minerals."

Be sure to explore the efforts of Dr. Small and her colleagues at VIMS: www.vims.edu/research/units/centerspartners/abc



Mr. John Vigliotta is an oyster enthusiast who owns a local oyster farm and distribution facility. Photo submitted by Mr. John Vigliotta (Ward's Oyster Company)

MEET THE SOURCE: JOHN VIGLIOTTA

CEO & Owner of Mobjack Bay Seafood and Ward's Oyster Company

Mr. Vigliotta sees the state of Virginia, rather than just the county of Gloucester, as a prime place for oysters and says, "Since the early 1900s, Virginia has always permitted bottom leasing, waterman, and aquaculture. This has led Virginia to its current place as a leader and state to exemplify on the East Coast as oyster friendly and supportive of some of its hardest working residents, the watermen."

To explain the oyster farming process, Mr. Vigliotta describes what he and his teams do at Ward's Oyster Company and its sister company Mobjack Bay Seafood. "We are an oyster farm. We take adult oysters and spawn them to make babies, and then through a 2 to 3 year process grow them to adults," says Mr. Vigliotta.

For his pearl of wisdom to Gloucester, Mr. Vigliotta shares, "The largest benefit of oysters is that they feed on algae. By removing the algae as a food, the water gets clearer which improves bay health."

A view of the cages used in the oyster farming process out in Mobjack Bay. Photo submitted by Mr. John Vigliotta (Ward's Oyster Company)



Have suggestions for an organization or expert that should be included in future issues? Send an email to jlawson@bestversionmedia.com with your ideas.