

# Roadsreport

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## Oysters for Life

Nothing works harder at restoring the waters of the Chesapeake Bay to their original pristine glory than the simple oyster. At maturity, each diligent bivalve can filter up to 50 gallons of H<sub>2</sub>O a day to help reduce nutrients that contribute to “dead zones” caused by a lack of oxygen in the water. As oysters feed, they filter out phytoplankton and other organisms that grow in the water, thus improving the overall oxygen content of the Bay in the process.

Journal entries from early English settlers to Hampton Roads report the shores of the Chesapeake Bay were once teaming with a thriving oyster population. Over-harvesting in the early 1900s and crippling diseases introduced a century later contributed greatly to the near extinction of the enormous beds. In the process, many watermen who relied on the harvesting of oysters also nearly disappeared.

Today, a privately funded co-operative started by the Oyster Company of Virginia



PHOTO BY DAVID UHRIN

is working to re-establish native oysters and helping local watermen gain an economic foothold in the process. Through the “Oysters for Life Cage Packages,” any business or interested citizen can contribute to the expansion of oyster colony production by “purchasing” oyster cages for \$175 each. In return, starting with the first harvest in 2012, package purchasers or gift recipients will receive two dozen fresh-packed oysters each year for life. Packages can be purchased as gifts, and oysters can be shipped anywhere in the continental United States. To ensure that you will continue to receive your oyster bounty well after “your cage” is taken out of rotation, your cage number will be transferred to each subsequent cage over the years.

The efforts being applied by the OCV follow up on pilot programs conducted by the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to find new ways to re-introduce native oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) to the Bay. Working with scientists to develop disease-resistant oysters, and enlisting local watermen to create sustainable “aqua farming” techniques, the Oyster Company of Virginia’s plan involves protecting growing oysters from predators, helping oyster populations multiply more quickly and making the colonies easier to reach for harvesting.

For additional information on the project or to purchase your “Oysters for Life” package, visit <http://oysterva.com>. **HRM**

—Barrett Baker

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