

## **Stockton University Field Station Joins American Littoral Society's Shell Recycling Program to Restore Reef Habitat in Barnegat Bay**

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**Galloway Township, NJ** - The shells from oysters served at two Manahawkin seafood restaurants will be recycled to restore reef habitat in the Barnegat Bay.

The pilot shell recycling program is an initiative of the American Littoral Society with the Stockton University Marine Science and Environmental Field Station serving as a storage site for the shells until they are placed into the bay. Old Causeway Steak and Oyster House and the adjacent Mud City Crab House will supply the shells.

Previously, oysters at the two restaurants were shucked, served and sent out with the trash. With a recycling program in place, they will be returned to the bay to create habitat for young oysters, known as spat, which anchor onto shells, naturally creating a reef.

From a reef to the restaurants and back to a reef helps complete a new lifecycle for oysters.

Steve Evert, manager of Stockton's field station in Port Republic and assistant director of academic labs, drives by the two restaurants on his way to work. Now, as a partner with the shell recycling program, he'll make biweekly stops at the restaurants to pick up shells and deliver them to the field station where they will cure for one year before being reused during reef restoration projects in 2016.

When shell is placed in an area with a wild oyster population, spawning occurs and then larvae floating in the water column settle down and cement to the shells, explained Evert.

"They need hard substrate. That's the key. That's why we need the shell," he said.

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“There could be millions of oyster larvae in the water column, and when they settle down and it’s just sandy mud, they’re not going to be recruited. The idea is to create a source of suitable shell for the oyster spat to set on,” he said.

Mel Magaziner, an owner of the restaurants, said that The Old Causeway and Mud City Crab House together go through about 5,000 oysters per week in the summer.

In the near future, those shells will become a nursery for the next generation of coastal bay oysters.

Last fall, Old Causeway sponsored a Shellfish Soiree event, where a panel of industry and academic oyster experts led a discussion to educate the public about the economic and environmental importance of shellfish. After that event, “I realized we had to do something sooner rather than later,” said Magaziner, who reached out to the American Littoral Society to find a way to repurpose the restaurant’s shell waste into a living reef.

Alek Modjeski, a 1998 Stockton Marine Biology graduate and former student-worker at Stockton’s field station, is now habitat restoration director at the American Littoral Society.

The shell recycling program is the result of a grant funded by Restore America’s Estuaries and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to investigate recycling programs, but instead we are starting one, explained Modjeski.

Last week, the same grant funding allowed 120 cubic yards of shell, an estimated 60,000 shells or more, to be planted in the bay off Good Luck Point in Berkeley Township.

Julianne Schumacher, a senior Environmental Science major at Stockton and a resident of Middletown, Monmouth County, researched recycling programs in other states during her third internship with the American Littoral Society.

She explained that while research was being conducted, Magaziner reached out to offer available shell and Evert offered to assist with transportation and storage. “This collaborative effort was the perfect storm of highly motivated partners,” said Helen Henderson, Atlantic coast program manager for the American Littoral Society.

“This project will educate the public about oysters and their importance to the Barnegat Bay ecosystem. One adult oyster can filter and clean up to 50 gallons of water per day. Establishing a large-scale shell recycling program for the state is the goal of the Society and would create jobs. The program will reduce waste going into our landfills and also offer an economic benefit to participating restaurants by reducing the waste they generate. We are eager to establish a larger program in Barnegat Bay and expand to Delaware Bay and other geographic locations throughout the state as well,” said Henderson.

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